

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Contact in the classroom

Exploring relationships between interfaith encounters and peaceful relations through a case study of The Faith and Belief Forum's School Linking Programme

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**CONTACT IN THE CLASSROOM:
Exploring relationships between
interfaith encounters and peaceful
relations through a case study of
The Faith and Belief Forum's
School Linking programme**

By

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PhD

April 2020



*A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the University's
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

Content removed on data protection grounds



Certificate of Ethical Approval

Applicant:

Lucy Peacock

Project Title:

How does Three Faiths Forum foster peaceful relations?
Developing an understanding of the complexity of faith in British
Schools - YEAR TWO

This is to certify that the above named applicant has completed the Coventry University Ethical Approval process and their project has been confirmed and approved as Medium Risk

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ABSTRACT

This research provides an original analysis of the relationship between interfaith encounters and peaceful relations among young people in schools, through use of a case study of the Faith and Belief Forum's School Linking programme. The School Linking programme is an informal education programme which trains teachers in interfaith dialogue facilitation skills and brings students from different schools together to engage creatively with questions around religious and non-religious belief. In order to explore how School Linking fosters peaceful relations between students, the research asks: a) what impact can be captured by the Faith and Belief Forum's existing evaluation data, b) how the School Linking process informs or inhibits peaceful relations at the interpersonal and institutional levels, and c) how academic understandings of 'peaceful relations' can be reassessed in light of the research's findings. The research's original contribution to knowledge is fourfold. First, it contributes to a number of discussions in religious and intercultural education literature (including religious literacy, 'safe space' and the role of community schools as sites of religious diversity) and addresses the lack of research-driven evaluations of interfaith initiatives with young people and/or in schools. Second, its mixed methods-driven, reflective approach to evaluation is implicitly critical of the assumption-based 'theory of change' model. Third, the research has generated the first dataset of its kind to capture teacher and student perceptions of interfaith encounters across 75 schools in London and Birmingham. Lastly, contact theory is reassessed to develop the first of its kind, context-specific, theoretical framework for how interfaith contact supports and inhibits 'peaceful relations' in schools. A further, practical, outcome of the research is to inform the design and evaluation of School Linking through consultation with the Faith and Belief Forum during Autumn 2020. The PhD takes a unique approach to an under-researched topic. It combines interdisciplinary research into religion and education, the sociology of religion and social psychology with impact evaluation to provide an original account of the role and effectiveness of interfaith approaches as a tool for fostering peaceful relations among young people in primary and secondary schools.

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GLOSSARY

Baseline	A survey completed by students and teachers at the beginning of School Linking.
CPD day	'Continuing professional development' day, held three times a year for teachers on the School Linking programme.
Endpoint	A survey completed by students and teachers at the end of School Linking.
Experienced teacher	A teacher who has participated in the School Linking programme in one or more previous years.
Faith and Belief Forum (F&BF)	Formerly Three Faiths Forum (3FF), the organisation which runs School Linking (the case study of this PhD research).
Focus school	One of four schools which agreed to be subjects of my participant observation.
Link Day	Day in which two Linking Classes meet at a neutral venue, or a school, as part of the School Linking programme. Held three times a year.
Link School	School participating in the School Linking programme.
Linking Class	Class from a school participating in the School Linking programme
Linking Teacher	Teacher leading a class participating in the School Linking programme
New teacher	A teacher who has not been part of the School Linking programme in previous years.
School A	A Church of England-ethos secondary school in East London (with an approximately 30% Muslim intake), linked with School B. It is co-educational, but the Linking Class I observed was made up exclusively of girls. Alongside its link with School B, there is a second (boys) link taking place this year with a boys' Muslim school, which I am not observing. It is a large,

	well-resourced school, with approximately 750 students in total.
School B	A Muslim-ethos secondary school in East London, linked with School A. It is a single-sex, girls' school. It is a small school, with approximately 20 students per year group.
School C	A Jewish-ethos secondary school in North London, linked with School D. It is co-educational, but the Linking Class I observed was made up exclusively of boys. There is a second (girls) link taking place this year with a girls' Muslim school. It is a very large and well-resourced school, with student numbers totalling 1,400-1,500 and approximately 180 in Year 9 (the linking year).
School D	A Muslim-ethos secondary school in North-East London, linked with School C. It is a single-sex, boys' school. It is a small school, with approximately 20-25 students per year group.
School Linking	Programme run by the Faith and Belief Forum in which two classes are 'linked' for one academic year. The teachers attend three CPD days and bring their students together for three link days in which the questions 'who am I?', 'who are we?' and 'where do we live and how do we live together?' are explored.
Student Reflection Form	Evaluation form completed by students at the end of each link day.
Teacher A	Linking Teacher for School A. Male, aged approximately in his 30's. He is the school Chaplain, an RS teacher and the Ethos and Values Coordinator. He is the teacher to most of the students in the 2017-18 linking group. Has been at the school for 11 years and part of School Linking for three years.
Teacher B	Linking Teacher for School B. Female, aged approximately in her 20's or 30's. She is a class teacher and the Citizenship Coordinator. She joined the school in 2015 and has been leading School Linking since.

Teacher C	Linking Teacher for School C. Male, aged approximately in his 30's. Informal Jewish Educator and Head of Student Voices. He joined the school in 2014 following a post as a formal class teacher in another Jewish-ethos school.
Teacher D	Linking Teacher for School D. Male, aged approximately in his 30's. He is a class teacher and joined the school over 10 years ago.
The Linking Network (TLN)	A charity in Bradford, UK, which designed the School Linking process and works with a network of facilitators and schools.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1: Introduction

“I’m sure we can ask them questions. They’re probably just like us!”

These are the words spoken by a year 8 (12-13 year-old) student at a Jewish-ethos secondary school in north London in November 2017. We were walking together to the school minibus; he and nine of his peers were about to travel to a RAF museum to meet a group of students from a Muslim-ethos school for the first time. He had been selected to take part in The Faith and Belief Forum’s (F&BF’s) ‘School Linking’ programme, an informal education programme that ‘links’ together classes from two schools (both with and without a religious character) for one academic year. By the end of the 2017-18 academic year, F&BF had trained a teacher from each of its 68 London-based ‘Link Schools’ in interfaith dialogue facilitation skills, and the teachers had brought groups of their students together for three ‘Link Days’ to explore questions of identity, community and religious and non-religious belief.

I was present at a variety of 2017-18 School Linking activities, since my research was structured around a case study of F&BF’s School Linking programme. The objective of the research was to draw upon teachers’ and students’ perceptions and experiences of School Linking to provide an original account of the relationships between interfaith encounters and peaceful relations among young people in primary and secondary schools.

The student’s words above capture multiple dimensions to my research, since I was concerned with the ways in which young people build ‘peaceful relations’ with others who they may otherwise never meet outside of School Linking. My research explores a number of themes relevant to the opening quote: what role does communication or curiosity play in relationship building? How

important is knowledge in young people's willingness or ability to form relationships? What types of knowledge aid students' understanding of someone with a different religion? Are peaceful relations built upon similarities? What role does the 'faith school' play in fostering relationships between students from different religious traditions? Under what circumstances are the potential for 'peaceful relations' maximised?

In exploring these themes, my research contributes to a number of discussions within religious and intercultural education (including religious literacy, 'safe space' and the role of community schools as sites of religious diversity). Moreover, I address a lack of research-driven evaluations of interfaith initiatives with young people in schools by developing a unique approach to evaluation. My inductive and reflexive treatment of primary data enables me to capture the complexity of change underpinning School Linking, thereby questioning whether there are concrete causal relationships. Through this approach, I provide an original reassessment of contact theory in order to develop a new, context-specific, theoretical framework for 'peaceful relations' in schools.

1.2: Chapter overview

Chapter 2 opens with a critical discussion of current literature and policy documents on reform in Religious Education (RE), reviewing different positions towards the inclusion of non-religious worldviews into teaching about religion and belief. It then assesses how studies about young people's attitudes to religious diversity have informed the development of intercultural education. The chapter highlights several discussions, including issues of teacher capacity, religious literacy and the role of 'safe space'.

Chapter 3 continues my literature review by outlining arguments around the role that faith schooling plays in supporting or inhibiting 'community cohesion'. The review highlights the reluctance of researchers to use language that embraces plurality within (and between) religions; something my research recognises and avoids. The chapter then examines efforts to promote or facilitate

interfaith understanding in schools. It reveals an opportunity for my research to explore the methodological implications of a practitioner-style evaluation framework from a research perspective and apply the learning to a reassessment of academic theory.

Chapter 4 outlines four formal research questions and defends my research as a mixed methods case study with an evaluative dimension. It positions my work as critical of deductive, 'one size fits all' evaluation frameworks including the assumption-driven 'theory of change' approach. As such, the research is not designed to *test* theory; rather the data collection is guided so that theory can be retrospectively assessed and built upon in Chapter 9. The chapter outlines the collection and analysis techniques of secondary data (over 1,400 teacher and student surveys collected by the F&BF in the 2016-17 academic year) and primary data (teacher focus groups and participant observation conducted in the 2017-18 academic year). The chapter closes with a discussion of limitations and the specific ethical considerations required by research undertaken with young people.

Chapter 5 critically explores the impact that can be captured by F&BF's existing evaluation data. It opens by addressing the response rates for F&BF's evaluation documents (secondary data), then presents the findings of statistical analysis at the student- and teacher-level. Analysis of this evaluation data reveals that both groups report a generally positive experience of School Linking, and points to useful relationships between the 'success' of School Linking and a number of demographic variables such as student age and school faith ethos. However, a number of inconsistencies in this chapter's findings question the extent to which demographic information alone can explain the teachers' and young people's *experiences* of School Linking. Ultimately, F&BF's evaluation documentation, as is designed, fails to capture this and so the assertions made about the impact of School Linking are limited.

Chapters 6-8 draw upon a qualitative analysis of my primary data to explore how School Linking informs or inhibits peaceful relations at the interpersonal and institutional levels. Chapter 6 opens with a commentary on the prescriptive nature of F&BF's CPD days (see glossary) and the extent to which

the teachers engage in and implement the training. My analysis corroborates previous evaluations of linking programmes in identifying teacher challenges such as time constraints and disruptive student behaviour, but questions previous findings that teachers with prior experience of interfaith work are most skilled at facilitating School Linking. The final section of the chapter explores wider school engagement with School Linking. It uncovers various motivations from school leadership to participate in the programme, as well as an ongoing challenge of embedding the work of School Linking within the school and wider community.

Chapter 7 examines factors which influence power dynamics between individuals and schools during School Linking. First, the basis upon which students are selected to take part in School Linking is assessed, including written applications (which can favour 'gifted' students), parental consent and gender (the latter two risking undermining student agency due to legal implications). Second, unequal power dynamics between teachers are explored. The potential for teacher-level power imbalances to be reflected in student interaction is identified. Moreover, gender inequalities appear to echo previous research about women's marginalisation in interfaith dialogue more generally. The chapter then considers the role of space, arguing that where 'linked' schools vastly differ in size or resources, students from the 'large' school hold power over the visiting students, reinforced by their assigned role as 'host' during school visits. Moreover, space is found to inhibit opportunities for mixing (a condition for positive interaction, literature argues) in two ways: physical constraints within a room can limit participation, and/or teacher and student control over the seating can influence the extent to which students' mix and take ownership of their decision to mix. Finally, perceptions of 'safe space' are found to be inconsistent between students and teachers, potentially undermining its role in School Linking.

Chapter 8, the final qualitative analysis chapter, seeks to explain two thematic inconsistencies identified in Chapter 5's quantitative analysis. First, the quantitative analysis suggested that students were interpreting 'difference' as a negative concept. This chapter argues that this finding may be explained by teachers reinforcing ideas of similarity between students. Whilst similarity is argued in literature to be a basis for friendship formation, teachers were found to

stress similarities between students to the detriment of recognising difference. This narrative is at risk of echoing rhetoric in academic literature and public policy that demonises and homogenises difference. Second, low levels of religious literacy among students and teachers identified in Chapter 5's quantitative analysis can be explained through simple question and answer sessions observed during Link Days. Such activities reinforce a form of religious illiteracy that disregards the complexity of 'personal worldviews' in favour of oversimplified factual knowledge about religions. Moreover, that religious illiteracy is specifically identified among community schoolteachers presents a challenge to literature which portrays community schools as sites for learning about religious plurality by virtue of their diversity. The chapter closes with the finding that there is little consensus between Linking Teachers on the practical aim(s) of the programme; whilst this could indicate a barrier to the shared understanding between individual Link partnerships necessary for setting student expectations, a 'strategic ambiguity' on the part of F&BF may allow for schools to undertake School Linking as part of wider educational, social or political agendas.

Chapter 9 explores how 'peaceful relations' can be reassessed in light of the findings discussed in Chapters 5 to 8. Whilst the findings can be applied to a number of theoretical lenses, this chapter critiques and rearticulates 'contact theory'¹ in order to posit a contextualised framework for peaceful relations between young people in schools. The history of contact theory is outlined and the theory's key principles for prejudice reduction (equal status, intergroup cooperation, common goals and social and institutional support) are individually assessed in light of my findings in order to build a 'recipe for successful contact' in School Linking. Moreover, my research findings suggest a threefold reassessment of contact theory. First, the role of 'acquaintances' in contact settings is identified as an area for further research. Second, the effectiveness of 'knowledge' as a mediating factor is questioned in an educational setting. Lastly, a reliance on the homogeneity of 'ingroups' and 'outgroups' risks exacerbating students' negative perceptions of difference by failing to recognise religious

¹ An academic theory within origins in Allport's (1954) 'contact hypothesis', which proposed that interaction between groups can decrease prejudiced attitudes.

plurality within the classroom. The chapter positions the ‘deategorization’ model of contact (Brewer and Miller 1984, 1988, Miller 2002) as an alternative framework for the development of peaceful relations in schools characterised by individual relationships within and between teachers and between teachers and students.

Chapter 10, the concluding chapter, opens with a summary of findings from chapters 5-9 and their contribution to academic literature. It also summarises the theoretical implications of the research, stating a set of recommendations for School Linking to optimise instances of contact and maximise prejudice reduction. Methodological reflections follow, with the chapter describing the ongoing consultation process with F&BF regarding the future design and evaluation of School Linking. The chapter ends by outlining several different theoretical lenses through which the findings can be presented in future research, including citizenship education and peace education.

1.3: The School Linking programme: An introduction

School Linking is run by a charitable organisation: F&BF. Founded in 1997 and formally known as Three Faiths Forum (3FF), F&BF runs programmes in schools, universities and workplaces with an aim to bring people of “all faiths and beliefs” together. F&BF assert that this is “the most effective way to tackle ignorance and challenge stereotypes – and create understanding and trust between people” (Faith and Belief Forum 2020a). School Linking represents an attempt to achieve this goal.

The structure of School Linking is twofold. Primarily, F&BF facilitates three continuing professional development (CPD) days per academic year, at which staff deliver intercultural and interfaith training to the teachers who have signed up for the programme. The CPD training is delivered to all teachers in line with a framework delivered by the Linking Network (TLN), in which School Linking has

its origins.² The activities during the CPD training may differ for ‘new’ teachers, who are new to the programme, and for ‘experienced’ teachers, whose previous experience on the programme acts as a basis upon which to receive more advanced training.

Beyond the CPD training days, F&BF pairs up, or ‘links’ faith school teachers for the duration of one academic year, who jointly deliver three ‘Link Days’, at which they put their training into practice and bring their respective school groups together in a series of activities, based upon three questions. ‘Who am I?’ explores questions around identity, ‘Who are we?’ explores ideas of belonging and community, and ‘Where do we live and how do we live together?’ explores concepts of society and citizenship. The activities are often creative, with past Link Days involving fashion shows, poetry, story-telling and art. The first Link Day is at a neutral venue, with subsequent days being held at the Linking Teacher and their partner’s respective schools.

My positionality traversed both ‘insider’ and ‘outside’ perspectives. As Section 4.3 will state, my research emerged from a studentship designed in part by the Faith and Belief Forum. Because of this, I undertook the research with, to an extent, an ‘insider’ understanding of the expectations and needs of F&BF and its beneficiaries. This perspective was compounded by my own professional background and knowledge of the inner workings of the British schooling context through individual family members’ professional experiences. My positionality drove my desire to undertake this research and, in Section 4.2. is reflected upon in more detail with regard to the research’s epistemological underpinnings. However, whilst my ‘insider’ status enabled me to develop a positive working relationship with F&BF, I took steps to maintain my objectivity and develop my ‘outsider’ role as a researcher throughout the process. My approach to research design and data collection and analysis is detailed in Sections 4.3 and 4.4.

My research took place between October 2016 and April 2020. During this time, the language F&BF used to describe the School Linking programme

² F&BF’s School Linking is run as part of The Linking Network (TLN), an organisation established in 2016 with support from the Pears Foundation. As of 2018, TLN was directly involved in a Bradford-based linking programme, but support an additional twenty-five programmes through Local Authorities by “providing training, advice, classroom, and training resources” (The Linking Network 2018: 3).

significantly changed. When I commenced my research, the programme was described in F&BF's annual report as "an effective way in which students can learn about other faiths and beliefs, and enrich the wider school community by bringing students of other faith and belief backgrounds into their school" (Three Faiths Forum 2016: 5). At the time, it was also publicly termed the 'Faith School Linking' programme, to reflect the fact that all schools on the programme were 'faith schools'.³ As such, I used the term 'interfaith encounters' in my research objective (stated in Chapter 4) to represent the nature of School Linking.

However, in the 2017-2018 academic year, the programme name changed to 'School Linking' because schools without a religious character joined the scheme for the first time. The following year, the organisation itself was renamed The Faith and Belief Forum (originally named Three Faiths Forum), to "clearly communicate that we are completely inclusive and welcome to people of all faiths and beliefs, whether religious or not" (Faith and Belief Forum 2020c). In the most recent academic year, School Linking was described as follows:

The School Linking Programme matches students and classes from different cultural or faith backgrounds to explore issues of identity, community and belief. [...] the programme's focus is to equip teachers with the skills, knowledge and support to provide these opportunities for their students. (Faith and Belief Forum 2020b)

To respond to this shift in language, I expanded my literature reviews to position School Linking within wider intercultural education and structured my primary data collection, outlined in Chapter 4, around the categories of knowledge, skills and attitudes; the key principles underlying 'intercultural competence' (originally stated by the Council of Europe (2014) and developed by Jackson (2014a) in relation to different pedagogical approaches to teaching intercultural education). The nature of religious and cultural plurality within schools is a theme that is continued throughout the research and I reflect on this language development in the thesis conclusion.

³ By this I mean schools that have a 'religious character'. See Section 3.2 for more detail.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review part one: Themes in religious and intercultural education

2.1: Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature in religious and intercultural education, exploring themes relevant to my research findings in Chapters 5 to 8. This literature review addresses two themes. First, although The Faith and Belief Forum's (F&BF's) School Linking programme does not constitute part of the national curriculum, research into Religious Education (RE) highlights a number of thematic areas relevant to my research. As the previous chapter demonstrated, F&BF's language about the School Linking programme has used the phrase 'faith and belief' for a number of years. These words echo 'religion or belief', a term used in the UK and increasingly more widely in Europe in its position as a 'protected characteristic' in the 2010 Equality Act.⁴ While there is a body of literature about religion in education, what has struck me is education literature's recent focus on the practical and conceptual implications of the inclusion of *non-religious* convictions in teaching RE. The first section, therefore, aims to answer the question 'what are the challenges facing the integration of non-religious worldviews into teaching about religion or belief?' I review organisational documents and academic literature on the topics of recent curriculum reforms and recommendations, as well as multifaith approaches to RE which have shaped, and been shaped, by the policy context in the UK. These discussions uncover the complexities of defining and teaching 'personal

⁴ A 'protected characteristic', if possessed by an individual, inhibits him or her being discriminated against on the grounds of that characteristic. According to Section 10 of the Act in which 'religion or belief' is stated as a protected characteristic, 'religion' refers to "any religion and a reference to religion includes a reference to a lack of religion" and 'belief' means "any religious or philosophical belief and a reference to belief includes a reference to a lack of belief". (Equality Act 2010, C. 10, S. 10)

worldviews', and reveal a lack of teacher training and low levels of religious literacy⁵ in schools, both of which I identify as prevalent in School Linking in Chapters 5, 6 and 8.

Second, the chapter considers religious diversity in the UK outside of the specific realm of RE. In response to F&BF's increasing use of the term of 'culture' alongside 'faith and belief' in language around School Linking (see previous chapter), I analyse the religion-related components of intercultural education as outlined by the Council of Europe, considering how these have been informed by research into attitudes to diversity among young people in the UK. In answering the question, 'how has research into attitudes to religious diversity informed the religious dimension of intercultural education?', the review opens up discussion of the nature and function of 'safe space', as well as the role of religion and belief in the 'community' school⁶ both of which I critically discuss alongside my own findings in Chapters 7 and 8.

2.2: What are the challenges facing the integration of non-religious worldviews into teaching about religion or belief?

This PhD does not undertake research into formal RE but it is concerned with religion *and* education. As such, there are a number of areas of research into RE that are not considered here (including historical perspectives⁷, curriculum and assessment⁸, teaching world religions⁹ and the role of worship in school¹⁰).

⁵ Defined by Dinham and Shaw (2017: 2) as "an understanding of the grammars, rules, vocabularies and narratives underpinning religions and beliefs." Further definitions of 'religious literacy' and its role in School Linking will be discussed in Chapter 8.

⁶ The UK government defines community schools in England as "sometimes called local authority maintained schools [... which] are not influenced by business or religious groups and follow the national curriculum". (Gov.uk 2020b)

⁷ See, for example, Doney (2019), Doney, Parker and Freathy (2017) and Freathy and Parker (2010) for research into historical insights and pedagogical innovation in Religious Education post-1944.

⁸ See, for example, Wintersgill and colleagues' work since 2017 on 'big ideas' as a framework for assessment and toolkit for the selection of RE curriculum materials. (Wintersgill 2017, 2019)

⁹ See, for example, Jackson (2019) for an overview of publications by the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education.

¹⁰ See, for example, Stern and Shillitoe's evaluation of *Prayer Spaces in Schools*, an organisation that supports temporary prayer space in schools. (Stern and Shillitoe 2019)

Rather, the main interest of this section is to critically consider how teaching religion or belief in schools relates to, or fits within, a UK that is becoming increasingly diverse in terms of religious and non-religious belief.

2.2.1: A move towards 'worldviews' in Religious Education

The question of to what extent, and how, both religious and non-religious worldviews can be integrated into teaching about religion and belief was addressed by the Commission on Religious Education's (CoRE's) final report, *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward* (CoRE 2018). The Commission was established in 2016 to outline a vision for the future of the subject in terms of its educational and policy contribution.¹¹ The report presents the analysis of quantitative (existing data on the provision of RE combined with survey data) and qualitative data (made up of oral and written evidence) capturing the views of multiple stakeholders including faith community representatives, teachers and secondary schools pupils.¹²

A number of themes were addressed in the main body of the report, including but not limited to collective worship in schools, syllabus structures, Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs), and debates around faith schooling (the latter to be discussed in the following chapter). The report makes three key recommendations, the first of which is that the RE title be changed to 'Religion and Worldviews' to reflect social and cultural changes in England (CoRE 2018: 3-4). The Commission's rationale for their recommendation is based upon 15 assertions which contribute to the summary that 'worldviews' is, "the best available catch-all term to describe both religious and non-religious approaches to life" (CoRE 2018: 31).¹³

¹¹ The Commission was established in 2016 by, but independent of, the Religious Education Council of England and Wales.

¹² My research encompasses both primary and secondary schools in Chapter 5's secondary data analysis, however my participant observation took place exclusively in secondary schools. My choice of collecting primary data from secondary schools was largely informed by ethical considerations (see Chapter 4).

¹³ Highlighting, for example, the importance of worldviews as a tool to explore other academic disciplines, worldviews as a shaper of public discourse and worldviews as a source of transferable

The term 'worldview'¹⁴ is defined in the report as "a person's way of understanding, experiencing and responding to the world" (CoRE 2018: 26) and a distinction is made between "institutional worldviews" which are "organised worldviews shared among particular groups and sometimes embedded in institutions" and include atheism, secularism and humanism alongside religions, and "personal worldviews" which represent, "an individual's own way of understanding and living in the world, which may or may not draw from one, or many, institutional worldviews" (CoRE 2018: 4). These definitions reflect van der Kooij, de Ruyter and Miedema's (2013, 2017) distinction between 'personal' and 'organised' worldviews in the RE classroom which "influence schools in different manners" (2013: 222). Similarly, Jackson (2014a) adopts van der Kooij, de Ruyter and Miedema's distinction in his work on intercultural education, discussed in the following section of this chapter.

The move towards the concept of worldviews which encompasses non-religious belief welcomes recommendations by the British 2004 National Framework for Religious Education that secular views be incorporated into local syllabuses (Watson 2008, 2010). The recommendation similarly validates the British Humanist Association's 2015 proposal for the inclusion of non-religious worldviews into the national curriculum to ensure relevance for an increasing proportion of students with no religious commitment (BHA 2015a, BHA 2015b); a proposal for which more than one hundred academics and religious leaders, including former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, wrote in support. The recommendation is also mirrored by Clarke and Woodhead's (2018) *A New Settlement Revised: Religion and Belief in Schools*, a substantially revised version of their original 2015 report based upon the 2012-15 Westminster Faith Debates (Clarke and Woodhead 2015). Though not drawing upon the 'worldviews' terminology directly, the report recommends that RE should be renamed 'Religion, Beliefs and Values' to capture the development of the

skills. They also state that misunderstandings of worldviews can lead to prejudice and extremism, and non-religious worldviews must contend with the same existential questions as religious worldviews. (CoRE 2018: 26-31)

¹⁴ The English term derives from the German *weltanschauung*, a term used in philosophy which refers to "the framework of ideas and beliefs through which an individual, or wider grouping, interprets and interacts with the world". (Jackson 2014a: 70)

subject since its inception in 1944 and reflect the multitude of perspectives in England today (including those that are non-religious) (Clarke and Woodhead 2018).

The suggestion of the name change has been widely supported. The RE Council of England and Wales “fully and wholeheartedly” endorsed the report within two months of its launch (Religious Education Council 2018) and a number of contributors to the RE:Online blog praised the move as a welcome one (Casley 2019, Dinham 2019, Flanagan 2019). Theos (2017) drew upon the views of civil servants, policymakers and members of faith organisations and RE professional bodies to back the change of name (stated in the 2017 interim report, published a year prior to the final report) as a means of tackling misconceptions around the aims and nature of RE, particularly amongst school leadership and the general public. Lastly, a majority in a House of Lords debate on 17th December 2018 viewed it as positive and encouraging, with members referring to it as “the most substantial piece of work on the issue of Religious Education in our country since the 1970s” (Lord Alderdice), “a splendid report” (Baroness Bakewell) and “the right approach” (Lord Addington) (House of Lords 2018). Despite this, three months after the launch of the report, the then Secretary of State for Education, Damian Hinds MP, whilst recognising the recommendations’ potential for change, wrote in response to the report that the government would not be acting on it in any way that would incur curriculum changes (Hinds 2018).

The hesitancy to implement these changes is symbolic of the wider issues surrounding the ambiguities, and indeed practicalities, of teaching a model of RE that is inclusive of the Commission’s categorisation of “personal worldviews”, particularly those that are non-religious. Jackson’s (2014a) work on the religious dimension of intercultural education (discussed in the second section of this chapter) points to this as a significant challenge:

The integration of ‘non-religious worldviews’ into an area that previously, in many countries, has dealt specifically with religions is probably the biggest challenge facing educators in this field. (2014a: 139)

Although there is little empirical evidence on the subject, Everington's (2018) qualitative research with 25 RE teachers in England attributes the challenge to teacher constraints, an area addressed in the RE Commission's report, and found to be a significant barrier for School Linking in Chapter 6 of this thesis. Everington's findings, though not generalisable, indicate that there is interest from RE teachers in the inclusion of non-religious worldviews, though they acknowledge that there are several challenges to be overcome if they are to be included effectively. These challenges include time constraints, a lack of resources, a lack of knowledge on the nature of the 'non-religious' for both specialist and non-specialist teachers, and the struggle to manage students with religious views who find it difficult to comprehend non-religious worldviews (all of which I also identify as challenges in my own research). Her findings reflect the work of Dinham and Shaw (2015), who argue that RE should be inclusive of non-religious worldviews but acknowledge that RE teachers are under relentless pressure to conform, adapt and respond to continuous changes in England's religio-cultural landscape. Similarly, The National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE 2017: 36) argues that a lack of specialist training for non-specialist teachers "could be severe in terms of perpetuating inaccuracies about religions or beliefs." Everington recommends further research, and has since undertaken comparative work with Bråten indicating that there is potential for England to learn from other countries which have integrated (or are in the process of integrating) worldviews into their teaching on religion and belief (Bråten and Everington 2019).¹⁵

Aside from the practical challenges, there are conceptual questions concerning the meaning, or classification, of 'personal worldviews'. There is a growing body of work exploring what some view to be the increasingly individualised nature of belief, for example Woodhead and Heelas' (2005) claim of a societal shift from organised religion to 'individualised spiritualities',

¹⁵ For global literature on 'worldviews' see for example Hella and Wright's (2009) exploration of worldviews in RE in Finland or Riegel and Delling's (2019) qualitative study on denominational RE in Germany. The latter explore how students' personal worldviews interplay with, or contradict, organised religious worldviews upon which the teaching is based. In the USA, the American Academy of Religions uses the term 'worldviews' as a distinction from 'traditions' in their Guidelines for Teaching about Religion in K–12 Public Schools in the United States (Moore 2010).

Watson's (2009a, 2009b, 2010) pedagogical model for 'spiritual education' or Davie's (1990, 1994) 'believing without belonging' framework. Similarly, intersectional approaches to young peoples' religious and non-religious identity formation are increasingly being used in research, such as Arweck and Nesbitt's (2010) analysis of mixed faith families, Strhan and Shillitoe's (2019) study of intergenerational transmission of non-religious identity through family, school and personal reflection, the AHRC/ESRC-funded *Religion and Society Programme* (Catto 2014) and the large-scale mixed methods *Youth on Religion* project (Mage, Hemming and Stenson 2014) which investigated the formation of religious and non-religious identities through "age, gender, socio-economic status, family, friends, geographical location, school, media, religious leaders and world events" (Mage, Hemming and Stenson 2014: 23). The complexity of the categories upon which 'personal worldviews' are built is revisited in Chapter 8, in which students' interpretations of 'difference' are explored.¹⁶

The issues associated with teaching 'personal worldviews' that are non-religious is further compounded by a wider 'secularisation debate' within religion and education. The impression that religion is increasingly marginalised in education has been a major source of debate for more than forty years, provoking many arguments and responses from academics (including Cooling 2010, Hand 2012, Hirst 1965, 1970, Norman and Copson 2011). Some hold the view that the integration of a 'secular humanism' skews the central aims of RE. Felderhoff (2015), for example, makes a theological/philosophical argument (alongside practical, legal and pedagogical challenges) that teaching non-religious worldviews does religions a "grave disservice". This perspective was echoed (albeit by a minority) during the December 2018 House of Lords debate, when Lord Alton of Liverpool expressed concern that the inclusion of non-religious worldviews would "force the dilution of Religious Education" (House of Lords 2018). Barnes (2015: 82) agrees with Lord Alton's sentiment:

¹⁶ The literature explored in this paragraph touches upon big issues around the nature of belief that this thesis cannot address. Nevertheless, my findings make tangential contributions to these discussions.

Understanding and interpreting religion and the religions is the central aim of RE [...] The content of religion has educational worth and it is this that the subject of RE seeks to convey through faithful representations of the different religions and religious phenomena.

Barnes' argument extends to more practical challenges outlined earlier in this section by Everington (2018) and Dinham and Shaw (2015). He suggests that expanding the subject to include more than a small number of religious topics, let alone non-religious worldviews, "ensures superficial teaching and learning and pupil confusion" (2015: 87). To an extent this argument is validated by my findings in Chapters 5, 6 and 8 where teaching during Link Days is found to develop surface-level knowledge contributed to religious illiteracy.

Returning to the secularisation of religion within education, Jackson (2003a), restates David Hargreaves' (1994) argument that "in a secular and plural society, religion can no longer be the basis of a socially cohesive civic education" (2003a: 70). Hargreaves, an advocate for state-funded faith schooling, proposed the abolition of RE in all 'secular' schools (an idea not subsequently adopted by the government), and advocated for the inclusion of citizenship education instead.¹⁷ However, this view appears incoherent. Hargreaves' use of the term 'secular' when referring to schools ignores the fact that not all students in a 'secular' school may be non-religious, a critique identified by Jackson (2003a: 76) who says that "Hargreaves' characterization of the 'common' school¹⁸ as secular misunderstands the plurality of community schools". Equally, not all children in a faith school will be religious, a finding which has significant implications for the teaching of difference, discussed in Chapters 5 and 8. Hemming and Roberts (2018) outlines reasons why non-religious families may send their children to faith schools, recognising that rural communities in particular may only be served by one school. Jackson's critique of Hargreaves is one which also recurs throughout my own research. In

¹⁷ Citizenship education, though explored briefly in overlapping conversations, will not be expanded upon in detail in my research. However, I acknowledge the contribution that literature on citizenship education could make here and I revisit the potential for my own research to contribute to this field in Section 10.5.

¹⁸ A term originally used to denote the community school.

Jackson's view, Hargreaves' argument presents faith schooling as if cultural, ethnic or religious groups are homogenous. As Jackson (2004: 71) puts it:

Religious schools are seen by Hargreaves as havens for particular pluralities, in which home and school are jointly committed to 'the transmission and living experience of a shared moral and religious culture', [...] This view exhibits an over-uniform view of the nature of religious or religio-cultural groups.

Jackson further argues that these perceptions reinforce Gerd Baumann's 'dominant discourse'. a concept revisited in the next chapter's review of literature on faith schooling, and identified as significant in my own discussions around religious plurality and literacy in Chapter 8.¹⁹

Others take a similar position to Jackson's. Moulin (2011: 316) found that RE students themselves "felt RE lessons failed to account for the diversity within their tradition and did not represent the nuances of their own personal views". Watson (2007: 4) echoes this critique:

[S]ecularisation of RE has been aided and abetted by many religious people themselves [...] Without mostly realising it, they have gone along with the assumption that religion is to do with membership of completely separate communities, one called Christianity, another Islam, another Hinduism, and so want, each subdivided into smaller almost self-contained units.

In sum, an acknowledgment of the complexity around 'personal worldviews' (explored in the opening of this section) extends into wider discourse

¹⁹ A term originally developed by Gerd Baumann in 1999, Jackson provides a definition of 'dominant discourse' as speech which "reifies cultures, seeing 'communities' as defined by ethnic and religious identity", often used by the media and politicians. 'Demotic discourse', on the other hand, is "the language of culture making [...] Thus 'culture' can be seen as both the possession of an ethnic or religious 'community' and as a dynamic process relying on personal agency, in which community boundaries are negotiated and there is the possibility of redefinition of the meaning of 'community' in particular situations" Jackson (2003a: 72-73).

around the extent of religious plurality found in both faith, and non-faith schools. Namely, it questions the secularist assumptions of those arguing for a marginalisation of religion in education.

However, it is not just the proposition to include worldviews in RE that is complex; there are pedagogical implications. The following sub-section outlines a number of 'multifaith education' approaches in the UK that, to differing extents, respond to the issues outlined above.

2.2.2: The role of multifaith education

Cush (2011) provides an overview of the development of multifaith RE in the UK since the 1960s. Citing secularisation (defined as the “decline in church attendance and social influence of religious beliefs and organisations”), immigration and social liberalism (2011: 71-2) as influences, Cush lists various characteristics of multifaith RE envisaged since the 1960s. First, the non-confessional approach sought to make the subject accessible for all students (regardless of personal beliefs or background) with a requirement to “respect believers, whilst not being afraid to debate controversial issues” (2011: 71).²⁰ In Cush’s words, this form of multifaith RE “combined the attempt to study religions ‘objectively’ (or academically) with the realisation that the subject matter dealt with the deepest convictions, cherished values, ancestral traditions and very identity of fellow human beings, requiring an attitude of respect and empathy” (2011: 70).

Second, Cush stated the influence of a phenomenological approach, which employed the use of categories, or ‘dimensions’ of religion (first introduced by Ninian Smart in the 1970s and then developed in the 1980s), including the experiential/emotional, social/institutional, doctrinal/philosophical, material, ritual/practical, narrative/mythic, and ethical/legal (Cush 2011: 73). Whilst lacking nuance, this checklist-style approach was pragmatic in that it that encouraged comparison. Smart’s approach has formed the basis for phenomenological

²⁰ An idea which will be echoed in discussions around ‘safe space’ in the following sub-section on intercultural education.

Comparative Religious Studies ever since. The approach was influential and contributed to the publication of the *Schools Council Working Paper 36* (Schools Council 1971) which formally introduced multifaith RE into the UK. However, it was not without criticism. For example, Cush (2011: 75) outlines that the categories can be seen as “western ‘orientalist’ constructions, which cannot be applied to non-Western traditions.

Multifaith approaches to RE were expanded in the 1980s and 1990s, with Michael Grimmitt and John Hull’s collaboration on *The Gift to the Child* project for primary school students. The process of the approach was to present a religious item, called a ‘numen’ (for example, a word, song, page from scripture, or a physical item such as a statue) to students, with the lesson structured around ‘engagement’, ‘exploration’ ‘contextualisation’ and ‘reflection’ (Hull 2007: 181-182). The project had methodological implications, as the choice of numen could be used to draw comparisons across religions (for example, two ‘items’, the prophet Jonah and the imagery of angels were chosen because of their relevance to Christianity, Judaism and Islam (Hull 2007: 185)). However, it was noted that the teacher must be able to “converse freely, spontaneously, and with humour on religious subjects [... and have] a detailed religious and theological knowledge of the numen” (2007: 188) for the approach to be successful. That the teacher was required to have sufficient religious literacy of the item points to a wider issue prevalent in my research. Low levels of religious literacy at the teacher and student level are identified in Chapters 5 and 8.

Wright’s (1993, 1998, 2000) framework for RE further developed the idea of religious literacy. Wright described his approach as “the process of producing religiously literate individuals” (1993: 63) from knowledge to understanding, through skills developed in order to evaluate truth claims:

[Students] will develop a depth of knowledge of a number of key religious and non-religious belief systems that offer contrasting and conflicting answers [...] This knowledge will be interpreted and understood using their developing skills of theological and philosophical reflection, by means of

which they will come to take part in an ongoing process of evaluating the various claims to truth. (1998: 79)

The process depends on the relationship between teacher and student. It is necessary for the student to understand that the teacher is not an 'expert', rather an individual who is on their own journey towards religious literacy (1998: 102). The interdependence between effective RE and religious literacy is further illustrated by Broadbent (2002: 167) who argues that "Religious Education has the potential for making a significant contribution to the development of pupils' literacy, and in turn, Religious Education is dependent on literacy skills for developing an understanding of religious concepts". Other recent work on religious literacy includes the Faiths and Civil Society Unit's 2015 research (Dinham and Francis 2015b), Conroy (2015) and Dinham and Francis (2015b). I discuss their arguments in more detail in Chapter 8, when I explore the finding of religious illiteracy among teachers and students on the School Linking programme.

Finally, the 'interpretive approach', developed by Jackson (1997, 2003a, 2004, 2009), offers an alternative method which puts the student at the centre of the learning process to embrace the multitude of perceptions of 'personal worldviews'.²¹ It aims to "balance skills of interpretation with reflective and critical activities appropriate to the age of children [...] often drawing on ethnographic studies of young people in Britain" (Jackson 2003a: 76). The approach draws upon three methodological principles. Firstly, 'representation' of religious traditions which are flexible, allowing for multiple influences which shape a student's identity. Secondly, the 'interpretation' of religious material based upon the anthropological principle of emphasising the students' own perspectives within their process of learning. Lastly, the process of 'reflexivity', in which the student critiques the experiences of others, while simultaneously re-assessing their own

²¹ Before Jackson fully articulated the interpretive approach in 1997, the methodology was shaped by his 1980's ethnographic research with Nesbitt on Hindu individuals and communities (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993), before being channelled through the 1994-1996 Warwick RE project, in which a number of age-specific curriculum materials were created, drawing upon the principles underlying the approach. As Chapter 5 of this thesis will show, age is a significant variable in how students' perceive and experience School Linking.

views and retaining a self-critical stance towards the reflexive process itself (Jackson 2004: 88).

Jackson's approach appears to be at odds with Wright's focus on religious literacy, which suggests that "learners should study the mainstream orthodox traditions within each religion [as...] the most effective way to grasp the deep (and mutually exclusive) truth claims of the different religions" (Iversen 2013: 169). The interpretive approach's onus on the researcher "indicates that because no one insider presentation can give a full account of religious tradition, it is up to the researcher to 'construct' the representation of the religion [... therefore] the 'bottom-up' approach of Jackson is in danger of misrepresenting religions" (Iversen 2013: 173). Nonetheless, the interpretive approach has been widely used and further developed in the study of religion and education (see, for example, the work of the REDCo project outlined in the following section, including O'Grady (2013), Jackson and O'Grady (2019) and O'Dell (2009)). It has also influenced a number of dialogical RE research projects which are discussed in the next chapter.

The approaches to multifaith education described above interpret and embrace the complexity of religious plurality and non-religious worldviews in different ways, each taking different pedagogical stances to address the challenges of inclusive RE teaching. In this respect they embrace the double-edged sword of the secularisation debate, bringing this section to a close. Igrave (2012b: 31) summarises this contradiction, which blurs the place of the 'religious' and 'secular' within education, arguably leaning towards a post-secular shift:

The absence of a neat separation between secular and religious in English education can lead to ambiguities and confusions on the ground, a position further complicated by contextual factors such as the religious profile of students and local communities. The absence can also have a positive significance in conversations between religious and secular, enabling discussions to move away from simplistic conceptualizations of the two as independent and opposite.

In a school context, Ipgrave takes a pragmatic overview to the secularisation debate: “[T]he multi-faith and secular nature of society demands some kind of religious and secular settlement if all voices are to be heard and allowed to contribute to the public good” (2012b: 47). My research, while not contributing *directly* to this settlement, sheds fresh light on some key topics: the nature of ‘personal’ worldviews, religious literacy in schools and teacher constraints are ongoing discussions to which this thesis contributes.

In summary, these two sections on RE reform, worldviews and multifaith education have highlighted the challenges facing the integration of non-religious worldviews into teaching religion in schools. Despite recommended reforms embracing inclusivity in teaching about religion, it is clear that challenges of incorporating ‘personal worldviews’, including those that are non-religious, remain. There have been a number of approaches to multifaith education which have positive pedagogical and methodological implications for inclusive teaching, however challenges identified in the first section (including issues of religious literacy, teacher training and teacher constraints) are potential barriers to their successful implementation. My research identifies these same barriers within the School Linking programme (in Chapters 5, 6 and 8), and as such my findings contribute to ongoing debate and settlement of these challenges. However, it is not just literature on RE that is concerned with these issues. Jackson’s (2014a) comment on non-religious worldviews in Section 2.2.1 stems from a body of work on intercultural education that has contributed to the debates above, and uncovered further academic themes that are relevant to my own research.

2.3: How has research into attitudes to religious diversity informed the religious dimension of intercultural education?

Literature on the religious dimension of intercultural education addresses a number of topics which underpin my research, some of which, such as teacher challenges, were introduced in the previous section of this chapter. This section also points to a number of additional discussions that recur throughout the thesis,

such as the role of 'safe space', the school as a site for interaction with wider communities and parents, and the influence of the school as a site that develops attitudes towards religious diversity. First, I reflect on two major studies of young people's attitudes to religious diversity in the UK, then I outline some key principles of the religious dimension to intercultural education that these studies directly informed.

2.3.1: Attitudes to religious diversity in the UK: research with young people

In the UK, two projects significantly informed the development of the religious dimension to intercultural education in the early years of the twenty-first century: the 2006-2009 project, 'Religion in Education: a Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries?' (REDCo) and the *Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity* project conducted between 2009 and 2012. Both projects resulted in a number of research findings that are directly comparable to my own in Chapters 5 to 8.

Firstly, REDCo was conducted by nine European universities, including a team from the WRERU at the University of Warwick, which is the focus of this chapter. WRERU's research consisted of a number of qualitative, quantitative and action research studies to discern how students' attitudes to RE and diversity influenced successful dialogue and/or cultivated conflict.

The qualitative work included Ipgrave and McKenna's (2008) study of four English secondary schools of various sizes, locations and student demographics (including religious affiliation, place of birth and family ethnic origins for students with a migrant background). Ipgrave and McKenna explored how religion influences young people's personal lives, social lives and education. They found that students' "perceptions of peace and understanding between people of different faiths" were underpinned by notions of multicultural education and familiarity with, or exposure to, other students' lives and experiences. They further concluded that Muslim students are perceived to pose more problems as a

“significant other” than non-Muslim students (a finding echoed in Chapter 5’s quantitative analysis), and that non-religious students in schools where faith identities are openly acknowledged perceived more hostility from religious peers (2008: 133-136).

What is more, Ipgrave, Jackson and O’Grady (2009) undertook classroom-based action research alongside teachers, teacher trainers and a RE advisor to apply Jackson’s (1997) interpretive approach (discussed in the first section) to the study of attitudes towards religious diversity. Their resulting publication outlines a number of findings. O’Dell’s (2009) action research project on RE and gender identity found that through a use of the interpretive approach, students are able to embrace “more fluid concepts of gender and identity”, some reassessing their original perception of RE as a ‘gendered subject’, more applicable to girls (O’Dell 2009: 65). What is more, Whitworth’s (2009) work with undergraduates training to become primary school teachers demonstrated that the interpretive approach, although requiring simplification for teachers with non-specialist skills in teaching religion, can contribute to teachers’ theoretical and methodological understanding of RE, and can develop student teachers’ confidence in teaching about religion.

The project’s quantitative work included a study by McKenna, Neill and Jackson (2009), who analysed 421 questionnaires from 14-16 year-old students across 16 English secondary schools to discern the role of religion in school, their personal lives and their relationships with other people. They found that most students were committed to the inclusion of religion within school life, but the data showed that family was an equally important source of information about religion for the students, and their relationship to religious belief was further influenced by life pressures such as relationships, youth culture and school examinations (2009: 57). What is more, the RE classroom was the most likely place for students to engage in interfaith dialogue, but outside of the lesson pupils were “most likely to discuss religion with those from similar religious backgrounds to themselves”. Finally, in general, the study suggested that students with a religious worldview were more tolerant towards other students’ perspectives and Muslim students in particular were most committed to “co-existence between those of different religions” (2009: 64).

Jackson (2014b) consolidates the UK-based REDCo findings with the other European university members' projects. Two of Jackson's findings in particular resonate with my own work. First, he summarises that "[f]or students, peaceful co-existence depends on knowledge about each other's religions and worldviews and sharing common interests as well as doing things together" (2014b 134). The extent to which "peaceful co-existence depends on knowledge" is debated in Chapter 8, in which the requirement for religious literacy in School Linking is shown to be lacking. Chapter 9 also explores issues with Linking Teachings emphasising 'common interests' at the expense of recognising differences. Second, Jackson suggests that "[s]tudents want learning to take place in a safe classroom environment where there are agreed procedures for expression and discussion" (2014b: 134). The role of safe space in School Linking is critiqued in Chapter 7, where I identify conflicting interpretations of the role of the safe space between teachers and students.²²

The *Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity* project was also conducted by a team at WRERU between October 2009 and December 2012 as an extension of the UK strand of REDCo research. This was a mixed method study, with data collected through focus groups with 13-16 year-old students in 21 schools and a quantitative survey of almost 12,000 13-15 year-old students. Both strands of data collection were conducted across the four nations of the UK, plus separate research in London (Jackson and McKenna 2017: 10-13).

The project resulted in multiple publications. Literature arising from the qualitative analyses highlights a number of overarching themes, summarised by Arweck and Ipgrave (2017: 24-26), and all discussed in Chapter 8. Arweck and Ipgrave assert that, firstly, pupils' assumptions that knowledge about religions leads to increased understanding and sympathy towards the 'other' are not necessarily reflected in practice. Secondly, that pupils tend to view their parents

²² The REDCo project has been critiqued by Gearon (2013: 132-134), who argues that RE researchers view RE as having an inherent 'political' goal. Jackson and McKenna (2017: 9) refute these claims, stating, "it does not follow from the fact that a piece of research focuses on a 'social' issue, in this case, dealing with the topic of religion in pluralistic classrooms, that the researchers involved in this must adhere to a single 'historical-political' aim for Religious Education". The debate has continued, with Lewin (2017) providing comment and provoking further response from Jackson (2017).

and friends as having a bigger impact on the development of values than their schools.²³ Thirdly, that attitudes to diversity are seen by students as a skill which is developed through direct knowledge of, and contact with, others' religions, and fourthly that developing an understanding of different religious perspectives is more difficult for students who self-ascribe as non-religious (and vice versa) than for those who understand *across* religious perspectives.

Several qualitative analyses arising from the *Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity* project are directly relevant to my own findings. Arweck (2017c) isolated data collected from two different community schools in Wales (which she described as a large, multicultural school in the suburbs of a city and a small, monocultural school in a rural village), both with a clear ethos of respect embedded within the school, to see how and to what extent the geographic and social context of the school affects students' attitudes to religious diversity. Arweck found that the ethos of respect present in both schools "proves an essential ingredient in young people's attitudes to diversity" (2017c: 122). Specifically, the greater number of opportunities to "learn about and for dealing with diversity" afforded to students in the larger, multicultural school led to more positive attitudes towards others of diverse religions and beliefs, "marked by tolerance" (2017c: 122), a finding echoed in the REDCo project (Jackson and McKenna 2017: 6).

Similarly, Arweck's (2017b) study of a single multicultural community school in inner-city London found that the ethos of the school, which "celebrated the presence of a wide range of cultural groups" and promoted a "cohesive community" (2017b: 125), by its nature provided "external and internal scaffolding" (2017b: 147) for students' development of positive attitudes towards religious diversity. The students' everyday exposure to diversity enabled the school to focus on the learning experience with indirect reference to this context. As Arweck (2017b: 148) summarises:

²³ Which again echoes the REDCo finding that, "The most important source of information about religions and worldviews was generally the family, followed by the school" (Jackson and McKenna 2017: 6).

[C]ommon interests and shared activities foster intercultural and interreligious understanding by allowing young people to do things together without any particular focus on religious or cultural background. Their schooling is thus a kind of apprenticeship for life.

My findings in Chapter 8 illustrate that the low levels of religious literacy among community school teachers in School Linking to an extent undermine these positive findings.

In terms of the quantitative strand of the project, researchers have investigated the ways in which self-ascribed religious affiliation and denomination affect views towards religious diversity. Francis, Penny and Barnes (2017) analysed questionnaires by 888 13-15 year-old male students from Protestant and Roman Catholic schools, mapping attitudes and views towards Protestants, Roman Catholics, religious plurality and cultural diversity. They found that whilst some worldviews and experiences of Protestant and Roman Catholic students overlap, significant differences can be traced back to self-ascribed denomination. Similarly, Francis and Penny's (2017) analysis of 2,296 13-15 year-old male and female students in London indicated that their self-ascribed religious affiliations can be directly associated with their personal and social worldviews. Francis, Penny and Pyke (2013) compared questionnaire response from 1,761 male students with self-ascribed non-religious beliefs with 2,421 male religious students and found that "young atheists are not only less interested in the challenges and opportunities offered by life in religiously diverse societies, but also less tolerant of the life styles and expectations or rights of religious people living in these societies" (2013: 57). McKenna and Francis (2018) compared the responses of 177 female students who self-ascribed as Muslim with the responses of 1183 female students who self-ascribed as having no religious affiliation. They found that the Muslim students placed more value on studying religion at school, and had higher levels of respect towards religious plurality, echoing McKenna, Neill and Jackson's (2009) REDCo finding. Specific findings from these studies will be considered in Chapter 5, in which my quantitative

analysis indicates significantly differing attitudes towards School Linking between students from faith schools and community schools.

However, these studies are not unproblematic. The first two studies described above, (Francis, Penny and Barnes 2017 and Francis and Penny 2017) coded their Likert scale²⁴ responses of 'agree strongly' and 'agree' into one category, and the 'disagree strongly', 'disagree' and 'not certain' responses into a second (Francis, Penny and Barnes 2017: 175-6). To combine those who are 'not certain' with those with stronger views will misrepresent the proportion of students disagreeing with the statements issued as part of the data collection. As chapters 4 and 5 will demonstrate, I have avoided this issues in my quantitative analysis of F&BF's secondary data.

What is more, the quantitative aspect of the project, whilst focusing on the relationship between religious identity and attitude, defines 'religious identity' solely in terms of self-ascribed affiliation. Although the researchers recognise this as "a fairly crude measure of religious identity" (Francis et al. 2012: 286-287) this definition overlooks other aspects that may influence a young person's religious identity.²⁵ After all, McKenna, Neill and Jackson (2009)'s REDCo research identified pressures such as relationships and youth culture as influences on young peoples' positioning towards religious belief. What is more, the previous section of this chapter highlighted the complexity of 'personal worldviews' that extend beyond that of self-ascribed religious affiliation. Other researchers have questioned the validity of using self-identification of religious affiliation in survey research (Day and Lee 2014) and previous large-scale studies such as the 1990's Teenage Religion and Values Survey (discussed in Robbins and Francis 2010) have highlighted the importance of intersectionality:

[W]e are concerned with the cumulative influence of a range of individual differences, including factors like age, sex, socio-economic background and personality [...] Such factors have to be taken seriously before we can

²⁴ A scale of measurement often used in survey research developed by Likert (1932).

²⁵ With the exception of Francis and McKenna (2017) who tested for additional correlations between attitudes to religious diversity and psychological and personal variables including sex, age (for which they found no significant association with attitude to religious diversity), extroversion and neuroticism.

ask questions about the potential influence of religion, since individual differences in religion may themselves be associated with these very factors. (Robbins and Francis 2010: 48)

My secondary data, provided by F&BF and analysed in Chapter 5, affords me the opportunity to analyse additional variables both personal (such as age) and school-based (such as school religious ethos, academic performance and levels of socio-economic deprivation) to discern the role they place in shaping students' attitudes towards others of different religious and non-religious beliefs.

In sum, these two projects have resulted in a multitude of findings relating to attitudes to religious diversity, some of which are directly comparable to my own findings in Chapters 5 to 8. What is more, these studies have explicitly informed the development of the religious dimension to intercultural education, to which this literature review now turns.

2.3.2: Intercultural education: The religious dimension

Jackson's seminal *Signposts – Policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious world views in intercultural education* (Jackson 2014a, referred to in the remainder of this chapter as '*Signposts*') was published following a lengthy process facilitated by the Council of Europe since 2002.²⁶ The aim of the report was to address a recommendation made by the Council (2008a, 2008b) that "an understanding of cultural diversity should include knowledge and understanding of the main religions and non-religious convictions of the world and of their role in society" (Jackson 2014a:18). *Signposts* provides advice and resources intended to enable implementation of the recommendation in schools across Europe, while further contextualising discussions about teaching and religious diversity in England and Wales.

²⁶ During which time a number of documents were published (Council of Europe 2004, Keast 2007) and a consultation process facilitated in 2010 by the Council of Europe and The European Wergeland Centre (EWC). The purpose of the consultation was to provide feedback via a survey on a number of recommendations regarding the religious dimension of intercultural education made in 2008 to the 47 member states.

A number of themes in the report echo topics discussed in the previous section of this chapter.²⁷ Jackson reflects on the terminology of ‘worldviews’ (2014a: 70-75), for example, and reintroduces the ‘interpretive’ approach to religion and education. He links the three key principles of the approach (representation, interpretation and reflexivity) to ‘intercultural competence’, defined as:

[A] combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes which enables learners to: understand and respect people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself; respond appropriately, effectively and respectfully when interacting and communicating with such people [and]; establish positive and constructive relationships with such people. (Jackson 2014a: 34)

The report categorises the terms ‘knowledge’, ‘skills’ and ‘attitudes’, which I revisit in my analysis of the aims of School Linking in Chapter 8. Jackson also supports CoRE (2018), Dinham and Shaw (2015) and Everington (2018), by suggesting that there is a need for high-quality, ongoing teacher training so that teachers “have opportunities to exchange resources and successful experiences, and to be able to evaluate them.” (Jackson 2014a: 45).

The report subsequently introduces new themes that the academic literature on religion and education discussed above did not address. The concept of ‘safe space’, has evolved since its creation in the 1970s²⁸ from a term originally used to “protect marginalised groups from violation, threat and hatred” (Flesner and Von der Lippe 2019: 276) to a term most often used within discourse on education to denote a safe classroom atmosphere conducive to students expressing themselves freely. For example, the Council of Europe’s recommendation upon which *Signposts* is based states a precondition of

²⁷ As well as other topics not discussed in this review, including religious representations in the media and issues around human rights. The report also reviews ‘dialogical’ approaches to religion in education, which I discuss in the next chapter.

²⁸ The term was originally created in LGBT and women’s movements to denote “physical meeting places where like-minded people could meet and share their experiences in a safe environment” (Flesner and Von der Lippe 2019: 276).

“provision of a safe learning space to encourage expression without fear of being judged or held to ridicule” (Council of Europe 2008a: 7.1). Jackson develops the idea of safe space in the classroom as:

...a shorthand term for a desired classroom atmosphere. In a safe classroom space, students are able to express their views and positions openly, even if these differ from those of the teacher or peers. However, there need to be ground rules which all participants must understand and agree to, in terms of civility and sensitivity, ensuring inclusion and respect for others. (Jackson 2014a: 48)

The extent to which ‘risk’ exists in a safe space, however, has made it a controversial concept.²⁹ While some see a “risk-free zone” as integral for allowing pupils “room for the expression of doubt and criticism in their lessons”, for example giving female Muslim students equal rights (Leganger-Krogstad 2003: 185), Jackson recognises that a degree of risk is an inevitable aspect of expression which, he argues, can be “minimised through suitable preparation and training” (2014: 56). Recently, Lockley-Scott (2019) has argued that in the UK context characterised by issues around religious extremism, safe spaces for religion-related dialogue are dependent on a complex combination of factors, including sufficiently trained teachers and a “conducive national political context” (2019: 54).

Others are less concerned about minimising risk, and instead view the potential for conflict as a *positive* dynamic in the classroom, if well-managed. O’Grady’s (2013) classroom-based UK research, which draws upon a decade of action research aimed at assessing Jackson’s interpretive approach (outlined above), found that drama and role play with 12-13 year-old students successfully dealt with instances of conflict. O’Grady’s findings are supported by Europe-wide research. A number of researchers taking part in the REDCo project suggest that conflict, defined by Skeie (2009: 343) as “the practice of distancing, struggling,

²⁹ This has led research into safe space in UK and US higher education to debate the extent to which students are informed of discussion topics in advance of encounters in case there are ‘trigger warnings’ about potentially upsetting topics (Flesner and Von der Lippe 2019: 278).

competing, and tension towards others in a situation of differences”, can be a positive element if managed effectively. Similarly, ter Avest et al. (2009: 103) reviewed student interaction in a number of European contexts and found that:

[D]ialogue in the classroom about religious issues may lead to conflicts among pupils; these conflicts may then be the opportunity to develop a deep and stimulating dialogue regulated by the teacher [...] Thus, conflict should not be seen as the opposite and negative word to dialogue: conflicts can prove to be fruitful as far as they are handled in the appropriate way by the teacher.

What is more, Kozyrev (2009) analysed videotaped classroom interactions about religion and conflict in St. Petersburg schools and found that conflict can be resolved through dialogue, which must be facilitated by the teacher. This highlights the importance of not only the facilitation skills, but the teacher-student relationship (Kozyrev 2009: 215), something which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 7.

Debates around the inherent risk within a safe space have provoked a move towards a number of different terms, which, some argue, more accurately capture the desired classroom atmosphere. Boostrom (1998: 397) sees ‘safe space’ as “undermining critical thinking”, suggesting a move towards the terms ‘classroom agora’ or ‘classroom’ congress’, to recognise the need for teachers to “manage conflict, not prohibit it” (1998: 407). Alternatively, Barrett (2010) suggest the term ‘classroom civility’ (2010: 10), since ‘safe space’ may give students false expectations around feelings of comfort during discussion. Her term moves away from the psychological experience of the students to their behaviour and language. Arao and Clemens (2013: 139) argue that students and teachers need to be willing to put themselves in a ‘risky’ position, coining the term “brave space” to denote “the need for courage rather than the illusion of safety” (2013: 141). Finally, Iversen (2019) advocates the term ‘communities of disagreement’, a framework which “undermines the common assumption that groups need to share key values to be cohesive and well-functioning” (2019: 315). Rather, the

'community' consists of a group (the class) with different identity claims and opinions, who are involved in the process of problem solving. Through problem solving, "disagreements can be dealt with, or even developed and transformed into learning" (2019: 324).

F&BF prescribes its own safe space tool as an integral and mandatory part of School Linking. Whilst Chapter 5 indicates that not all teachers implement safe space in their Link Days, findings presented in Chapter 7 illustrate that the students' and teachers' have different interpretations of F&BF's safe space principles. My research thus gives rise to fresh data on the concept, which I discuss in relation to 'peaceful relations' in Chapter 9.

A final theme discussed in *Signposts* relevant to this review is hosting visitors in schools and making school trips to external venues (including places of worship). Jackson outlines recommendations for appropriate teacher planning and behaviour and advocates employing ethnographic methods to study students visiting places outside of their school site, as they, "develop pupils' intercultural competence in an active and engaged way, building knowledge, developing skills and fostering appropriate attitudes in learning to understand and appreciate different ways of life" (2014a: 93). However, other research into school visitors (Beavan 2013³⁰, Naeslund 2009³¹) indicates that despite enthusiasm for the activities from the students, teachers may express practical concerns about "their own lack of time and resources to organise guest speakers and outside visits" (Jackson 2014a: 96). This is an issue which I identify in my own research in Chapter 6. Despite a small amount of research (for example, Hemming, Hailwood and Stokes 2018) offering guidance for the 'whole school' to support best practice, Jackson recognises that there is a gap in the literature:

There is a limited amount of European research on the use of visitors and outside visits and related activities in creating links between schools and wider communities in the field of religions and beliefs. (2014a: 95)

³⁰ Who studied visits and visitors to seventeen British secondary schools between 2011 and 2012.

³¹ Who undertook a study in Sweden in which 17 year-old students hosted guests from a variety of religious backgrounds.

Visiting schools is a key aspect of the School Linking process. Chapter 7's findings concerning unequal and potentially problematic power dynamics cultivated by schools' roles of 'hosts' and 'visitors' will contribute to the literature gap stated above.

To summarise, two ideas developed in *Signposts* have explicit relevance to my research. First, the concept of safe space and second, the role of schools as sites for hosting visitors. These themes have been validated by a body of literature which has developed descriptive and empirical evidence for the implementation of intercultural education strategies to teach about religious diversity.

To end, this chapter forms the first of two literature reviews (to be addressed alongside each other in full in the following chapter's conclusion). I have reviewed, in turn, literature on the themes of non-religious beliefs in RE teaching, and the influence of UK-based research on the development of intercultural education. Moving forward, research reviewed for the second theme included the *Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity* project, which collected data from students from a number of schools with and without a 'religious character'. The former, known informally as 'faith schools', make up the majority of schools in the School Linking programme, and their role as shapers of positive attitudes towards religious diversity and, by extension, 'community cohesion' (defined in the next section) is the subject of much academic literature. The following chapter thus positions these schools within social and scholarly debate, providing much-needed context for the framing of this aspect of the thesis, before placing my research within other organisational- and research-based studies of interfaith initiatives in schools.

CHAPTER 3

Literature review part two: Faith schooling and interfaith initiatives

3.1: Introduction

The previous chapter offered a critical review of literature about religious and intercultural education and discussed a number of key themes to which my research findings make an original contribution, as I demonstrate in Chapters 5-8. The purpose of this chapter is to position School Linking within discourse and debate about faith schooling and to contextualise my research into the programme alongside previous evaluations of interfaith initiatives in schools.

The first section reviews literature on the nature and role of faith schools (the type of school which makes up the majority of schools involved in School Linking). I outline arguments about the contentious issue of faith schools' roles in supporting or inhibiting 'community cohesion', defined in 2008 by the Department of Communities and Local Government³² (DCLG 2008: 10), as "what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together". Specifically, I ask, 'is the argument that faith schooling is a barrier to community cohesion flawed?' The section illustrates that whilst there is a body of literature on faith schools pointing to the negative effects of physical segregation, there is a tendency to frame single-faith schools as homogenous; as 'communities' in and of themselves, thereby dramatising ideas of 'difference' and misrepresenting single-faith schools' role in community cohesion. This omission of language that embraces religious plurality (even *within* religions), is thus something I avoid in my own research, instead recognising the implication of this discourse as overlooking the potential for multiple interfaith encounters amongst individuals within and between faith schools.

³² Now renamed the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

The second section of the review provides contextual information for the evaluative-aspect of my research by asking ‘how have previous interfaith³³ studies been evaluated?’ A generally under-researched topic, I examine both practitioner- and academic-based efforts to promote or facilitate interfaith understanding in schools. First, national approaches in England (The Linking Network, TLN) and Northern Ireland (Shared Education) are outlined and findings from evaluations of the activities are discussed and compared alongside my own research. Whilst organisational programmes have debates in the issues around faith schooling and segregation discussed above, research-based interfaith work is largely concerned with understanding the nature of the interfaith encounter taking place. The second part of this section thus turns to ‘dialogical approaches’ to religion and education within and between schools. Focussing on Ipgrave’s (2003a, 2003b, 2009, 2013) work, the dialogical approach is found to develop a conceptualisation of the term ‘dialogue’ and emphasises how students’ experiences of dialogue characterises the interfaith exchange.

The evaluations of the previous interfaith studies signal a number of findings that I reflect upon in my own research, including the type of ‘friendship’ that develops between students, the role of the teacher as facilitator of dialogue and the challenges they face, and the nature of the ‘space’ in which the dialogue is taking place. What is more, by comparing how the evaluations have been conducted, I identify a lack of evaluative approaches that seek to blend academic research with impact evaluation. By filling this gap, my research demonstrates how developing interfaith relations between young people in schools can foster, and thereby create a contextualised theoretical understanding of, peaceful relations.

³³ My focus is on social scientific research into interfaith in an educational context, however I recognise the importance of the bodies of literature within the disciplines of the Philosophy of Religion and the Theology of Religions, which would provide additional insight into the nature of ‘interfaith’.

3.2: Is the argument that faith schooling impedes community cohesion flawed?

Contemporary discourse on faith schools³⁴ in the UK is characterised by conflict. As of March 2020, over a third of primary schools are faith schools (6,219 out of 16,938 schools), dropping to less than one in five at secondary level (600 out of 3,298 schools).³⁵ There are a number of debates about different aspects of faith schooling, including admissions processes³⁶ and staff recruitment³⁷, which although legitimate issues in their own right, do not have direct relevance to the focus of my research. Rather, this section outlines arguments for and against the position that faith schools a) contribute to the negative outcomes of ‘segregation’, defined as “the extent to which [schools] are representative of local populations in terms of different characteristics such as social class, ethnicity or religion” (Casey 2016), and b) subsequently inhibit ‘community cohesion’ as defined in the introduction to this chapter.

3.2.1: Faith schooling and segregation

We are concerned that some existing faith schools appear to be operating discriminatory policies where religious affiliations protect

³⁴ I am using the term ‘faith schools’ to represent schools with the status of being of ‘religious character’ and which “have a faith-based ethos written into their instruments of government” (Ipgrave 2012: 30). I recognise that there is no such term as a ‘faith school’ in law (Oldfield, Hartnett and Bailey, 2013: 11).

³⁵ Information from the government website school search facility (Gov.uk 2020a)

³⁶ A number of authors challenge the fairness of admissions processes, often citing affluence and academic attainment as selection criteria (e.g. Allen and West 2009). Although some argue that academic attainment is linked to ‘religious character’ (Pring 2005). Schagen and Schagen (2001) summarise the more prevalent view that the trend is attributable to the “hidden selection that takes place” rather than “the distinctive ethos of the school” (2001: 30).

³⁷ Parker-Jenkins, Hartas and Irving (2015: 105) state that “faith-based schools have failed to offer continuation of employment to those staff members who are not seen as adhering to the tenets of the faith”. The option to discriminate on the grounds of religious belief has always been available to faith schools, however (School Standards and Framework Act 1998) and academics argue this form of discrimination is “essential” (King 2010: 288) or necessary in exceptional cases to ensure that “staff can genuinely carry out the mission of the school” (Clarke and Woodhead 2015: 61).

cultural and ethnic divisions. (Community Cohesion Review Team 2001: 33)

The above statement comes from the influential, though widely criticised (as this section will go on to show), *Cantle Report*. The independent Community Cohesion Review Team, chaired by Ted Cantle, was commissioned by the Home Office Minister, John Denham, to investigate and establish the cause of rioting and disturbances in the North West of England (in cities including Bradford, Oldham and Burnley) in 2001. The riots and subsequent investigation took place just months after the government announced its Green Paper, *Schools: Building on Success* (DfEE 2001: para 4. 19) which outlined an intention to increase the number of faith-based schools in England and Wales (Burtonwood 2006: 68). However, the *Cantle Report* (although based upon a limited amount of fieldwork in a small geographical area) highlighted amongst its findings a concern that faith schools were self-segregating therefore failing to contribute to social and community integration.

The government-funded *Ouseley Report* of the same year³⁸ similarly identified faith schools as a contributing factor to racial and cultural divisions that were seen to exacerbate the unrest:

[T]he Bradford District has witnessed growing divisions among its population along race, ethnic, religious and social class lines - and now finds itself in the grip of fear. [...] Fear of confronting all white and/or all Muslim schools about their contribution, or rather lack of contribution, to social and racial integration. (Ouseley 2001: 1)

In the years following its publication, the reports' assertions on faith schooling and community cohesion continue to provoke support. In 2005, the then Chief Inspector of Schools in England, David Bell, shared his concern that "many young people are being educated in faith-based schools, with little

³⁸ Although the report was published in the same year, the findings were based on research carried out in the months before the riots took place.

appreciation of their wider responsibilities and obligations to British society” (Bell, 2005: para. 43). Two years later the government issued guidance to schools asserting their “duty to promote community cohesion” (DCSF2007).³⁹ In 2016, Cattle’s *Understanding School Segregation in England 2011-2016* drew upon Department for Education data for more than 20,000 schools in England to claim that faith schools “add a further layer of segregation due to the links between faiths and ethnicities” (Cattle 2016: 7). Cattle recommended that schools increased provision for students to “build intercultural competence⁴⁰ and religious literacy” (2016: 17), a recommendation previously made in the *Casey Review: A review into opportunity and integration*, which was undertaken following the so-called ‘Trojan Horse affair’ in 2014.⁴¹ Focusing on all schools (faith and non-faith), Casey argues for the importance of ensuring that “children from different communities learn alongside those from different backgrounds” (Casey 2016: 168).

Supporting the various reports’ claims is a body of literature and empirical evidence. The argument against faith schooling, although sometimes attributed to the ethos and practices of faith schools (Bailey 2002) is usually concerned with physical segregation. Studies of Roman Catholic and Protestant schools in Northern Ireland⁴² appear to support the view that physical segregation of students from different faith schools has a direct, negative impact on cohesion by promoting distrust or suspicion, extreme positions on politics or national identity, or a lack of understanding of the other group’s religion or culture (Hayes et al. 2007, 2013, Hughes et al. 2013, Stringer et al. 2000, 2009). Gallagher (2004) proposes that these findings may be a result of either differing curricula or the “mere existence of a separate system” (Blaylock and Hughes 2013: 479).

³⁹ The Department for children, schools and families is now called the Department for Education.

⁴⁰ This concept was explored in the previous chapter (see Section 2.3.2).

⁴¹ A scandal in which a number of Birmingham schools were reportedly “taken over to ensure they were run on strict Islamic principles” (Casey 2016: 114). Notably, the schools in question were not faith schools, and the affair has been shown to be based on a hoax letter (Holmwood and O’Toole 2018).

⁴² Schooling in Northern Ireland has largely been separated along Protestant (controlled by the state) and Catholic (controlled by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools) lines. As of 2013, figures estimated that fewer than 10% of students in Protestant schools are Catholic and approximately 5% of students in Catholic schools are non-Catholic. What is more, integrated schools, for which there is mixed enrolment across denominations, account for approximately 7% of all schools in Northern Ireland (Blaylock and Hughes 2013: 479).

Other studies in Northern Ireland have shown demonstrated the positive impact of integrated schooling in comparison to faith schooling. Gallagher, Smith and Montgomery (2003) found that three in ten students from Protestant schools and four in ten students from Catholic schools had no friends from the 'other' religious tradition. This dropped to one in ten students attending integrated schools. This finding is reflected in McGlynn et al. (2004), who showed that after attending an integrated school, the proportion of students with 'mixed friendship' groups rose from four in ten, to two thirds. Similarly, Schubotz and Robinson (2006) measured more positive attitudes towards the 'other' religious group from students in integrated schools. Finally, Hughes et al.'s (2013) quantitative analysis of 3,923 year 8 and year 9 students' survey responses reported that students attending integrated and 'super mixed'⁴³ schools had significantly more cross-group friends than those attending Protestant and Catholic schools.⁴⁴ These findings are further supported by evidence in England. Bruegel (2006) researched students' friendship patterns in 12 English primary schools with high levels of ethnic and religious diversity and found that, "[t]here was some evidence that parents learned to respect people from other backgrounds as a result of their children's experiences in mixed schools" (2006: 2). In this case, the positive impact is extended beyond just that of the student. Many of these studies draw upon the theoretical principles of contact theory (Allport 1954) as tools to measure community cohesion. Contact theory forms the theoretical basis of my own research, and will be assessed in Chapter 9 of the thesis when these studies are revisited.

The purpose of this review, however, is to assess the question of whether the community cohesion case against faith schooling described above is flawed. There are three positions in response to the argument. First, there have been a multitude of criticisms levelled at the *Cattle*, *Ouseley* and *Casey* reports. Criticisms include assertions that the reports problematise difference (Shannahan 2017), and thereby promote Islamophobia (Alam and Husband

⁴³ A school category developed by the researchers to denote schools with 10% of more of the student population from the 'other' religious community (Hughes et al. 2013: 771).

⁴⁴ However, the researchers are careful to point out that their findings do not indicate that faith schools are "necessarily divisive". Rather, the claim that faith schools promote social cohesion needs further investigation (Hughes et al. 2013: 777).

2012). According to Barker and Anderson (2005), faith schools are being made into “scapegoats for inner-city problems.” (2005: 122). Pring (2005: 67) states that the primary drivers in social and community disturbances are not issues around faith, but “economic disadvantage, un-fair treatment, discrimination, exclusion and social despair”. Similarly, Shannahan’s (2018) research in the Bradford-based TLN, set up in light of the events in 2001 (and discussed in more detail in the next section) argues that class and poverty were the primary drivers of the unrest, rather than religious difference. King (2010) points to the fact that if faith schools are established in inner-city areas to provide for the majority of ethnic minority families, “perhaps the schools’ location within low-socio-economic and high-crime areas is a more plausible reason for instability and conflict” (2010: 290). Finally, Parker-Jenkins and Glenn (2011) criticise the term ‘community cohesion’ itself. They “reject the concept of “cohesion” in its present, simplistic form” since it is the “language of aspiration and rhetoric” (2011: 13). Instead, they suggest that the goal of “community engagement” (2011: 14) might prove more realistic and align with initiatives that schools already undertake.

Second, some argue that faith schools in fact *promote* cohesion. The Church of England’s research into Ofsted⁴⁵ inspection findings reveals that at the secondary school level, faith schools scored higher in the social cohesion category than schools with no ‘religious character’ (Church of England Archbishops’ Council Education Division 2009). What is more, the quantitative work of the *Young People’s Attitudes to Religious Diversity* project (explored in the previous chapter) undertook an analysis of 1,012 Catholic school students and 1,518 non-religious school students in Scotland. They found that the Catholic school students’ attitudes towards religious diversity were more positive than those of the students from non-religious schools (Francis et al. 2014). My own findings allude to a potential hostility towards, and from, students from community schools in School Linking (discussed in Chapters 5 and 8).

Lastly, Flint (2009: 168) surmises that the promotion of cohesion stems from the ethos and practices within faith schools, which, he argues “promote

⁴⁵ The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, a British government-led inspection service of all education providers. Referred to as ‘Ofsted’ in the remainder of the thesis.

tolerance of diversity, particularly in respect to other traditions". This stance is defended by a number of academics, such as Miller (2001) who states that "a secure foundation in Judaism enables pupils to live in the outside world with confidence" (Miller 2001: 511). Similarly, The Association of Muslim Social Scientists' 2004 report *Muslims on Education* states, "Islamic teaching does not seek to create a society that is ignorant of other cultures and religions. Knowledge of other faiths – Christianity and Judaism in particular – is an essential part of Islamic knowledge" (2004: 31).⁴⁶ Jerome (2012: 59) summarise these views:

By promoting the development of the secure identity, enhancing the life chances of children in deprived communities, and educating children in moral reasoning, it is possible to argue that faith schools serve multicultural societies well.

The three positions above hint at the flaw in the argument against faith schools. Namely, claims that faith schooling inhibits cohesion are rooted in misconceptions of the nature of the faith school. McKinney (2006) expands on this in the form of a dilemma:

If a faith-based school focuses primarily on *faith aspects* and theological concepts underpinning educational curriculum are shaped in such a way that it appears closed and anti-rational, the faith-based school appears to be in conflict with educational aims of society [...] If a faith-based school, conversely, focuses primarily on *educational aims* then the ideals of the faith-based school may be compromised and the faith-based school may struggle to retain its faith identity (McKinney 2006: 109, emphasis added).

In other words, faith schools are battling against oversimplified perceptions about their work and character. The following section develops this reasoning; in identifying a tendency in policy and academic discourse to view faith schools as

⁴⁶ Exploring the role of knowledge in leading to positive attitudes towards others is a fundamental part of my own research and is discussed in Chapters 5, 8 and 9.

homogenous, I illustrate how their negatively perceived role in the community cohesion agenda is rooted in misinterpretations.

To summarise, this section on faith schooling and segregation has introduced various sides of the debates surrounding community cohesion. It is the physical and geographical segregation that often drives critics' view of faith schools as divisive (and there is a large body of research in Northern Ireland with theoretical underpinnings in contact theory evidencing this), however proponents of faith schooling draw upon the ethos and practices of the schools as conducive to cohesion. Common amongst defences of faith schools is the assertion that public misperceptions are integral to the flawed criticisms of the role of faith schooling in community cohesion.

3.2.2: A homogeneity of faith schools

Many of the [...] debates have focused on the macro-scale of the community, namely residential segregation and school selection procedures, often ignoring the micro scale of the educational institutions themselves. (Hemming 2011: 64)

Hemming (2011), in his comparative case study of a voluntary aided⁴⁷ Roman Catholic primary school and a community primary school in urban, multi-faith areas of the North of England, showed that despite having distinct motivations, both schools promote meaningful encounters between students through similar strategies. This repudiates the claim noted above that faith schools are divisive. But what is more, his statement above echoes the issue identified at the end of the previous section; the “micro scale” of schools is often disregarded in debates around faith schooling and community cohesion in favour of oversimplified presentations of faith schools as a whole.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Defined as “local authority-maintained schools [...] which] often, but not always, have a religious character” (Gov.uk 2020c)

⁴⁸ A claim echoed by Parker-Jenkins and Glenn, who argue that the negative perceptions of faith schools' role in community cohesion are “frequently grounded in a lack of knowledge of what takes place in these schools” (2011: 11).

Others echo the argument. As noted in the previous chapter, Jackson criticised the “over-uniform view of the nature of religious or religio-cultural groups” (2003a: 71) in discourse around faith schools. This is a view he restates in general terms in *Signposts* (Jackson 2014a), when he says that “representing religions as entirely homogeneous systems of belief tends to produce oversimplified, stereotypical accounts which often do not correspond to the experience of believers and practitioners” (2014a: 18). In this way, he argues that the language used in the community cohesion argument against faith schools channels that of Gerd Baumann’s ‘dominant discourse’.⁴⁹ His argument is particularly pertinent in light of the previous chapter’s exploration of the complexity of ‘personal worldviews’ in Religious Education (RE), and its recognition that not all students attending a faith school will be religious (Hemming and Roberts 2018).

Similarly, Grace (2003: 163) argues that critics who articulate oversimplified perceptions of faith schools hold assumptions that “may be based upon out-dated and distorted understanding of a particular faith community”. MacMullen (2007: 5-6), too, warns against generalising about faith schools, arguing that distinctions must be made, including between “pedagogical and curricular” features of the school, and between primary and secondary education (the latter echoing Jackson’s interpretive approach to RE as described in the previous chapter, and something which I do in my quantitative analysis of secondary survey data in Chapter 5). Finally, Ted Cattle himself, in conversation with Maqsood Ahmed and Dilwar Hussain in 2009, recognised that the language used in his 2001 report may have also fallen into this trap:

Well, just reflecting on the report that I did on the riots in 2001, bearing in mind that this was before 9/11, most of the stuff on the streets was nothing to do with anti-Muslim sentiment, it was very much anti-Asian sentiment. It wasn’t until after 9/11 that the BNP [British National Party] and others started to characterise this as anti-Muslim. [...] So I think what we’ve found in the last 40 years is that, you know, we can’t just characterise minority

⁴⁹ See Chapter 3, footnote 19 for the definition.

communities in one dimension as we used to. (Ahmed, Cattle and Hussain 2009: 89)

Then again, I recognise that some critics of faith schools attempt to avoid generalisations. Burtonwood (2003, 2006) argues that critics' views that faith schools are divisive might be justified, but it depends on the 'type' of school in question. He argues that 'strong cultural identity' schools Short (Short 2002, Short and Lenga 2002, McDonough 1998) can be justifiably critiqued. In such schools, Burtonwood argues, parents are "uninterested in multicultural education" and teaching materials are "vetted of inappropriate images to ensure that schooling is consistent with the values of the home" (Burtonwood 2006: 73). The 'moderate' faith school, by contrast, is one which is "more cosmopolitan in its openness to a range of cultures [...] Children learn to appreciate their ancestral traditions but in a way that allows them to eventually examine these traditions in the light of alternatives" (2006: 74). For example, teachers in 'moderate' schools seek to provide opportunities for students to undertake "inter-cultural contact where possible". According to Burtonwood, these schools can be defended against claims that they violate community cohesion.⁵⁰

Burtonwood (2006) draws upon academic literature to substantiate his defence of the 'moderate' faith school. He invokes Walford's (2002) findings that some Muslim schools are not very concerned with the integration of Islamic teaching within the curriculum, and reflects upon Colson's (2004) Church of England secondary school study, in which one headteacher said, "We don't try to be a church. Their Churches are at home" (2004: 80). For Burtonwood, this demonstrates that 'moderate' schools provide for the community as a whole, rather than focusing on RE for one specific part within that community. Finally, he reiterates Scholefield's (2001: 52) finding that teenagers attending Catholic and

⁵⁰ By this definition, all schools signed up to School Linking are of the 'moderate kind'. This was certainly the case of my Focus Schools within which I collected primary data. However, although the schools may be 'moderate', my research in Chapters 5, 7 and 8 suggest that parents of students on School Linking may represent Burtonwood's (2006) 'strong cultural identity' category. Issues around selection bias and students' predisposition to unprejudiced attitudes is revisited in Chapter 9.

Jewish schools value diversity, but retain a strong sense of their own religious identities.

Whilst, to a degree, his argument recognises variation between faith schools, Burtonwood's (2006: 71) claim that "[m]any faith communities aspire [...] to faith schools of the strong variety", and his model of categorising schools as 'strong' and 'moderate' by means of quantifiable indicators, illustrates that the tendency to make oversimplified distinctions and generalised statements endures. So there is clearly a danger of overlooking religious and cultural plurality within and between faith schools. Not only is this something that I avoid in my own positionality as researcher, but it is an issue I discuss in Chapter 8 after identifying the problem among my own participants.

But why does this misperception and oversimplified language endure? One contributing factor may be that within the literature on faith schools there are no singular meanings attributed to the language used to describe their uniqueness. 'Character', 'climate', 'culture' and 'ethos' are all contested concepts (Glover and Coleman 2005, Green 2009). Sai's (2018) study of two Muslim schools illustrated how ethos is shaped through the lived experience of students. Despite both schools having an Islamic religious character, the schools' ethos' were found to be equally similar or different across various aspects of experience (for example, prayer or dress code). In this way, "the intended ethos is not always in accordance with the actual ethos experienced by the Muslim pupils" (Sai 2018: 41). Similarly, Francis and Penny (2013) claimed that the ethos of Anglican secondary schools is represented by students 'shared worldviews', a concept developed further by Francis, Casson and McKenna (2018), who found further differences between ethos' *within* the Anglican secondary school category, depending on how the schools "voice their interpretation of the Church's mission" (2018: 446). Lastly, Smith's (2005) 18-month study of over 100 9-11 year-old pupils at three schools (two of which were church primary schools in a multi-ethnic and multi-faith city in the north of England) found that "[t]he majority of children were not aware of any particular religious ethos in their schools and were largely indifferent to faith-based schooling". If the authors above are accurate in their claims that students' views shape the ethos of the school itself, the students'

indifference identified by Smith has negative implications on the handling of faith-based experience within the school. As Smith (2005) describes:

...a lack of religious awareness on the part of the schools or their classmates was seen as an issue and a cause of tension. Lunch-times and assemblies were seen as events that marked religious difference and promoted clustering. In one school, tables were separately labelled 'halal', 'vegetarian' or 'packed lunch', and staff described some food as 'normal'. In another, children described teacher insensitivity and punishment for not joining in some religious activities.

This passage brings the conversation full circle. Where teachers' generalisations of student experience interplay with students' indifference towards the school ethos, their actions may exacerbate issues around segregation and risk legitimising critics' oversimplified characterisations of faith schooling.

In sum, this section has assessed the claim that faith schools inhibit community cohesion through the segregation of students and mishandling of religious plurality. Whilst the community cohesion argument against faith schooling is flawed in that there is a tendency within institutional and academic literature to view faith schools as homogenous, there is a requirement to understand more fully how insights into the 'ethos' of faith schools shapes this trend. The conclusion of the 2013 Theos report, *More than an Educated Guess: Assessing the evidence on faith schools* advocates further research on the "distinctive education experience" of faith schools (Oldfield, Hartnett and Bailey 2013: 45), echoing the sentiments of Grace (2003: 163), who states the need for "a more reliable evidence base [of...] particular faith school cultures". This is an area to which discussions of my research findings will contribute. In the meantime, the final section of this chapter deals with a concept which is undermined when religious plurality is overlooked in schools: interfaith.

3.3: How have previous interfaith studies been evaluated?

The primary focus of this chapter is school-based interfaith initiatives in UK.⁵¹ This section first describes initiatives run by organisations (other than F&BF), drawing upon institutional literature and reports concerning local projects and national ‘twinning’ initiatives in England and Northern Ireland, within which the School Linking programme has its origins. The work of TLN is considered in detail, as is the Northern Irish ‘Shared Education’ programme. Evaluations of these initiatives throw up a number of findings that my own research supports or refutes (including the extent to which friendships formed between students are sustainable, the impact School Linking has on the participating teachers and the challenges that schools face in implementing the programmes). I then turn to research-based, academic literature that aims to further understanding of students’ interfaith experiences and indeed the concept of ‘interfaith dialogue’ itself. Dialogical approaches to RE both between and within schools are explored, opening up discussion into the interfaith potential of the community school and the role of space in the interfaith exchange.

3.3.1: Interfaith in schools: an organisational approach

It is not just the work of F&BF that provides interfaith encounters for young people; a number of local and national initiatives have received government and media attention in recent years. The St. Philip’s Centre in Leicester runs ten within-school interfaith programmes, sessions in inner-city Leicester in which students undertake school trips to places of worship and areas of high religious diversity, and teacher training workshops which “give teachers deeper understanding and confidence teaching faith as part of the curriculum” (St. Philip’s Centre 2020). This approach to teacher training differs from F&BF’s, in that it favours teacher training in the delivery of faith-based lesson content, rather

⁵¹ Although I recognise a growing number of studies into interfaith in higher education both in the UK (Allen 2016) and the US (Patel and Meyer 2011, Rockenbach 2017).

than equipping teachers with the skills necessary to facilitate interfaith encounters. The purpose of F&BF's teacher training, and the extent to which teachers were found to implement the training, are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

The delivery of interfaith initiatives is not limited to charitable organisations. The Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) for North Yorkshire, a predominantly white British area with many schools in rural locations, received funding in 2018 from the Westhill Endowment for its *Exploring Religious Diversity: What does it mean to follow a faith in Britain today?* project. Working with year 5, 6 and 7 students (9-12 year-old students from one secondary school and eight primary feeder schools), the project aimed to develop the students' understanding of religious diversity in the UK through workshops delivered by representatives of different faith communities. Students are also trained as 'Diversity Champions' to encourage them to plan and deliver their own events on religious diversity to their school peers (Westhill Endowment 2018).

Similarly, two London Boroughs, Redbridge and Tower Hamlets, operate the 'Ambassadors of Faith and Belief' programme, in which sixth form students (usually aged between 16 and 17) are trained to deliver presentations, followed by question and answer sessions, to primary school students about how faith shapes their lives. When the project was initially active in just one borough, it was advocated by Jackson (2014a), who outlined three local needs which the programme aimed to address: "to support good-quality education about religions and other life stances; to provide students at the top end of the secondary school with opportunities to extend their personal and social skills; and to help to promote social cohesion" (Jackson 2014a: 91). The latter is particularly relevant to my research, since it highlights the contribution that interfaith work can make to the cohesion agenda outlined in the previous section.

Larger, national interfaith projects in schools have similarly been undertaken in response to the call for community cohesion. First identified as one of the *Cantle Report's* "immediate steps [...] to address the problems of mono-cultural schools" (Home Office 2001: 35), the idea of 'school twinning' between two to four schools was recommended for both faith and non-faith schools. A pilot

'twinning' or 'linking' programme was funded by the then-Labour government in 2007⁵² and as of 2020, TLN is overseeing 28 linking programmes (of which F&BF's School Linking is one) in which 30,000 children in 1,063 classes are participating. For more details of the relationship between TLN and F&BF, and the structure and methods of the 'linking' process, see Chapter 1. Despite TLN's strong presence, the need for school twinning/linking continues to be stated. The Department for Education (2016) asserted a need for faith 'free schools'⁵³ to "[e]stablish twinning arrangements with other schools not of their faith [...] including sharing teachers and resources and conducting joint lessons and assemblies" (DfE 2016: 33). What is more, Clarke and Woodhead (2018) argue that the linking process must be "done in a professional way [...] across the whole local school community and should have professional training for the teachers involved, preferably with input from the most successful existing twinning programmes" (2018: 42), echoing calls in the previous chapter from CoRE (2018) and Everington (2018) for high quality training for specialist and non-specialist teachers. In 2019, the UK Government responded to its 2018 *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper* (in which it recognised the contribution of faith schools to twinning/linking programmes) with an assurance that it will "continue to fund programmes which help promote social mixing, such as [...] Schools Linking, which show that bonds can be formed with people from very different backgrounds" (HM Government 2019: 20).

The work of TLN has been evaluated several times. Raw's (2006)⁵⁴ evaluation of the 2005-6 academic year (during which 200 secondary school students and 1,800 primary school students from Bradford schools participated) took a mixed methods approach through participant observation by Raw, teachers' and students' observations and quantitative data collected through attitude surveys. Raw's key findings included a 'dramatic' impact on students' readiness to widen their personal network of contacts, and an increased number

⁵² Prior to this, school twinning activities were advocated by the Scottish Executive (Gov.scott 2006).

⁵³ Free schools are schools which "are funded by the government but are not run by the local authority" (Gov.uk 2020b).

⁵⁴ And subsequent 2009 evaluation which focused on how the programme was being adopted in other areas.

of cross-cultural friendships per student (although she was careful not to overstate the potential for long-lasting friendships once the programme has finished)⁵⁵. Conversely, she found ‘no clear impact’ on neither class of students’ “emotional openness” (2006: 53), nor their confidence or levels of assertiveness when interacting with their peers. She also found that primary school students were more responsive to the process than secondary school students; a finding shared in my own secondary data analysis of Chapter 5.

A government funded evaluation of TLN was subsequently undertaken by Kerr et al. (2011). Following a ‘pre’ phase, during which baseline data was collected from students and schools to determine their experiences of, and attitudes or policies towards, cohesion,⁵⁶ the ‘post’ phase measured change against the baseline data in terms of students’ “knowledge, attitudes, experiences, and behaviours” (Kerr et al. 2011: 7). Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected, the qualitative data from eight local authority case studies (through interviews with teachers and school management and focus groups with students), and the quantitative data collected exclusively from secondary school students through a survey. Kerr et al. identified student-level impact in the development of “knowledge and understanding, skills, attitudes, dispositions and behaviours, particularly those concerning self-confidence and self-efficacy” (2011: 7), however the impact on students’ “willingness to express opinions and perceptions of school and community climate” (2011: 7) was limited, echoing Raw’s finding that assertiveness amongst peers was not developed directly through the process. Kerr et al. also recommended careful planning and implementation on the part of schools, since there were “a small number of examples of negative outcomes, where linking was less carefully thought through and merely reinforced existing attitudes and stereotypes about particular groups in society” (2011: 7). I too, identified instances of School Linking activities reinforcing stereotypes of religious groups (see Chapter 8).

⁵⁵ I consider the extent to which relationships formed between students in School Linking are sustainable in Chapter 8

⁵⁶ Which Kerr et al. measured via a set of indicators: “we hypothesised that cohesion levels among pupils would be influenced by a range of individual-level, school-level, and local-level factors” (2011: 21).

Lastly, Shannahan's (2018) evaluation of TLN, commissioned by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government in January 2017, differs methodologically to the previous two evaluations of the programme, in that it is shaped by 'participatory active research', a model characterised by a partnership between researcher and participants in which the participant as 'partner' is no longer viewed as the "passive object of study" (2018: 5). Shannahan took a mixed methods approach to data gathering, using an attitudinal survey, 28 interviews and focus groups with linking facilitators, participant observation and document analysis (2018: 6-7). He describes a "multidimensional" (2018: 39) impact of the work of TLN on students:

[The programme has impacted on] their sense of identity and self-confidence, the overcoming of prejudice, their levels of empathy, appreciation of diversity, ability to collaborate, enhanced sense of self-worth and having fun with new friends from different ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. (Shannahan 2018: 39)

At the teacher level, Shannahan outlines that participation in TLN had a positive impact on teachers' collaboration with other school staff and their own classroom teaching, disputing Kerr et al.'s (2011: 78) finding that "on the whole, teachers felt that the link work had not affected their teaching practice". In terms of key challenges, Shannahan identified practical constraints on the part of the schools, including "overstretched" teachers, cuts to spending, limited administrative support and lack of engagement on the part of the local authority. I identify similar barriers to School Linking in Chapter 6.

The findings which have developed over the 12 years of evaluation will be drawn upon alongside my own findings and discussion in Chapter 5-8. Similarly, all of the approaches (but in particular Raw's and Shannahan's) explicitly refer to contact theory as underpinning their approaches, which, as the previous section described, is intimately associated with community cohesion. Indeed, the main criticism the evaluations levelled at TLN stem from a contact theory position. Namely, researchers state that contact between students is not happening

frequently enough to lead to sustainable change. In Loader's (2016) words, Kerr et al.'s (2011) finding that some schools met just twice in one academic year, "may give cause for scepticism about the scheme's potential to foster durable relationships and change attitudes." This reflects Bruegel's (2006) examination of friendship patterns amongst students of different faiths. Bruegel found that, "day-to-day contact between children has far more chance of breaking down barriers between communities, than school twinning" (Bruegel 2006: 2). The implications of the frequency of School Linking in terms of contact theory will be reassessed in Chapter 9, when I adopt the same theoretical lens to reassess the conceptualisation of 'peaceful relations'.

The Northern Irish initiative of Shared Education focuses on high frequency of contact, in theory avoiding the criticism above. Since 2007, the Shared Education programme has established partnerships between Roman Catholic, Protestant and integrated schools which facilitate joint curriculum-based lessons for their students. The joint lessons take place as often as once a week for more than a year (Loader 2016). Since the programme started, more than 100 schools have participated, with the number of integrated schools increasing to the extent that they are now overrepresented (Gallagher 2016: 9). Participants taking part in Shared Education often join the programme with limited experience of the religious 'other'; Gallagher et al. (2010: 70) identified that two-fifths of 821 Shared Education participants surveyed had "never met someone from a different religious community prior to their involvement". The approach of Shared Education is once again grounded within contact theory, however aims to provide more sustained, regular contact than is experienced in School Linking:

Shared education [...] seeks to provide frequent, sustained opportunities for Catholic and Protestant pupils to meet and build relationships, with the aim of promoting more positive attitudes and thereby challenging existing patterns of separation and division. (Loader and Hughes 2017a: 119)

Chapter 9 details a number of approaches to the evaluation of Shared Education directly in relation to contact theory, but for now, findings from several

studies reflect the literature described above in relation to the work of TLN. Borooah and Knox (2013) conducted focus groups with multiple stakeholders across four case study schools and, like Shannahan (2018)'s TLN evaluation, suggested that a key motivator for teachers was institutional support from school leadership. If this was absent, teachers felt "abandoned to yet another initiative" (2013: 941). Similarly, teachers identified challenges in engaging parents and the wider community with the programme, issues my own participants share in Chapter 6. At a student-level, Borooah and Knox (2013) reflected Raw's (2006) TLN-related finding that the experiences of Shared Education were shaped by the potential to form friendships within the classroom. Friendships were also identified as positive outcomes in teacher focus groups run by McClure Watters (2014) and a quantitative analysis by Hughes et al. (2012), who further identified an association between the formation of friendships and reduced anxiety amongst the students. Loader and Hughes (2017b), however, echo Raw's (2006) TLN-related concerns about the sustainability of the friendships formed; they found that despite the longitudinal nature of the Shared Education programme, the relationships developed between the students more accurately represented 'acquaintances'. The role and nature of friendships are pertinent to my own findings. As Chapters 5 and 8 will show, the development of friendship is a key aim of School Linking for (primarily primary school) students and teachers, however in Chapter 9 I question the extent to which the relationships formed constitute friendships and assess the alternative value of making, in Loader and Hughes' (2017b) words, 'acquaintances' in a contact situation.

To summarise, this sub-section has reviewed two organisation-based interfaith programmes (TLN and Shared Education). Both have theoretical groundings within contact theory, both are concerned with facilitating contact between schools with and without religious characters, and in the case of TLN in particular, have origins within the government-led community cohesion agenda as an initiative aimed at tackling segregation (referred to in detail in the first section of this chapter). Despite key differences in the frequency of interfaith contact facilitated during the programmes, the findings of evaluation research

share common themes, including a requirement teacher support and a focus on the development of friendship between students.

Academic research-based interfaith work, however, though also concerned with issues of segregation, primarily appears to focus on a) understanding the perceptions of the interfaith encounters on the part of the students, and b) developing understandings of academic concepts involved in interfaith, especially that of 'dialogue'. I now turn to the following sub-section, which outlines such work and revisits the key question of this literature review.

3.3.2: Interfaith in schools: a research approach

Coles (2014) compiled a research report on the contribution that interfaith activities can make to the promotion of community cohesion in education. He termed schools (with the exception of faith schools) and education services 'faith-blind' (2014: 5) and based upon the outcomes of his focus groups he recommended guidance and training in interfaith work for teachers and support staff, echoing researchers such as CoRE (2018), Dinham and Shaw (2015) and Everington (2018) who, in the previous chapter, advocated better training for specialist and non-specialist teachers in dealing with religious plurality and non-religious worldviews in schools. He also found that within mainstream education, interfaith issues have been confined to RE exclusively. Accordingly, this section opens with an exploration of Ipgrave's 'dialogical' approach to RE within (2003b, 2013) and between (2003a, 2009) schools.

Defined by the Council of Europe (2008a) as enabling students to "engage in dialogue with other persons possessing other values and ideas", the concept of the 'dialogical' approach to RE is regarded by the Council of Europe as "a crucial element of a broader intercultural education" (Knauth and Vieregge 2019: 20). Jackson (2003b: 20) praises the dialogical approach: "The method is dialogical and personal, with young people learning about others' positions, and clarifying their own, by comparing and contrasting their views with one another. The dialogical approach is overtly concerned with helping pupils to form a sense

of their own personal identity, but also with key social issues.” Jackson (2014b) also illustrates how the dialogical approach can cultivate ‘intercultural competence’ (defined in the previous chapter) by developing attitudes including “respect for the right of a person to hold a particular religious or non-religious viewpoint” and “openness to learning about different religions”, skills including “awareness of one’s own prejudices and judgments” and “empathy”, and knowledge including “sharing knowledge and experience of others in the class” (2014b: 44).

In the UK, Ipgrave’s (2003b) study of primary students in an inner-city district of the East Midlands was the first to explicitly employ a dialogical approach. Her research considered the Christian and Hindu minority (35 students) in a school in which 85% of the children identified as Muslim. She analysed the students’ language when communicating with each other within an analytical framework of Bakhtin’s (1981) discourse theory and developed a definition of ‘dialogue’ which encompassed ‘context’, ‘attitude’ and ‘activity’ (McKenna, Ipgrave and Jackson 2008: 23) at three levels:

Primary dialogue is the context of diversity, secondary dialogue is a positive, open response to that context, and tertiary dialogue encompasses the forms and structures of communication that gives scope to dialogical activity. (Ipgrave 2003b: 154)

For the students Ipgrave studied, the ‘primary’ dialogue encountered was chiefly the “diverse intake of the school”, supported with additional quotations from a number of individuals holding a variety of beliefs, the ‘secondary’ dialogue of attitude was fostered by equipping students with listening and learning skills through the engagement with ‘difference’ in RE classes, and the ‘tertiary’ dialogue was facilitated through debate, using resources such as stories and films to encourage discussion (McKenna, Ipgrave and Jackson 2008: 18-19).

Ipgrave argued that within the classroom, teachers can organise their approach to dialogue (as defined above), by a) valuing the diversity of the context within which the dialogue is taking place, b) encouraging students’ to be open to

the diversity and the possible changes in their own and other's perceptions that might occur through dialogue, c) and employing methods or exercises that facilitate the dialogue (2003b: 154). Although the teacher facilitates the dialogue, agency belongs with the students, who are regarded as "collaborators in teaching and learning" (Jackson 2014a: 42). Returning to a theme explored in the previous chapter, utilising the method assumes a 'safe space', a requirement first stated by Jackson (2014a: 42) and more recently advocated by Luby (2020). The safety of the dialogue enables students to understand that to "place oneself in a position of dialogue with another is to accept limitations" (Ipgrave 2013: 47). For Ipgrave, her form of dialogical RE "recognises that there is room for disagreement without judgement" (2003b: 162). What is more, teacher practice develops through the approach since teachers' new understanding of the dialogue's "meaning-making process" underpinning the dialogue in RE enables them to analyse conversation at a deeper level (Ipgrave 2013).

Ipgrave also implemented her dialogical approach in the *Building E-Bridges* 'email exchange' programme (Ipgrave 2003a), which she posited as a direct example of the type of dialogue between schools that was advocated in the *Cantle Report* (2003b: 158). Working with 15 faith and non-faith primary schools in two different locations (ten from inner-city Leicester and five from a rural town in East Sussex), the programme created partnerships between 7-11 year-old students of different religious and cultural beliefs (including those with non-religious beliefs) via email. The programme was designed "explicitly to address RE and citizenship needs" (Ipgrave 2003b: 154). Students would email each other on a regular (often weekly) basis, and on two occasions at the start of the project, residential weekends were held for students from Leicester to visit East Sussex. At the end of the year of email exchange, students from East Sussex visited their partners in Leicester. Only a few of the teachers taking part in the programme were RE specialists, however some undertook training prior to the start of the year and all had a guidance handbook for the project.

Five pairings were made across schools from Leicester and East Sussex, providing a context of ethnic and cultural difference. The remaining five schools based in Leicester were paired based upon a varied criteria; though pairs were

primarily made across the religious-character of the schools, location, levels of ethnic diversity and socio-economic factors were also considered (McKenna, Ipgrave and Jackson 2008: 20). In my own research, the criteria upon which F&BF makes its linking decisions is assessed in Chapters 4 and 5. Notably, the programme also purposely paired faith and non-faith schools, something which School Linking did for the first time when I commenced my own research. Known as the 'common' or 'community' school, they have been recognised by a number of academics as ideal sites for interfaith encounter. They are described as "ideally placed for dialogue and communication between different positions, whether between children and others beyond the school or between children from different backgrounds within the school" (Jackson 2003a: 79), as sites which provide "the obvious opportunity for [...] inter-cultural experience" (Burtonwood 2006: 74) and "the institutions that can best provide the context for every child on his or her path to full participation in the liberal democratic polity" (MacMullen 2007: 32). Similarly, Madge, Hemming and Stenson's *Youth on Religion* project participants recognised "the overarching advantages of multi-faith schools [...] mixing with young people with a range of beliefs and customs is good preparation for meeting people from diverse backgrounds at university or in employment" (2014: 170). My findings in Chapter 8 directly address the role of the community school in School Linking, in which I argue that religious illiteracy on the part of community school teachers can undermine the arguments above that community schools foster positive attitudes by virtue of their diversity.

By design, the *Building E-Bridges* project can be seen as an academic, research-led 'twinning' project alongside the government and organisation-level initiatives outlined in the previous sub-section. Although it contributes to the *Cantle Report's* recommendations in terms of between-school dialogue, the primary purpose of the programme was to develop Ipgrave's theoretical and conceptual understanding of the interfaith dialogue process, as well as explore students' engagement in, and articulation of, issues around 'difference' with peers of other religious and non-religious beliefs. Indeed, the model advocated a structured approach, with different themes including "gifts", "creation", "life after death" and "prayer" the subject of each email exchange (McKenna, Ipgrave and

Jackson 2008: 21). The project also acknowledged the religious plurality *within* schools with both religious and non-religious character, thereby avoiding the pitfall of framing all faith schools as homogenous as outlined earlier in this chapter:

Any one of the classes involved in the Building E-Bridges Project is in itself a context of primary dialogue, a diverse community where positive attitudes towards others can be promoted, and a potential forum for dialogical activities, discussion and debate. (McKenna, Ipgrave and Jackson 2008: 22)

McKenna, Ipgrave and Jackson (2008) evaluated the project, with the aim of establishing how it affected “children’s attitudes towards peers from different cultural and religious backgrounds” and “teachers’ understandings of and approaches to teaching about difference of religion and culture” (2008: 24). The evaluation collected data from six schools between September 2003 and August 2004 through questionnaires (thirteen from teachers and 231 from students), interviews (with seven teachers), focus groups (twenty student groups and one teacher group), observation and document analysis (including a random sample of transcripts of the email exchanges themselves).

The evaluation found that, for teachers, the project had “not so much changed [their] approaches as given them opportunities to apply their understandings in practice” (McKenna, Ipgrave and Jackson 2008: 103). For example, teachers’ new understanding of the development of dialogue enabled students to expand their conversations into more challenging areas of debate. However, the teachers expressed concern about competing pressures on their time and resources, suggesting changes to timetabling or explicitly articulating links between the project and other areas of the curriculum to mitigate against the risk of it being seen as less of a priority in the wider school and Ofsted. This is an issue common to the projects described in this chapter, and is identified as a barrier to School Linking in Chapter 6. The evaluation also highlighted instances of the teachers’ participation dominating the dialogue; while warning against

“diminishing teacher presence in the process”, the researchers advocated assigning that presence “a facilitating – in this case guiding and structuring – role” (2008: 113). The extent to which the spaces in School Linking are controlled or perceived to be controlled, by the teachers is discussed in Chapter 7.

For the students, the evaluation analysis of the language and tone in the email transcripts signalled that of the formation of friendships between the students. However, since many teachers had explicitly framed the partnering of students as a new friendship in and of itself, the attitudinal change observed in the students “was not so much a gradual development through a series of changes [...rather] from the very beginning, founded on an already established basis of good will” (2008: 105). Nevertheless, the email transcripts indicated that students’ levels of ‘awareness’ increased through the acquisition of factual knowledge, usually based on “external manifestations” including “[w]hat their partners wore, or ate, or the festivals they celebrated” (2008: 106). The evaluators charted the student’s exchanges against a fourfold categorisation of ‘dialogue’ used by Christian churches involved in interfaith dialogue (Vatican 1984) and employed by Ipgrave in the project, and found that whilst students focused on the ‘dialogue of life’, that is, personal introductions and interests etc., and ‘dialogue of religious experience’, such as religious practices, there was minimal engagement with ‘dialogue of social involvement’, such as conversing about ethical issues, and very marginal engagement with ‘theological dialogue’, in which religious convictions and questions around belief are explored (2008: 106). Then again, this may not reflect the students’ interest or capabilities, as much as the involvement of the teacher (see paragraph above).

Ipgrave (2009) subsequently used the project data to explore how students’ choices of dialogue influenced their “presence” in the “contested space of the online exchange” (Ipgrave 2009: 214). Ipgrave defines “presence” as “a self, in this case a self situated in a context of communication and so a self who is experienced by others” (2009: 214). She explored the different dimensions to the “communication space”, which included the physical computer screen, upon which the students view the presence of their partner and imprint their own presence. The email format allows time for self-reflection before the presence is

transmitted to the partner, something I identify as lacking in School Linking in Chapters 6 and 7. In between the two physical spaces is a “virtual space”, which represents the ongoing discourse between the partners. Each space is “territorial” (2009: 215), in that how the students project their presence is dependent on whose space they are occupying. This is where the teacher may be viewed as the ‘owner’ of the space because the communication is taking place within their classroom, in lesson time, at the invitation of the teacher. The teachers recognised this dynamic and were unsure of their obligation to manage the exchanges. The perception of the School Linking spaces as ‘owned’ by the teacher is further analysed in Chapter 7.

Reflecting on a finding from the original 2003 research, some language choices employed by the students invited friendship with their partners, through a ‘chatting’ style of communication. In contrast, some language choices represented boundaries to conversation in cases where the student “attempts to contain the potential threat inherent in the invitation” of friendship (Ipgrave 2009: 219). This form of language can be seen as signifying an ‘insider’ culture, using ‘I’ or ‘we’ when identifying as a member of a particularly religious or cultural group. For Ipgrave, “this discourse was used in such a way as to maintain a safe space for the children’s religious/cultural identities: a ‘proper’ space, different from the ‘common’ (though occasionally disputed) space, of the friendship discourse” (2009: 222). Reflecting on this contrast, Ipgrave concludes that directing language towards the creation of spaces of friendships can cause “elements of tension” (2009: 224), and so the individual spaces of the participants must be respected and preserved, with the email exchange as a vehicle for “reciprocal movement between the two” (2009: 224). The role of the teacher is thus clarified:

[T]he role of the teacher as a guide and model is significant in developing the more sophisticated language of respect, politeness, interest, co-operation and dialogue, qualities that, rather than friendship, should be the key guiding principles for children’s intercultural exchange. (2009: 24)

The theme of space was mentioned briefly in the previous chapter's discussion around the school as a place of hosting and visiting. Ideas around dimensions of space transcend into my own research and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Ipgrave's development of a dialogical RE that embraces religious plurality within and between schools has been praised as "seminal in appreciating the potential of RE in the state-funded school as a site for inter-religious and intercultural dialogue and interaction" Jackson (2003a: 80-81). Australian research has been developed in direct response to Ipgrave's email exchange project, for example (McCowan 2016). What is more, a number of researchers across eight European countries have utilised the dialogical approach as part of the Religion and Dialogue in Modern Societies (ReDi) project. Weisse (2003), for example, explored how dialogue is central to the approach of RE in Hamburg, Germany. What is more, Leganger-Krogstad (2003), in her investigation of RE in Norway, attempted to capture the complexity of the concept of 'dialogue', which she views as made up of a combination of dimensions, including "practical [...] action", "verbal and spiritual", "an attitude", "a working method" and "philosophical" (2003: 182). For an overview of the ReDi project see Weisse (2019) and for a summary of project findings see Vikdahl and Skeie (2019). Lastly, the dialogical approach continues to be developed in the UK (Castelli 2012). Indeed, Fancourt's (2016) study of religious dialogue in both a faith and non-faith school in England disputes Coles' (2014) critique that opened this section. Rather than dialogue being confined to the RE classroom, Fancourt illustrates that "[r]eligious dialogue is not simply what happens in religious education lesson; it is textured by complex institutional arrangements, and wider discourses beyond the school" (2016: 337).

In sum, the first part of this section reviewed practitioner- and organisation-based literature with a focus on interfaith activities between schools. This part, however, addressed academic literature which aimed to further understanding of the processes underlying dialogue *within* schools, as well as between them. Throughout the discussions above, the meaning of 'dialogue' was understood as shaped through students' experiences of interfaith exchanges. What is more, the

role of the community school, as well as the spatial dimension to the activities were highlighted amongst key findings (both of which are discussed in my own research in Chapters 8 and 7 respectively).

Finally, I return to the question that this review seeks to answer, 'how have previous interfaith studies been evaluated?' Similarities between the evaluation processes exist. For example, there is a tendency for mixed methods data collection and analysis, regular references to the community cohesion agenda, and for some of the practitioner-based approaches, a focus on contact theory. I similarly conduct my own research along these lines to ensure a shared foundation upon which to compare findings.

However, there are some stark contrasts. Evaluations of organisation and government-based interfaith initiatives tend to structure the evaluation process in order to maximise the opportunity for positive change to be directly attributed to the programme's activities. Shannahan's (2018) TLN evaluation expands upon the concept of 'theory of change' (Weiss 1995), which he describes as "a stepped assessment of the actions that need to be taken and the resources that need to be in place to generate specific measurable outcomes" (2018: 35). In Raw's (2006) and Kerr et al.'s (2011) evaluations, theories of change are not directly addressed, however they both ensure that the outcomes of the programmes can be 'measured' by establishing sets of indicators for the testable variables. The research-based evaluation expounded upon above, however, did not deductively test for assumed outcomes. One reason for this is the inherent difficulty of operationalising academic concepts in such a way that they can be tested. Research into local community cohesion has identified challenges with asserting accurate and reliable indicators (Ratcliffe, Newman and Fuller 2008), and Gay (2018), in his review of Cooling et al.'s (2016) research into Christian-ethos school teachers argues that the practitioner-style evaluation framework represents a "positivist bear-trap" (2017: 1) for academic research into religion:

[T]he tools needed for such an approach would be measurement, scientific objectivity and prediction. However, religion, which by its very nature is

uncertain, controversial and subjective, fits uneasily into such a frame.
(Gay 2018: 1)

Rather, the research-driven evaluation in this section was concerned with developing an understanding of the processes underlying interfaith encounters in order to reconceptualise the theoretical basis to 'dialogue'.

An appreciation of the differences involved within interfaith evaluation frameworks reveals a gap in the literature; there is space for my research to amalgamate impact evaluation processes with the development of theoretical understanding. The following chapter explains how my research takes an evaluative stance towards School Linking which is critical of the assumption-based theory of change model. Rather, I remain open to unexpected outcomes during the data gathering and analysis process. By inductively uncovering changes in attitudes and behaviours throughout the School Linking process, the research culminates in a unique theoretical reassessment of 'peaceful relations' through the lens of contact theory. The theoretical understanding is a context-specific representation of programme outcomes that can reflectively operationalised for future evaluations of School Linking.

3.4: Conclusion: Chapters 2 and 3

To conclude, the four questions posed throughout these two literature review chapters ('what are the challenges facing the integration of non-religious worldviews into teaching about religion or belief?', 'How has research into attitudes to religious diversity informed the religious dimension of intercultural education?', 'Is the argument that faith schooling is a barrier to community cohesion flawed?' and 'How have previous interfaith studies been evaluated?') have sought to aid understanding of the academic context within which I undertake my research. Whilst the purpose of Chapter 2 was to identify a number of academic themes in religious and intercultural education to which my own

findings contribute, this chapter has provided contextual detail around faith school debates and previous interfaith initiatives in schools.

The literature reviewed in these chapters concerns several thematic areas directly relevant to my research findings in Chapters 5-7. The themes include issues around non-religious worldviews, religious literacy and teacher training, the role of physical space and 'safe space', young peoples' attitudes to 'difference', the importance of interfaith friendships and the role of community schools. What is more, the faith schooling section of this chapter revealed a tendency for the literature to use language that assumes that faith schools are homogenous. My research thus takes steps to avoid this pitfall, in contrast shedding light on the nature of individual schools in a number of ways (as the following chapter will show, I have included individual schools as a variable in my secondary data analysis and ensured that my primary data collection encompassed direct observation within schools and robust focus group discussions between as many teachers in School Linking as possible).

This chapter has also alluded to the theoretical contribution of my research. A number of studies into faith schools, integrated schooling and interfaith initiatives are grounded in the principles of contact theory and some of this literature will be revisited in Chapter 9 when I reassess the concept of 'peaceful relations' through this theoretical lens.

The review ends by highlighting a gap in the body of literature evaluating interfaith initiatives; my research takes the opportunity to combine rigorous academic study with impact evaluation. My inductive and reflective methodological approach to evaluation provides the context-specific evidence necessary to reassess the theoretical underpinnings to peaceful relations as shaped by School Linking. Moreover, such an approach enables me, in the thesis conclusion, to advocate a 'grounded theory of change' approach for F&BF staff to follow in order to establish accurate measures of School Linking outcomes. I now turn to the following chapter, in which I discuss my methodology in more detail.

CHAPTER 4

Methodology

4.1: Introduction

This chapter defends the methodological underpinnings to my research. To achieve my research objective, I assert four questions which my research explores in three distinct phases encompassing quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, followed by theory reassessment. After establishing my epistemological standpoint, I present a single-*n* case study design (The Faith and Belief Forum's (F&BF's) School Linking programme)⁵⁷ within which my data are collected and analysed through mixed methods. Also in this chapter, I reflect on the role of 'causal inference' in impact-related research, claiming that understanding the complexity of processes underlying change should be prioritised over the assertion of causal links or relationships. The chapter ends with an exploration of ethical considerations, an important aspect to this research which aims, in part, to understand young people's attitudes to sensitive topics around religious and non-religious belief.

My research objective was to provide an original account of the relationships between 'interfaith encounters' and 'peaceful relations' in schools, through a case study of the F&BF's School Linking programme. To achieve this objective, I responded to four research questions:

1. What impact can be captured by the Faith and Belief Forum's evaluation data?
2. How does School Linking inform or inhibit peaceful relations in schools at an interpersonal level?
3. How does School Linking inform or inhibit peaceful relations in schools at an institutional level?

⁵⁷ The subject of this PhD studentship. See Section 4.3 for more details.

4. How can School Linking influence academic understandings of peaceful relations?

As Sections 4.2 and 4.3.1 will show, my research was not concerned with hypothesis testing, since I did not view 'peaceful relations' as a concept that could be operationalised and measured through a set of indicators. Rather, its aim was to understand the processes underlying the 'how' of these questions, before *reflectively* assessing academic understandings of the concept of peaceful relations once my data were analysed.

4.2: Researcher approach

Answering my four research questions required different data collection and analysis methods, and "methods impose certain perspectives on reality" (Berg and Lune 2012: 5). My mixed methods approach (see next section) presupposed complementary epistemological underpinnings which I embraced by identifying as a 'constructivist' with 'pragmatic' tendencies.

The 'how' of questions two to four encompassed multiple tensions: to what extent did I aim to *understand* or *explain* processes within my case study from a qualitative perspective? I embraced this tension through a constructivist approach, in that I am concerned with the study of "the multiple realities constructed by different groups of people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others" (Patton 2015: 121). This view was reflected in my research design in that I captured multiple perspectives (see next section). Notably, the thesis will often refer to the term 'experienced' to describe teachers who have participated in School Linking before (a term coined by F&BF, see glossary). However, there were inherent limits to how far I could access the 'real' experiences of students and teachers. My research explored to what extent multiple actors constructed various representations of F&BF, School Linking and the participants' experiences. During the research I witnessed a high turnover of F&BF staff involved in School Linking, leading me to recognise that

each individual's experiences and viewpoints shaped how the programme was perceived by its participants.⁵⁸

This recognition enabled me to adopt a “double reflexivity”, advocated by Knauth and Vieregge (2019: 32) in their religion and education research. The double reflexive process acknowledges that “social actors in a school context (teachers, students, administrators) have a reflexive knowledge of their daily actions, which ethnographic researchers can reconstruct and translate into their own concepts”. Hermeneutically, two levels of knowledge were at play: the School Linking actors' and my own. That they were intimately related during the research presupposed a specific structure for the research design:

It must be conceived of as a cyclical movement, from practice to theory and back to practice [...] knowledge is surveyed during phases of field research and translated into second-order knowledge in phases of theory generation. This must then be returned into practice so that the dialog between both orders of knowledge can produce the conditions giving rise to a new reflexivity on both sides of the research relationship. (Knauth and Vieregge 2019: 32)

Integrating the (potentially contradictory as well as complementary) dynamics of participant-researcher knowledge into my data analysis resolved research questions two to four in such a way that the practice of School Linking could be subsequently shaped and informed by the outcomes of my research. The practical ways in which my theory generation was applied to School Linking are outlined in Section 10.4 once the research findings and theory have been established.

However, I am to an extent a pragmatist because context and consequences are important. I use Patton's (2015: 152) definition of pragmatism as a model which, “directs us to seek practical and useful answers that can solve,

⁵⁸ Between October 2016 and March 2020, four staff members left the organisation, six staff members were hired, one staff member left for maternity leave and subsequently returned, and three transitioned into different roles within the programme. For a short period in 2019 the managerial position for the programme was vacant, leading the Director to take up the role in the interim.

or at least provide direction in addressing, concrete problems”.⁵⁹ Whilst the constructivist in me did not intend or expect to find “answers” through my research, I was sympathetic towards an outcome-oriented attempt to “provide direction” for School Linking that would help it to overcome some of the problems it faces. This tendency stemmed from my researcher positionality.⁶⁰ My professional background is in the charity sector; before undertaking this PhD I worked as Fundraising and Communications Manager for an international peacebuilding charity. I empathise with staff in organisations (like F&BF) who experience the problems of a) effectively communicating the impact of their work when the concepts involved cannot be easily ‘measured’, and b) articulating assumed outcomes of the charity’s work to stakeholders in a way that invoked confidence that such outcomes would be ‘seen’.⁶¹ Similarly, I enter this research with a cynicism towards English education policy, which, in my view, has caused ‘concrete problems’ for overstretched teachers. I grew up in a family of primary school teachers and am all too aware of the pressures they face.⁶² There was therefore a need to consciously recognise my biases to mitigate the risk of a personal agenda influencing my data. Nevertheless, a pragmatic approach (particularly in my quantitative response to the first research question) enabled me to become “contextually responsive” (Datta 1997: 34) to my case study, asserting findings and recommendations that have real life relevance to my participants.

My complementary epistemological perspectives allowed for flexibility in approaching my research questions. The following sections outline my mixed methods case study research design, data collection, analysis and theory generation, illustrating “the specific relation between theory and practice that must underpin a context-related approach in classroom research” (Knauth and Vieregge 2019: 32).

⁵⁹ I further align myself with the classical pragmatist, James (1907) who promotes that truth value is experienced in the practical outcomes of belief and action.

⁶⁰ I further reflect on my positionality as a researcher in schools collecting data from young people in Section 4.7.

⁶¹ Section 4.3.1 of this chapter explores assumptions of impact in more detail.

⁶² Indeed, challenges facing teachers is revealed as a key issue facing School Linking

4.3: Research design: A mixed methods case study

The concept of 'interfaith encounters' in my research objective was represented by the case study of F&BF's School Linking programme. The choice to undertake a single-*n* case study design was driven by a desire to achieve a detailed understanding of the processes at play within School Linking.⁶³ I therefore aligned myself with Berg's (2007: 283) definition of a case study as "[a] method involving systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, setting, event or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how the subject operates or functions".⁶⁴ My case study design encompassed two of Yin's (2009) three typologies: exploratory and explanatory. Principally, I saw the research as exploratory since no academic research has previously accessed F&BF's School Linking programme to this extent. Consequently, my research was similarly revelatory in nature, which in itself is a defence of selecting a single case: if I could "uncover some prevalent phenomenon previously inaccessible to social scientists", I could "justify the use of a single-case study on the grounds of its revelatory nature" (Yin 2014: 49).

Then again, there was inevitably an explanatory aspect to the research since my research considered *impact*. At the outset, I recognised that it is nearly impossible for single-*n* studies to establish causal relationships (and ensure internal validity)⁶⁵ since there is no comparative case in which to isolate factors that may contribute to the process of change. As Section 4.3.1 will demonstrate, the purpose of my research design was *not* to establish causal inference. Rather, I remained open to inductively uncovering otherwise unknown factors that contributed to the outcomes of School Linking. To maximise opportunity for this

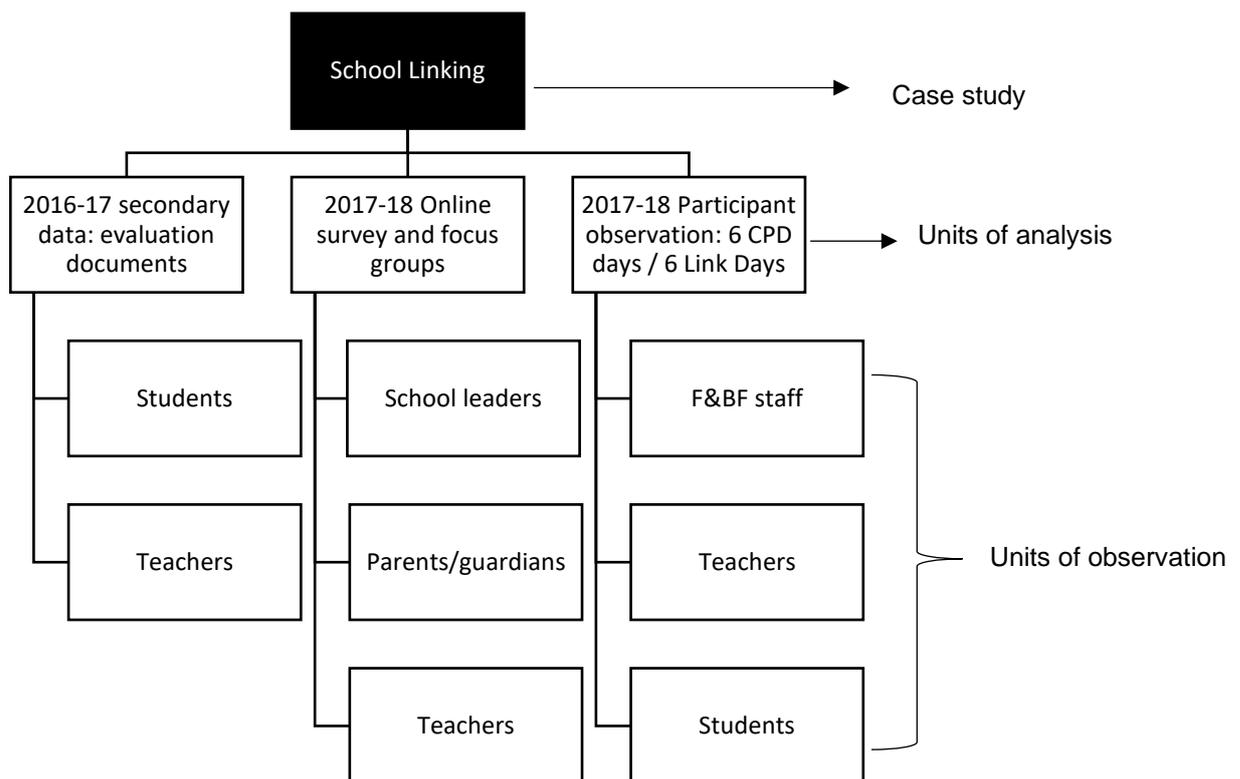
⁶³ Single-*n* case studies are subject to the common criticism of selection bias, that is, that the case study is chosen to maximise the chance of findings being desirable. My research has origins in a studentship designed in partnership between F&BF and the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University. As such, the research was designed within the scope and remit of the studentship agreement, with access to secondary data and School Linking participants granted by F&BF. With agreement of F&BF, I own all of the datasets that I created for analysis.

⁶⁴ Note, the information that I have chosen to gather, as well as what I have chosen *not* to gather, will be described in Section 4.4.

⁶⁵ Internal validity is the process of ensuring that explanatory case studies accurately explain "how and why event *x* led to event *y*" (Yin 2009: 42).

(and mitigate the risk of internal validity issues), I established covariation within my the single-*n* case design. Figure 4.1 illustrates how I embedded units of analysis in the form of secondary evaluation data, survey responses, focus group discussions and participant observation of F&BF’s CPD training and Link Days to ensure my model captured the “many actions and goals” of the case (Berg and Lune 2012: 327). Moreover, the units of observation generated multiple perspectives representing various stakeholders in the School Linking programme. I maximised the complexity within my design to adhere to Yin’s (2009: 52-53) argument that this would “add significant opportunities for extensive analysis, enhancing the insights into the single case”.

Figure 4.1: Illustration of within-case variation:



My secondary and primary analysis captured data from two academic years to ensure temporal variation within the case. I adhere to Gerring’s (2004)

'Type 3',⁶⁶ or Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier's (2013) 'longitudinal' case type, since this is preferable for education research. It meets a "need to understand the process across an academic year, over the length of the project or longer" in order to provide the "opportunity to build an overview as well as a deeper understanding of the changes that might be occurring" (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier 2013: 16-17).

I chose a mixed methods approach, which researchers argue, is suitable for the investigation of complex issues in education (Coldwell and Maxwell 2018, Sammons et al. 2018, Siddiqui and Gorard 2019) and is asserted as complementary to the pragmatist philosophical standpoint (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004, Maxcy 2003). In terms of the evaluative nature of my research, Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989) posited five purposes for mixing methods in the evaluation of educational programmes, of which two were applicable. First, I mixed methods for the purpose of complementarity, in that I used a design which "seeks broader, deeper and more comprehensive social understandings by using methods that tap into different facets or dimensions of the same complex phenomenon." (Greene 2007: 101). Second, I mixed methods for the purposes of triangulation, that is, when "different methods are used to measure the *same phenomenon*" to determine whether "the results provide consistent or convergent information" (Greene 2007: 100).

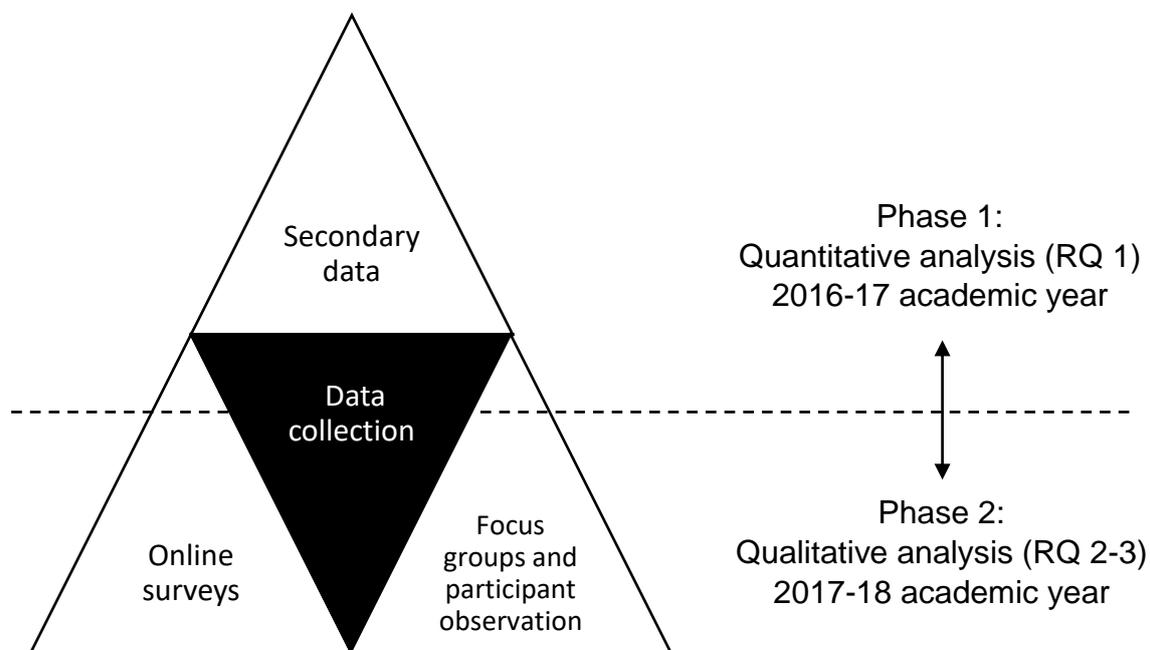
I triangulated methods by using secondary data analysis, participant observation and online surveys,⁶⁷ with the results of the latter discussed in focus groups. Figure 4.2 illustrates my triangulation: each corner of the triangle represents a method of data collection to compare the above. It also illustrates the longitudinal nature of the mixed methods by distinguishing two distinct phases: phase one addressed the first research question, 'what impact can be captured from F&BF's evaluation data?' through the quantitative analysis of secondary data collected in the 2016-17 academic year. Phase two addressed the second and third research questions, '*how does School Linking inform or*

⁶⁶ A case study design which "*combines* both temporal and within-unit variation" (Gerring 2004: 344).

⁶⁷ I also employed a small amount of 'within-method' triangulation (Flick 2014) by mixing question types in the online surveys, see Section 4.4.2.

inhibit peaceful relations at the interpersonal and institutional levels?’ through the qualitative analysis of data collected in the 2017-18 academic year.

Figure 4.2: Triangulation of data collection and analysis



Following the first two data-driven phases of my research, I embraced Knauth and Vieregge’s (2019: 32) double reflexive approach to the relationship between practice and theory during phase three to address my final research question: ‘How can School Linking influence academic understandings of peaceful relations?’ As Section 4.4.2 will show, my primary data were analysed inductively, outside of an assumed theoretical framework, so that my findings could be reflectively applied to the context of School Linking through a number of different theoretical lenses. This phase satisfies arguments from case study researchers, such as Yin (1994), who argues that “theory development as part of the design phase is essential, whether the ensuing case study’s purpose is to develop or to test theory” (1994: 27). I chose to reassess ‘intergroup contact theory’ (see Chapter 9), since this is the theoretical framework underpinning comparable programmes (for example Shared Education in Northern Ireland) and

is intimately tied in with issues around faith schooling and community cohesion (all outlined in Chapter 3). In this way, my theoretical contribution had the widest relevance and application to this area. In the future, alternative theoretical understandings of peaceful relations may similarly be reassessed in light of my research findings (see Section 10.5). Moreover, Chapter 10 outlines how the double reflexive nature of my work completed the practice-theory-practice cycle by indicating how the outcomes of my research will be implemented by F&BF in their future programme design and evaluation.

4.3.1: How is evaluation integrated into the research?

My research questions presupposed an evaluative approach to my case study, which fills the gap revealed by Chapter 3's exploration of the evaluation of organisational and academic research into interfaith encounters. Namely, this research afforded me a unique opportunity to explore the methodological implications of a practitioner-style evaluation framework from a research perspective and apply my learning to a reassessment of academic theory. I align myself with Bassey's (1999: 41) claim that "provided the enquiry is conducted systematically and critically, evaluation is a branch of research".

Organisation-driven evaluations of interfaith encounters explored in Chapter 3 explicitly utilise theories of change,⁶⁸ or construct their research to test for assumed and measurable outcomes. Similar approaches have been used in education research, with "theory-based evaluation"⁶⁹ being increasingly framed through 'logic models', which "seek to understand the causal logic underlying an intervention" (Coldwell and Maxwell 2018: 268). A logic model is often formed of two parts. First, a process is articulated at the start of a programme, stating how it "causes the intended or observed outcomes". Second, the evaluation is

⁶⁸ Defined by Shannahan (2018) in Section 3.3.2 and used in his evaluation of The Linking Network (TLN)

⁶⁹ The use of the term 'theory' in this section should be viewed as separate to academic theory, which is the subject of Chapter 9. Coldwell and Maxwell (2018) use this term as a 'catch all' for approaches including 'programme theory evaluation' (Rogers 2008), 'theory-anchored' and 'theory of change' (Rogers and Weiss 2007) and 'realist evaluation' (Pawson and Tilley 1997).

undertaken towards the end of the programme that is “at least partly guided by this model” to illustrate that the intended outcomes have been met (Rogers et al. 2000: 5). Within schools, there are an increasing number of programmes that draw on logic models, including ‘research and development’ projects (Greany and Maxwell 2017) and, in England, ‘school-led self-improving systems’, which posit knowledge production as a key outcome of schooling (Hargreaves 2012). At the heart of the approach are assumptions based upon ‘causal mechanisms’, which describe, at an individual level, the “processes that result in changes in the *minds*—the thinking and behaviours—of individuals or groups of individuals” (Coldwell and Maxwell 2018: 269).⁷⁰

My methodology, however, was critical of practitioner-led, assumption-based models in four ways. Firstly, despite theory-driven evaluation posited as a useful tool for attributing specific outcomes to interventions (Rogers et al. 2000), I aligned myself with those who argue that it is difficult to ‘prove’ attribution, since multiple programmes could “contribute to a single change”, and there are difficulties in tracing multiple steps between the programme activities and the outcomes (INTRAC 2017).⁷¹ Indeed, school-centred evaluations in England have, in the past, struggled to identify how *far* a process of change has developed. For example, studies that have evaluated teachers’ professional development programmes have experienced difficulty in establishing a process of change starting from the introduction of the programme, to changes in teachers’ practices, and changes in students’ outcomes. (Coldwell and Maxwell 2018: 274). The same could be said of School Linking. To what extent are students’ perceptions attributed to their Link Day experiences, and to what extent are the Link Day outcomes attributed to the teachers’ CPD training? Chapter 5 demonstrates low levels of attendance at the CPD training and Chapter 6 reveals that some teachers do not correctly implement their School Linking training in the

⁷⁰ The term has also been interpreted at a social level. Tilly’s (2005) ‘boundary mechanisms’ represent how groups of individuals may be divided through ‘imposition’ (for example, where authority figures separate students within the classroom) ‘inscription’ (where formal laws are established), or where groups interact for the first time through ‘encounter’.

⁷¹ I recognise, however, that methodologies exist which engage with this problem. ‘Contribution analysis’, for example, identifies a programme’s contribution to one or more changes through a six-step methodology in which theories of change are periodically assessed, revised and strengthened as the programme develops (for example INTRAC 2017).

Link Days. The implications for the attribution of outcomes to School Linking is reflected upon in the thesis conclusions.

Secondly, my research challenged the hypothesis-testing aspect of theory of change. Within a theory of change, concepts are operationalised and often represented by a set of indicators which are subsequently measured. However, the previous chapter highlighted Gay's (2018: 1) critique of the approach in relation to religion, which, he argues "by its very nature is uncertain, controversial and subjective, [and] fits uneasily into such a frame".⁷² Translated into an academic framework, a theory of change approach invokes a positivist outlook that contradicts my epistemological standpoint described in Section 4.2. Rather, my research was concerned with inductively uncovering findings that may or may not have been posited as an indicator of peaceful relations had I taken a theory of change approach.

Thirdly, my research was critical of the lack of recognition of 'complexity' within theory-driven evaluation. As Rogers (2008) and Stame (2010) recognise, a theory of change approach can presuppose that conflicting, competing or interdependent factors can be controlled for. In other words, it fails to account for rival explanations of the change process. This critique is echoed in educational research, with Wholey (2003) recommending that where educational outcomes cannot be easily observed, more complex approaches are required. Similarly, case study researchers have argued that addressing rival accounts should be "a core part of interpreting case study findings" (Yin 2008: xxii). My second and third research questions are explicitly worded to avoid oversimplification; my exploration is open to 'how' multiple processes shape peaceful relations.

Lastly, my research recognised that "interventions always and only take place in context" (Coldwell and Maxwell 2018: 277). This understanding forms the basis to Pawson and Tilley's (1997) 'realist evaluation' approach, which, rather than simply asking whether a programme works, asks "what works in which circumstances and for whom?" (Better Evaluation 2020). My emphasis on context (and the individuals and groups *within* the context) complimented the

⁷² A view echoed by MacMullen (2007: 30), who sees establishing quantitative measures for successful citizenship education as a "formidable task".

pragmatic aspect to my epistemological stance, which valued consequences of decisions made by multiple actors within a given context. It is this dimension of my methodology that aided me in my reassessment of contact theory as a specific framework for peaceful relations in School Linking.

In sum, my research was designed to explore the role of School Linking in its complexity. The few research-driven evaluations outlined in Chapter 3 were concerned less with causal inference, and more with generating an *understanding* of the *processes* underlying the complexity of change within an interfaith programme (Ipgrave 2003a, 2003b, 2013). My academic priority aligned with this research, however as this and the previous sections have demonstrated, I placed a double reflexive value on the relationship between practice and theory, and adopted a pragmatic, realist view of evaluation to reassess contact theory within a specific context. The following section outlines how I collected and analysed my data to support this unique approach to case study design.

4.4: Data collection and analysis

This section outlines how the first two, data-driven, phases of my research were structured. Each phase is outlined in turn and includes information on participants and access, data collection and data cleaning and analysis.

4.4.1: Phase one: secondary data

Participants and access

The secondary data were collected from the 2016-17 School Linking Teachers and students at various points throughout the academic year by F&BF staff. The 2016-17 cohort consisted of fifty-two Linking Classes from forty-five schools. Over a third of the classes (nineteen) were from schools with a Muslim ethos, with

twelve from schools with a Jewish ethos, three from non-faith community schools,⁷³ two from a school with a Sikh ethos and one from a Hindu-ethos school. The remaining fifteen classes were from schools with a Christian ethos: seven Church of England-ethos schools, six Roman Catholic-ethos schools and two Greek Orthodox-ethos schools. All of the twenty-six 'links' were paired across faiths, twelve were between Muslim-ethos and Christian-ethos schools and six links were across Muslim-ethos and Jewish-ethos schools. There were only two links between Christian-ethos and Jewish-ethos schools, and a further two between community and Jewish-ethos schools. Of the remaining four links, two classes from Sikh-ethos schools were paired with classes from Christian-ethos and Jewish-ethos schools, and the class from the Hindu-ethos school was paired with a class from a Jewish-ethos school.

In relation to the gender balance of schools involved in my research, more than three quarters of the classes were from mixed, co-educational, schools. Of the remaining thirteen classes, five were from boys' schools and seven were from girls' schools.

When it came to the 'experience' of the teachers (i.e. whether they had taken part in School Linking in a previous year, see glossary), of the fifty-two classes, thirty-nine were led by 'new' teachers who were participating in the programme for the first time. The remaining thirteen were led by 'experienced' teachers.

Over two thirds (thirty-four) of the classes were from primary schools, and 18 were from secondary schools. Twenty-seven were from key stage 2 (years 4, 5 and 6), seventeen from key stage 3 (years 7, 8 and 9), two from key stage 1 and one spanned across more than one key stage. The most common primary school year group was year 5 (9-10 year-olds). In secondary school, students were evenly spread between years 8 and 9 (12-14 year-olds). There were four classes from nursery or reception year groups (2-4 year-olds).

Lastly, although a small number of Linking Classes were based outside of London, most (forty-two) were situated in and around the capital. In terms of Local Authority, nine were in North West London, seven each in North London, North

⁷³ See Section 2.1 for the definition of the 'community' school.

East London, East London and inner-city London, three in West London and two in South London.⁷⁴ Figure 4.3 shows the positioning of the London-based Linking Classes, coloured by faith ethos of the school. Of the Linking Classes outside London and not represented on the figure, six were in Birmingham (three from Muslim schools and three from Church of England schools) and four were in Hertfordshire (two from community schools and two from the same Jewish school).

⁷⁴ The majority of the schools were based in the areas surrounding F&BF's London office, suggesting that local networks may play a role in the recruitment of linking schools.

Figure 4.3: Map of London-based School Linking Classes in the 2016-17 academic year

Some materials have been removed from this thesis due to Third Party Copyright. Pages where material has been removed are clearly marked in the electronic version. The unabridged version of the thesis can be viewed at the Lanchester Library, Coventry University.

I had access to the demographic information above since it was known by F&BF when they 'linked' the schools. To aid analysis of data, I gathered further demographic information for the 2016-17 Linking Classes, covering levels of academic achievement, ethnic diversity and social deprivation.⁷⁵ It would have been unrealistic to expect to gather information about the particular students taking part in School Linking from the classes. Publicly available information was accessible on the gov.uk website, however, at a school-wide level.⁷⁶

Firstly, I accessed information on ethnic diversity (represented by the percentage of students whose first language was anything other than English) for all but two Link Schools.⁷⁷ The classes' percentages ranged from 0 to 94.2%, with a mean of 29%. The mean is significantly higher than the averages for English primary (20.8%) and secondary schools (16.1%). However, the average was distorted by a minority of schools with very high levels of ethnic diversity; when recoded according to whether the school was above or below its respective average, there was an almost equal split with twenty-four classes above average, twenty-six classes below average and two classes missing data.

Secondly, I used the percentage of students who were eligible for free school meals at any time during the past six years as representative of levels of social deprivation.⁷⁸ Thirty-two schools did not publish data. For the twenty that did, percentages ranged from 1.9% to 72.9%, with a mean of 23%. This average was lower than the English primary (29.1%) and secondary (24.9%) school averages; when recoded, fourteen schools were below average and six were above average (with 34.6% missing).

Finally, data on academic performance was available for twenty-four (out of thirty-three) primary schools, and fifteen (out of eighteen) secondary schools.

⁷⁵ This attempt reflects the aim of other research. Ipgrave's (2003a, 2003b) email exchange interfaith programme (see Section 3.3.2) considered location, ethnic diversity socio-economic factors (McKenna, Ipgrave and Jackson 2008: 20).

⁷⁶ Which has a searchable function called 'Find and compare schools in England'.

⁷⁷ I recognise that an indicator of diversity based upon language skills is problematic, however without pupil-level data, this was the closest measure publicly available.

⁷⁸ I am aware of an ongoing debate around free school meal eligibility as a sufficient indicator of socio-economic deprivation (Ilie, Sutherland and Vignoles 2017, Taylor 2017). However, as with levels of ethnic diversity, government-level school data was the only source accessible to me.

It was represented by the percentage of students assessed as ‘working at expected standard’ at primary level, and the percentage of students who achieved grade 5 or above in the 2016-17 English and Maths GSCSEs at secondary level. There was a relatively small range amongst primary schools, from 46% to 92%, with a mean of 69%, slightly above the English primary school average of 61%. The percentage range was much larger for the secondary Link Schools, from 7% to 93%, with a mean of 58%. This is significantly higher than the English secondary school average of 39.6%. When recoded into whether the classes are above or below their respective academic performance average, over half (twenty-eight) are above average, just over one in five (eleven) is below average, and a quarter (thirteen) did not publish data.

To summarise, the social demographics available for the schools in the 2016-17 academic year indicated that they had mixed levels of ethnic diversity, lower than average levels of social deprivation and higher than average levels of academic performance. I do not know the criteria on which F&BF makes its pairing decisions, however Table 4.1 shows that schools were mostly linked between similar demographics of which F&BF were aware, that is, *within* the same category. The only exception is that of the faith ethos of the school, and to an extent the borough.⁷⁹ The difference was greater, however, when social demographics unknown to F&BF were taken into account.

Table 4.1: Number and percentage of classes linked ‘like for like’, per demographic variable

Demographic		No. of classes linked ‘like for like’ (out of 26)	%
Known to F&BF	Primary or secondary	26	100
	Teachers: ‘new’ or ‘experienced’	25	96
	Key stage	25	96

⁷⁹ Kerr et al.’s (2011) evaluation of TLN highlighted the benefits of ‘linking’ students within a borough; students could more easily create a shared identity and it was practical to sustain relationships outside of school. However, since neighbouring Local Authorities may provide “greater diversity of contexts” (2011: 9) they advocate exploring more potential for linking to take place *across* boroughs.

	Gender of entry	22	85
	Borough (including London boroughs, plus Hertfordshire and Birmingham)	14	54
	School faith ethos	0	0
Unknown to F&BF	Academic performance: above/below national average	20 ⁸⁰	77
	Ethnic diversity: above/below national average	14 ⁸¹	54
	Social deprivation: above/below national average	3 ⁸²	12

The table above begs the questions of on what basis schools are chosen to be a part of linking, who drives the pairing process and to what extent the tendency to link classes ‘like for like’ is intentional. Kerr et al.’s (2011) evaluation of The Linking Network (TLN) highlighted the challenge of “matching schools so that there were sufficient differences between the partner schools to make the linking meaningful” and found that “[s]chools did not want to link with schools that were similar to them but rather with those that were very different, particularly in terms of ethnicity and culture” (2011: 86). It appears that F&BF assume difference primarily at the level of school faith ethos (an assumption my literature reviewed in the previous two chapters problematises).⁸³ The extent to which difference is integrated into School Linking and perceived and experienced by the teachers and students is an ongoing theme in the research and addressed specifically in Chapters 5 and 8.

⁸⁰ 29% of primary and 17% of secondary did not publish data.

⁸¹ Two schools with missing data.

⁸² 32 schools with missing data.

⁸³ As literature in Chapters 2 and 3 identified, the assumption that all students in a faith school (or indeed a community school) share the same religious beliefs is flawed, therefore linking schools across faith ethos alone does not appear to be a valid measure of difference in the School Linking experience.

Data collection

Teachers were provided with evaluation documents to complete during the academic year by F&BF staff. They were requested to fill in a teacher 'baseline' survey during CPD 1 (see Appendix 1, Item 5) and an 'endpoint' survey during CPD 3 (see Appendix 1, Item 6). They were also given student surveys (see Appendix, Items 1 to 4) to distribute to their classes: a baseline survey to be completed by students before their first Link Day and an endpoint survey to be completed after their third Link Day. Additionally, a smaller sample of teachers were given 'student reflection forms' (see Appendix 1, Item 8), which students were to complete after each *individual* Link Day.⁸⁴ Similarly, teachers were requested to complete evaluation forms at the end of each CPD training day (see Appendix 1, Item 7). However, I chose to exclude this document from my research. Despite the forms being largely representative of the fifty-two Linking Teachers (forty-two forms for the first CPD day, forty-four for the second and thirty-four for the third), there is overwhelming consistency in the responses, which are in turn overwhelmingly positive (see Appendix 1, Item 9 for a table summarising the responses). The results suggest that the teachers may have been influencing their responses in a way that was 'desirable' for F&BF (perhaps because the surveys were not anonymous and were completed in full view of F&BF staff).⁸⁵ That there is so little variation in the responses means that their use in statistical analysis is limited. Ultimately, they proved less useful than expected for analysis, other than their value in identifying a potential issue with F&BF's evaluation procedure.

Of the four documents I chose to retain that were circulated to all teachers on the programme, the response rates were low (see Table 4.2).

⁸⁴ F&BF's sampling technique is unknown, so I cannot assume that the sample was random.

⁸⁵ This is known as response bias, defined as when respondents are not necessarily truthful because of "fears that they will be judged negatively or will be exposed to criticism" (Henerson, Lyons Morris and Taylor Fitz-Gibbon 1978: 144).

Table 4.2: Response rates for F&BF's 2016-17 evaluation documents

Evaluation document submitted	No. of classes	% of total (52) classes	Total Number of documents returned
Student baselines	30	57.7%	777
Student endpoints	13	25.0%	260
Both student baselines and endpoints	12	23.1%	-
Teacher baselines	39	75.0%	49 ⁸⁶
Teacher endpoints	11	21.2%	12
Both teacher baselines and endpoint	11	21.2%	-
All four required documents	8	15.4%	-
Total number of documents collected and analysed			1,488

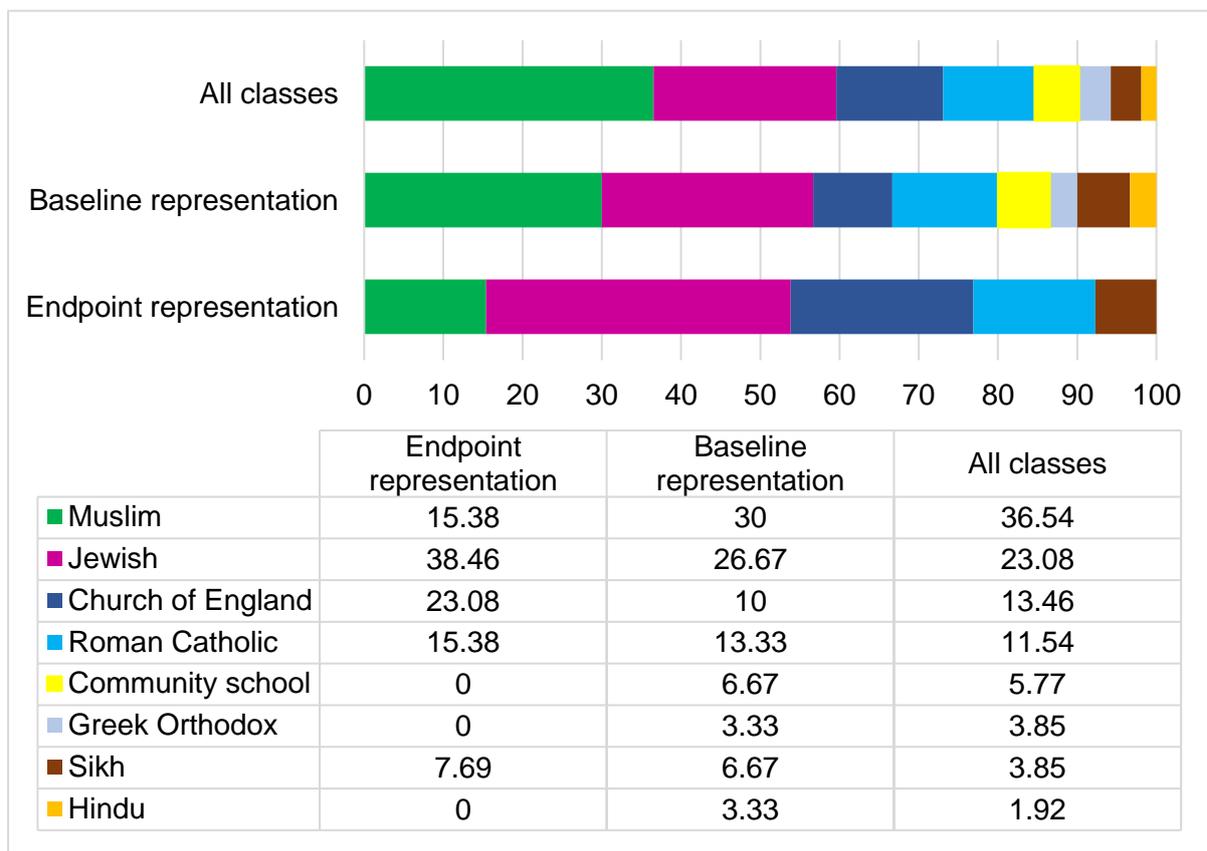
Just over half of the teachers returned their students' baseline surveys at the start of school linking. However, despite this low response rate, the students remained generally representative in terms of the proportion led by new and experienced teachers, and the distribution of classes by key stage. When it came to school faith ethos, Jewish and Hindu-ethos classes were slightly overrepresented and Muslim-ethos classes underrepresented. Coeducational classes were also overrepresented, as were classes with above average levels of ethnic diversity, social deprivation and academic performance. Classes from Birmingham were underrepresented.

At the end of school linking, the student return rate was just 25% and not representative of the cohort, so it is not possible to assume generalisability beyond this sample. When it came to faith ethos, classes from Jewish and Christian-ethos schools were overrepresented and classes from Muslim-ethos schools were once again significantly underrepresented. The differences were further exacerbated when class sizes were considered. For example, although 23% of the classes in School Linking come from Jewish-ethos schools, their

⁸⁶ This figure is higher than the number of classes because some teachers brought teaching assistants to the CPD training, who completed additional surveys.

endpoints make up 60% of the 777 total, suggesting larger Linking Class size. Conversely, 36% of classes in School Linking were from Muslim-ethos schools, but only two class teachers responded to the call for student endpoints, and their number of returned endpoints totalled just eleven (4.2% of all endpoint surveys). There were no endpoint surveys from Hindu, Community, or Greek Orthodox-ethos schools. The difference in faith ethos representation is illustrated in Figure 4.4 (with colours aligning with the map points in Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.4: Representation of class faith ethos for all Linking Classes, classes that completed the student baseline survey and classes that completed the student endpoint survey (%)



Lastly, primary school students were significantly overrepresented in both the baseline and endpoint surveys. Although the overall number of classes have a 65%/35% primary/secondary split, 84% of the 777 baselines and 87% of the

260 endpoints are from primary students. This overrepresentation is possibly due to larger Linking Class sizes, since, for example, nine primary classes returned 225 endpoints, whilst four secondary classes returned a total of thirty-five. As the year progressed, the response rate for these documents decreased, with only eight teachers returning their own, and their students', baseline and endpoint surveys.

The teachers' surveys were largely representative at baseline, with a 75% return rate. Classes from outside of London were underrepresented and experienced teachers were overrepresented.⁸⁷ Only one in five teachers completed an endpoint survey, however. Primary school teachers and new teachers were overrepresented.⁸⁸ Once again, classes from Birmingham were underrepresented. No endpoint surveys were completed by Greek Orthodox-ethos, Hindu-ethos or community school students.

Lastly, in terms of the additional student reflection forms, if all classes were to circulate them (with an average of 20 students in each Linking Class) there would be a total of 1000 reflection forms covering all three link days. I received 390 forms from thirteen schools. I do not know which forms are from which Link Days so am unaware of when they were completed. In total, 162 of the 390 forms (41%) came from one Jewish-ethos (26%) – community school (15%) link. There were no student reflection forms completed by students from Greek Orthodox-ethos or Hindu-ethos schools. Students from Muslim-ethos school were slightly underrepresented and students from Sikh-ethos schools were overrepresented. 100% of student reflection forms were completed by students from schools with below average levels of social deprivation and 80% of responses came from links between schools which both have above average levels of academic performance.

⁸⁷ Perhaps due to the fact that they were familiar with the evaluation process, having taken part in School Linking in previous year(s).

⁸⁸ Potentially explained by a primary data analysis finding in Chapter 6; I observed low levels of attendance at the final CPD training day from experienced teachers.

Data cleaning and analysis

All of the 1,488 documents were provided in hard copy form. I inputted all legible responses into Microsoft Excel and 'cleaned' the data as applicable (for example, identifying instances where Likert scale responses fell in between two given responses, such as 2.5, or where students gave two contradictory answers to the same question). Where students drew a picture in their student reflection form, I inputted a brief description of the drawing. I also inputted the additional demographic data on ethnic diversity, social deprivation and academic performance that I had researched, as well as a numeric indicator representing the individual school.⁸⁹ The documents were not anonymous, therefore I removed names and other identifying factors when inputting the response into Excel. At the same time, I took advantage of having access to named documents, since it enabled me to 'match' 189 individual students' baseline and endpoint surveys and create a secondary dataset for additional statistical testing.

Once all dataset was completed in Excel, it was exported into SPSS for statistical testing. As Chapter 5 will describe, I conducted numerous tests on the data: 'chi square' tests determined relationships of association between student and teacher School Linking experiences and demographic data, 'Mann-Whitney U tests and Wilcoxon signed ranks' tests measured the extent to which attitudes captured through Likert scale data changed over the duration of School Linking and tests for 'spearman correlation' explored how students' enjoyment of School Linking was connected to the attitudes students' reportedly developed. The following chapter presents the findings of the secondary data analysis.

4.4.2: Phase two: primary data

⁸⁹ Doing this mitigates the risk of the research assuming homogeneity between schools of the same faith ethos (see Section 3.3.2).

Participants and access

This phase of the research was undertaken with participants in the 2017-18 School Linking year, in which there were seventy-four classes from sixty-eight schools; an increase on the previous year. Eleven classes from ten 2016-17 schools did not return for 2017-18, however fifteen classes from thirteen schools joined in 2017-18 for the first time. The demographic makeup of the 2017-18 classes remained largely unchanged, as did the proportion of classes being linked 'like for like', suggesting that F&BF's rationale for linking schools had not changed. The data collected and analysed for this chapter excludes Birmingham,⁹⁰ so focuses only on fifty-one classes from forty-five schools based in and around London.

2017-18 was the first year in which F&BF held a separate School Linking programme exclusively for one London borough: Waltham Forest. The request for this borough-specific training originated from the UK government Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the final programme was developed by F&BF through consultation with TLN. The training, including its venue in the borough, was funded by the Local Authority, with teachers recruited through advertising in local schools and amongst the local Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACRE) network. A Local Authority representative was present at the first and second CPD training days.

As Figure 4.1 illustrated, I designed the second phase of my research in order to capture the perspectives of as many actors involved in School Linking as possible. My data collection tools were designed to reach all teachers in the 2017-18 School Linking programme, the schools' senior leadership, and the parents or guardians of students taking part in the scheme. Due to ethical constraints (see Section 4.5), access to the School Linking students was limited. However, in consultation with F&BF I identified four 'focus schools' in which to conduct participant observation during the Link Days.⁹¹ All of my focus schools

⁹⁰ Birmingham was excluded for three reasons: to minimise practical disruption to the research (I am based near London), to restrict the context to a single setting and because School Linking was far newer and less established in Birmingham than London.

⁹¹ The procedure through which the schools consented to take part in the research is outlined in Section 4.5.

were secondary schools (because secondary schools were significantly underrepresented in the secondary data analysis) and all Linking Teachers had previous experience of the School Linking programme.

In the following chapters, the focus schools are designated with the letter A, B, C or D. Focus school A was a Church of England-ethos, co-educational school in East London. The Linking Class I observed, however, was made up exclusively of female students.⁹² It was a large well-resourced school, with approximately 750 students in total. The school performed at 10% below the England average level of academic performance and had more than three times the England average levels of ethnic diversity and more than two-and-a-half times the England average levels of socio-economic deprivation. Teacher A, who represented the school was male, aged approximately in his thirties. He was the school Chaplain, a RE teacher and the schools' Ethos and Values Coordinator. When I undertook the research, he had taught at the school for eleven years and had been part of School Linking for three years.

School B was linked with School A. School B was a single sex (female) Muslim-ethos school in East London. It was a small school, with approximately twenty students per year group. Levels of ethnic diversity and socio-economic deprivation were not accessible, however in contrast to School A, School B performed at 51% above the England average levels of academic performance (94% compared to 33% for School A). Teacher B had been leading School Linking for five years, (since she joined the school). She was aged in her twenties or thirties and was a class teacher as well as the school's Citizenship Coordinator.

School C was a Jewish-ethos school in North London. Although it was co-educational, the Linking Class I observed was exclusively male.⁹³ It was a very large and well-resourced school, with student numbers totalling 1,400-1,500 and approximately 180 in Year 9 (the year in which students take part in School Linking). The school performed at 29% above the England average levels of academic performance, and had lower than average levels of ethnic diversity and

⁹² Within the school, there was an additional (boys) link taking place this year with a boys' Muslim-ethos school, which I did not observe.

⁹³ Like in School A, there was an additional (girls') link taking place this year with a girls' Muslim-ethos school

socio-economic deprivation (the latter being more than two-thirds below the national average). Teacher C was male and aged approximately in his thirties. As well as being the Linking Teacher, his role in the school is Jewish Educator and Head of Student Voices. He joined the school in 2015 following a post as a formal class teacher in another Jewish-ethos school.

Lastly, School D was linked with School C. It was a Muslim-ethos school in North-East London and was single-sex (boys). It was a small school, with approximately twenty to twenty-five students per year group. Like School B, data for levels of ethnic diversity and socio-economic deprivation was unable, however in contrast to School C, the school was performing at 7% below the England average for secondary academic performance. Teacher D, a male class teacher in his 30's, had been at the school for over ten years.

Data collection

As Figure 4.5 illustrates, the primary data were collected through online surveys, focus groups and participant observation over the period of one academic year.

Figure 4.5: Timeline of phase two data collection



I designed and circulated two online surveys. First, all teachers from the London and Waltham Forest-specific CPD training were asked to complete an open-ended survey and distribute it to colleagues in their schools at the beginning of the School Linking year (see Appendix 2, Item 1). The survey was emailed to the teachers two weeks prior to the first CPD days and reintroduced in person at the first CPD days, allowing time for the teachers to ask questions. After the first CPD days (October 2017), F&BF circulated the survey link via email to all teachers. I also distributed paper versions of the survey to teachers at the first CPD day to forward to headteachers and school governors. Responses were anonymous, so it was impossible to detail the specific classes which were represented. However, I achieved a relatively good response rate (thirty-nine of fifty-one Linking Teachers). Whilst only a limited number of additional school colleagues completed the survey (and no school governors), I received responses from two headteachers. The purpose of the survey was to act as a baseline, and I worded my questions to generate open-ended data on the participants' expectations of School Linking.

Parents or guardians of all students on the programme were similarly invited to take part in an online survey towards the end of the programme (see Appendix, Item 10). After the final CPD days (April 2018), teachers were given the survey link in an A5 flyer to distribute to parents. The purpose of the survey was to collect additional data on the role of School Linking outside of the school community. I do not know how many parents received the invitation to participate,⁹⁴ however I only received five responses and the respondents left many survey questions unanswered. Due to the extremely small sample, I made the decision to exclude this data from my analysis.

I did not undertake formal pilot studies of the two surveys. I acknowledge that there are risks involved in this approach, including missing opportunities to improve the internal validity of the survey through refining questions (Peat et al. 2002), gain an initial impression of participant's understanding of the project (Danesh 2015) or identify potential practical issues regarding dissemination and

⁹⁴ I recognise that non-participation may have been a result of teachers not giving the flyers to students, or students not giving the flyers to their parents or guardians, rather than refusal on the part of the parent or guardian to participate.

participant completion (van Teijlingen et al. 2004). However, to mitigate these risks I informally piloted the surveys within my research centre; four colleagues with backgrounds in the sociology of religion and education completed a test-run of the survey and fed back on their understanding of the survey question wording and their experiences of completing the survey online and/or on paper.

I held focus groups with the teachers attending the third CPD days. All teachers attended the Waltham Forest training (thirteen teachers in three focus groups), but only sixteen (out of an expected thirty-five) attended the London-wide training (where I conducted a further four focus groups).⁹⁵ The purpose of the focus groups was to discuss the outcomes of School Linking in relation to the teachers' expectations that they shared at the start of the programme. As such, anonymous descriptive content from the online surveys (in the form of a 'word cloud' depicting the 100 most common words in the survey responses, alongside a sample of quotes) was presented to the teachers during the focus groups as discussion points (see Appendix 2, Item 3).⁹⁶

With this in mind, I guided the data collection in both the online surveys and the focus groups around the three headings of 'knowledge', 'skills' and 'attitudes' to aid comparison between expectations of the programme and reported outcomes. There were both theoretical and methodological reasons behind my choice of headings. From a theoretical standpoint, Chapter 2 has already outlined how a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes constituted "intercultural competence" within intercultural education literature (Jackson 2014a: 34), a body of literature explored in relation to F&BF's 2018 change in organisational identity (see section 1.3). Furthermore, the terms (or very slight variations on the terms) have been used to frame learning in Religious Education (RE, Broadbent 2002: 166), citizenship education (Jackson 2003a: 83) and peace education (Fountain 1999: 1). As Section 4.3.1 outlined and as will be revisited in

⁹⁵ The implications of the lack of attendance at CPD days is discussed in Chapter 6.

⁹⁶ I was unable to pilot the focus group resources with School Linking participants since the target sample was so small, however, following Breen's (2006) guide to piloting focus group research, I built in potential "modifications" (2006: 471) to the focus group design. For example, I structured in time at the start of the focus groups for participants to request clarification on questions about which they were unsure.

Section 10.5, my findings can be applied to the reassessment of theories in future research agendas. Ordering the data in this manner aids this process.

There is also methodological justification for framing my primary data collection in this way. I was critical in Section 4.3.1 of the tendency for theories of change to operationalise the concepts involved with a series of indicators. Indeed, researchers have highlighted the particular issue of measuring such concepts of knowledge, skills and attitudes, particularly in the area of religion and education. First, the development of “a range of specific and general transferable skills” was advocated as a key element of the Commission on Religious Education’s (2018: 29) report, and attitudes to religious diversity were posited as “an acquired skill” for young people by Arweck and Ipgrave (2017: 24), both discussed in Chapter 2. However, Kay (2007: 99) argues that “skills discourse is often intellectually incoherent or inapplicable to Religious Education”, since there is “no agreed definition of skills, of their breadth, of their relationship to one another” (2007: 106). The same can be said for attitudes.⁹⁷ The task of measuring attitudes and attitudinal change has been described as “the most difficult of all evaluation tasks” (Henerson, Lyons Morris and Taylor Fitz-Gibbon 1978: 11) because attitudes may not be accurately reflected in behaviour, they can continuously fluctuate and are open to interpretation when articulated. Lastly, my epistemological reflections in Section 4.2 distinguish between multiple levels of knowledge. As the following chapter will reveal, ‘knowledge’ is framed in F&BF’s evaluation documentation as a key outcome of School Linking for students, but the *type* of knowledge, and its role as a mediator for the development of peaceful relations is questioned in Chapters 8 and 9. Essentially, by specifically framing the primary data collection in my surveys and focus groups in such a way that the concepts of knowledge, skills and attitudes are interpreted, articulated and discussed by a variety of actors in School Linking aids me in exploring the complexity of the concepts in more detail than a straightforward ‘theory of change’ approach would allow.

Lastly, I conducted participant observation at all London and Waltham Forest CPD training days and six Link Days conducted by my focus schools (as

⁹⁷ Defined as “all the objectives we want to measure that have to do with affect, feelings, values, or beliefs” (Henerson, Lyons Morris and Taylor Fitz-Gibbon 1978: 13).

well as an additional assembly at School A).⁹⁸ All Linking Teachers attended at least one CPD training session, so all schools are represented in this data. Conversely, my focus schools represent, by design, a very small sample of students in School Linking and I do not claim that my findings can be generalised to students outside of the sample. Rather, this aspect of participant observation was purposefully selected to provide an in-depth analysis of the Link Days themselves. Selecting a small sample alongside the wide-scale secondary data analysis and all-school surveys and focus groups allowed me a space to conduct my participant observation by drawing upon ethnographic techniques advocated for research into religion and education, without being overstretched.

My participant observation framework was inspired by the more than twenty-five years of ethnographic research in RE by the Warwick Religions and Education Research unit (WRERU) at the University of Warwick. WRERU's stance is that we are all "already amateur ethnographers every day in our homes, classrooms [or] staff rooms" (Nesbitt 2002: 112) by virtue of mixing, talking and listening and forming and revising judgements about others and the way in which we live in the world. According to Nesbitt (2002), these activities form the basis of an ethnographic approach to religion and education if "carried out methodically, purposefully and rigorously" (2002: 113). In line with this approach, formal piloting of my participant observation was unnecessary (and was similarly unrealistic, since piloting observation in a school context could not take place outside of term-time). Rather, adopting a reflexive stance enabled me to pilot and refine my observation techniques in between CPD and Link Days. I evaluated my fieldnotes and observation protocols throughout the process and ensured that rigorous inquiry into this aspect of my data collection was the subject of supervisory team meetings throughout the fieldwork.

I recognised that I was spending relatively little time within my focus schools. However, as Parker-Jenkins (2018: 24) states, "It is not the time spent

⁹⁸ Changes to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) came into effect in May 2018, before my final Link Day observation. As Section 4.5.2 outlines, a combination of passive parental consent and active consent from the students' was used for the collection of student-level data. Due to GDPR changes, I was unable to collect verbal data from students during School A and B's final Link Day, or School A's assembly. However, I remained present at the activities to observe the teachers.

in the field alone but immersion in the context and/or data collection". I align myself with her argument that since my research questions pertain to a *specific* aspect of school life (the implementation of School Linking), "immersion in the field for a long time may not be required or appropriate" (2018: 24). To manage expectations of what might be achieved from this strand of the research, I adopted Parker-Jenkins' (2018) 'ethno-case study' approach, the aim of which is to, "better convey the sense of an inquiry concerning people, which employs techniques associated with long-term and intensive ethnography, but which is limited in terms of scope and time spent in the field" (2008: 24). With this in mind, I designed a participant observation protocol and ensured that I discussed findings with my supervisory team throughout the process to maintain a reflective approach. In doing so, analysis of the fieldnotes generated from my participant observation advances theoretical and epistemological debate about the framework within in which School Linking is played out in different spaces and for different participants.

Data cleaning and analysis

The focus groups were transcribed and the files uploaded to NVivo (the audio files were deleted). The fieldnotes generated through the participant observation were also uploaded into the same NVivo project, so the data could be analysed alongside each other. In total, my qualitative primary data consisted approximately 90,000 words of transcripts and fieldnotes.

In NVivo, I undertook thematic analysis, following Strauss' (1987) four guidelines when coding my focus group transcripts and participant observation fieldnotes. First, I continued to ask myself whether the data are pertinent to my research objective. Second, in the initial stages of coding I analysed the data minutely to ensure sound grounding for my later, systematic coding. Third, I built in reflection time to the coding process to allow me to write theoretical or methodological notes as they arose. Lastly, I was sure to never assume the

relevance of 'traditional' variables (for example, gender or age) unless the data showed them to be relevant to my research objective.

Throughout the coding process, and in line with my epistemological and evaluative standpoints outlined in Sections 4.2 and 4.3.1, I took an inductive reasoning approach to my qualitative analysis. Inductive reasoning is "a form of theory development in which the analyst seeks to discover the crucial patterns that can best explain the data" (Berg and Lune 2012: 369) and presents a contrast to deductive reasoning processes which are often based around hypothesis or theory testing. I recognise that there is an ongoing epistemological debate around inductive reasoning; as the researcher, my own knowledge fill a "logical gap" (Ketokivi and Mantere 2010: 316) when interpreting the data and translating it into theory. However, being aware of this helped to ensure that the voices of my participants were accurately represented in my reasoning and the quality of my interpretation matched that found within similar projects:

...the findings reflect the voices of the young people in the study and, using the language of interpretive social scientists, these voices in turn reflect the impressions that they decided, whether consciously or unconsciously, to convey." (Madge, Hemming and Stenson 2014: 42)

From an evaluative point of view, I adopted the position of the 'reflective practitioner', an approach channelling an "inductive, theory-building process that is based on daily experiences" (Lederach, Neufeldt and Culberston 2007: 45). This approach addressed many of my critiques of deductive approaches described in Section 4.3.1. They highlight the following (2007: 5):

Ask why not only about the nature of the project, but about how particular activities are related to project outcomes.

When you ask why, listen for "because" [...] Dig deeper. Go beyond the initial "because" to find the reasons and unspoken ideas behind the rationale.

Watch carefully for the unexpected – Little things along the way that almost go unnoticed and unexpected changes often provide insight into the complexity of the change process.

Combining a carefully thought through epistemological and evaluative approach to my primary data analysis enabled me to access the complexity of the data. What is more, I did not concern myself with the concrete assertion of causal inference. Rather, my analytical role enabled me to suspect, suggest or question the assumptions and causal framework underlying School Linking's context-specific processes of relationship building. This approach prepared the data in such a way that academic theory could be reassessed in light of my findings in the final phase of the research.

4.5: Limitations and ethical considerations

4.5.1: Anonymity, reliability and validity

Throughout my research I adhered to Coventry University's 'Data Protection and Principles and Standards of Conduct on the Governance of Applied Research policies' at all times. I created a 'data management plan' to ensure the safety of my data and participants, which was approved by the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations Ethics Committee.

Anonymity was ensured through the following steps. When notes were transcribed, names were anonymised and any references to named individuals removed from the transcript during the 'data cleaning' process. For analysis purposes, participants were asked demographic details in the surveys, such as school, role title and family background, however this information is not revealed in this thesis in such a way that they could be identified as the respondent. Anonymous quotes were collected for inclusion in the thesis and other publications. This was made clear in the participant information sheets for the teachers, the parents or guardians and the students. During participant

observation of the Link Days, if a parent had opted out or a child had not given consent or assent (see next section for details) quotes from that young person were excluded from the data collection. My focus schools are anonymised in the thesis at all times, however because the study of School Linking was designed partly at the request of F&BF, the organisation and programme are not anonymised.

I ensured reliability⁹⁹ in my research by being transparent about case selection criteria, clearly outlining my data collection techniques and describing in detail my methods of analysis. However, by design, this research challenged the underlying assumption of the positivist approach; that generalisations can be made which supersede the context. As Section 4.3 described, part of the purpose of doing a case study is to paint the context first in order to understand the specific processes involved. Similarly, my evaluative stance outlined in Section 4.3.1 questions the assertion that such research should be replicable, therefore I do not claim that my findings can be applied outside of my research sample. Rather, my findings contribute to a number of academic debates (see Chapters 2 and 3) and develop a theory of 'peaceful relations' that may inform or generate discussion in other contexts (see Chapter 9).

As far as validity is concerned, I recognise a need to define the study subjects were I aiming to improve construct validity.¹⁰⁰ However, in line with my epistemological underpinnings, I was not concerned with operational measures; rather a *purpose* of the research is to reassess academic understanding of the concept of 'peaceful relations' (see my fourth research question).

Finally, I recognise the limits of denoting my research as 'longitudinal'. As stated previously, however, Hamilton et al. (2013) specified a study of one academic year as 'longitudinal' in their contribution on case study approaches to the British Educational Research Association's *Research Methods in Education* literature, and Parker-Jenkins' (2018) 'ethno-case study' approach to educational research manages expectations of the outcomes achievable in a given timeframe. I acknowledge that in a school context, where teachers may change

⁹⁹ The goal of which is to "minimize the errors and biases in a study" (Yin 2009: 45).

¹⁰⁰ Defined as "identifying correct operational measures for the concepts being studied" (Yin 2009: 40).

every year, the long-term impact of School Linking may be better understood once the students are no longer in the Linking Teacher's class. However, given the time restrictions of this PhD studentship, this limitation is unavoidable.

4.5.2: Consent and young people¹⁰¹

The active consent of my participants was secured through a number of methods. A participant information sheet was distributed to Linking Teachers two weeks before the research commenced, and at the first CPD day I met them individually, allowed time for questions and all teachers signed a consent form covering their participation in a) the CPD training participant observation and b) the focus groups. In terms of the Link Day observation, once my focus school teachers agreed to participate in principle, a clause was inserted into their 'linking agreement', a document drawn up between F&BF and the Linking teacher at the start of the academic year. The Linking Teacher, a member of F&BF staff and the schools' headteacher signed the agreement. The signing of the document illustrated the schools' consent in its legal capacity in loco parentis for my presence as an external observer, in line with their legal duty of care. I obtained an 'enhanced' Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate to attend the Link Days at the neutral venues and school sites.¹⁰²

As this chapter has demonstrated, however, I also wished to capture the perspectives of students taking part in School Linking. As researchers (for example Morris, Hegarty and Humphreys 2012) advocate, where adult-centric initiatives or policies directly impact young people and concern potentially sensitive topics (and I argue that School Linking is such an example), young

¹⁰¹ As all observed classes will be of secondary school age, I regard my student participants as 'young people' as opposed to 'children'. David et al.'s (2001) research gathered data in classrooms, with only primary schools requesting parental consent. That the research could be conducted in secondary schools without the consent of parents illustrates that, "young people [were] being regarded by their educational gatekeepers as having the competence to make an autonomous decision about participation in ways that children were not" (2001: 361).

¹⁰² A DBS certificate is obtained following a government check for criminal convictions.

people under the age of 16 should be included in research as “it helps to raise these often unacknowledged voices to the forefront” (Pickles 2019: 34).

Following a lengthy consultation process with the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relation’s Ethics Committee, the question of consent was resolved by taking the position of that young people be presented with information in line with their *competencies*,¹⁰³ rather than their age, to be fully informed to consent to participating in social research (Morrow and Richards 1996). As such, I acquired passive parental consent (i.e. a parent ‘opts out’ of the research should they wish their child not take part). This is in line with researchers who advocate a move towards passive parental consent for ‘whole’ classroom based research, (Berg and Lune 2012, David, Edwards and Alldred 2001, Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher 2009). To reiterate, my research did not take the extreme view that parental consent was unnecessary. Nor did my participant observation protocol include data provided by a young person who has consented to participating, but whose parent/guardian ‘opted out’. Rather, it aligns itself with Alderson (1995), who acts on the assumption that school age participants are competent *unless* the parent/guardian states otherwise. In the same way, if a young person did not consent or show assent at any stage, their data was excluded, regardless of whether their parent/guardian opted out.¹⁰⁴

There are further practical benefits to a passive parental consent approach. For example, it can ensure that the sample studied is representative by avoiding the issue of low written consent response rates:

In the past, researchers who have employed an active consent style have reported that it yields unacceptably low response rates. This translates into

¹⁰³ The notion of ‘competence’ (or ‘Gillick competence’) stretches back to the 1985 House of Lords decision that anyone under the age of 16, though not automatically deemed legally competent, can consent if he or she has a sufficient ‘understanding’ of their involvement in the research. In other words, parental consent is not a legal requirement in the case of a ‘competent’ young person.

¹⁰⁴ With regard to *vulnerable* young people, although literature generally agrees that “consent from parents, guardians or other representative is generally necessary in relation to research with children and adults who lack the ‘capacity’ to give consent for themselves” (Wiles et al. 2005), in cases where a child is deemed by the researcher to be particularly vulnerable (for example, a child whose understanding of the project or ability to communicate consent is compromised as a result of a certain disability), my protocol was designed to act on the basis that consent and assent had not been given, even if the student’s parent/guardian did not ‘opt out’ of the research.

the underrepresentation of relevant study subjects, often the very ones involved in or at risk from the study behaviours. (Berg and Lune 2012: 76).

Indeed, the expectation of a low response rate stems from the administrative pressure put on the teacher (the responsibility of circulating information sheets to the parents/guardians lies with the teacher to avoid the unnecessary sharing of contact details).¹⁰⁵ To insist on the added task of collecting signed consent forms and following up non-responders is in opposition to the British Educational Research Association's Ethical Guidelines, which state: "Researchers must recognize concerns relating to the 'bureaucratic burden' of much research [...] and must seek to minimize the impact of their research on the normal working and workloads of participants" (BERA 2011: 7).

Ultimately, an ethical position should not be taken purely because it limits administrative duties. Rather, adopting a passive consent procedure is possible without compromising the ethical integrity of the project:

...active consent requirements may be too stringent for many qualitative research endeavours. This is especially true when qualitative projects implement a series of diligent data safeguards, such as removal of identifiers, to ensure confidentiality. Carefully designed passive consent procedures can avoid various negative consequences of active consent, while still ensuring parents are being informed. (Berg and Lune 2012: 76).

I ensured that my approach was rigorous. The teachers circulated letters to parents/guardians at least three weeks in advance of the first Link Day, giving the parents/guardians sufficient time to ask questions. The participant information sheet contained an 'opt out' section for those parents who wanted their child to participate in the day, but not in the research. I wanted to recognise agency of the young people as gatekeepers for parental consent, so the letters were sent home with them (posting separately may feed into the perception that they are untrustworthy).

¹⁰⁵ A finding reiterated in my own research in Chapter 6.

I similarly recognised my obligation to ensure that the young people had the necessary information to make an informed decision regarding participation in the research. Three weeks before the Link Day the students received an A5 participant information sheet that I designed to be age-appropriate (See Appendix 2, Item 4, the students I observed were 12-14 year-olds). Recognising that there had to be interaction to determine whether the information was understood by the participant and an *explicit act* or response that affirmed the participation of the student, at the Link Day I explicitly asked students how they understood the research and if they would like to participate.

Beyond this the concept of 'assent' was invoked at all times, defined by Groundwater-Smith, Dockett and Bottrell (2015: 46) as "where children and young people have the right to revoke or renegotiate participation throughout the research. Providing or renegotiating assent can involve researchers attending to the behaviours and actions of children and young people, as well as their verbal interactions". I established assent throughout the Link Days by giving the young people coloured cards, which they will held to signify their consent to the research (green = consent, yellow = outstanding questions, red = refusal). The cards were used as a tool for a young person to exclude a statement from the observation notes, and encourage active participation in the research. The Link Days took place over the course of a year with the same participants, so the importance of ongoing assent was heightened and it was gained at every stage of the research. This is in line with Alderson and Morrow's (2011: 114) advocacy:

[C]hildren gradually become more informed and able to make their own decisions about whether to confirm or to end the consent agreement given at first by their parents, and they should have the chance to do this at each renewed research contact.

Moreover, invoking the assent of the young people mitigated the risk of a situation occurring whereby they felt obliged to take part because an adult has

sanctioned their participation (Balen et al. 2006).¹⁰⁶ However, I was introduced to the classes by an adult in a position of authority: their teacher, and some Linking Teachers insisted that the students called me “Miss”. Chapter 7 explores power dynamics within the School Linking programme at the levels of students, parents or guardians and teachers. However, my positionality as researcher in the room did not exclude me from potentially affecting the dynamics further. As outlined in this chapter, as I recognised this potential issue, I carefully managed my positionality by invoking the ‘double reflexive’ nature of my research and following the approach of the ‘reflective practitioner’. This enabled me to identify to what extent, and how, my own presence as ‘researcher’ affected the participants’ perceptions of experiences of School Linking, the data generated by the participants, and my interpretations of the data analysis process.

4.6: Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to defend my methodological position. I outlined my epistemological standpoint as a ‘constructivist with pragmatic tendencies’, before defending my decision to undertake a single case study of F&BF’s School Linking programme. The triangulation of mixed methods was posited in order to explore four individual research questions and, collectively, capture the detail of my case study from multiple perspectives. To explore the research questions, my research design was structured around three distinct phases.

The first phase of my research addressed my first research question through the quantitative collection and analysis of secondary data (F&BF’s evaluation data collected from teachers and students on the 2016-17 School Linking programme). The findings from this phase are presented in Chapter 5. Conversely, the second stage explored research questions two and three through

¹⁰⁶ I witnessed an incident of a student entering the Link Day involuntarily during my participant observation, discussed in Chapter 7.

qualitative methods (focus group discussions driven by open-ended online survey answers and participant observation). My qualitative findings are presented in chapters 6 to 8. My research designed invoked 'double reflexivity' (Knauth and Vieregge 2019: 32) by developing the conditions necessary to reassess academic theory in the research's third phase. I have chosen contact theory in this instance, which is discussed in Chapter 9.

This chapter similarly addressed the evaluative nature of my research. Section 4.3.1 outlined the ways in which I am critical of practitioner-led approaches to evaluation which utilise 'theory of change'. Instead of establishing concrete causal inferences, my research sought to explore the *complexities* underlying the ways in which School Linking informs or inhibits peaceful relations at multiple levels, including those that potentially contribute to change processes. My inductive reasoning approach to my primary data analysis embraced my epistemological standpoint and allowed me to uncover unexpected findings, access the rationale behind participants' views or behaviours and explore 'how' multiple findings interact in relation to School Linking's stated aims. This approach ideally positioned me to reassess contact theory in Chapter 9 in a way that was "contextually responsive" (Datta 1997: 34) to School Linking and its actors.

For this reason, my research is defended against the reliability and validity critiques explored in the closing section of this chapter. However, the section recognised the nuances of ethical considerations when conducting research with young people. I outlined my rigorous protocols for gaining a combination of passive parental consent and active consent and assent from my participants, based within supporting academic literature. Furthermore, my reflective stance enabled me to consider my positionality as a researcher in the classroom throughout the duration of the research so that I was mindful of how my own participation shaped the perceptions and experiences of the actors in my case study.

CHAPTER 5

Quantitative data analysis: A year of School Linking

5.1: Introduction

This chapter answers my first research question, ‘what impact can be captured from the Faith and Belief Forum’s evaluation data?’ and serves as the backdrop to which my other research questions are addressed. The chapter analyses secondary data provided by The Faith and Belief Forum (F&BF), comprising five evaluation documents collected during the 2016-17 academic year. Chapter 4 described the demographics of the students and teachers taking part in School Linking during that year and detailed the response rates, per evaluation document. That discussion illustrated problems with response rates leading to various demographic variables being over- and under-represented in the datasets (see Section 4.4.1). It also highlighted that F&BF’s rationale behind the ‘linking’ decisions may have significant implications for participants’ perceptions and experiences of the programme. The five documents upon which this chapter’s analysis is based are outlined in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: A summary of the evaluation documents’ response rates, sample sizes and representativeness

Evaluation document	Item in Appendix 1	Response rate (out of 52 classes, %)	Number of documents
Student baseline surveys	1 and 3	57.7	777
Student endpoint surveys	2 and 4	25.0	260
Student reflection forms	8	Unknown ¹⁰⁷	390
Teacher baseline surveys	5	75.0	49

¹⁰⁷ Not provided to all classes.

Teacher endpoint surveys	6	21.2	12
Total number of documents analysed			1488

This chapter first presents findings from my analysis of the student baseline and endpoint surveys which were completed at the beginning and end of School Linking. The surveys comprised four sections, which I analysed in turn: feelings and approaches towards School Linking, discussions that take place during School Linking; changes in knowledge, skills and attitude that occur by the end of School Linking; and the factors that contribute to the enjoyment of School Linking. The student reflection forms assess the enjoyment of School Linking in relation to what students report they have learnt about themselves and their Link School during the Link Day. I will use these to illustrate, corroborate, or dispute themes in the baseline and endpoint survey analysis.

Descriptively, analysis reveals that students report a generally positive experience of School Linking. Where analysis considers the minority of findings that are less positive, however, issues of religious illiteracy and conflicting ideas of 'difference' are revealed. What is more, the demographic variables of student age, teacher 'experience'¹⁰⁸ and whether or not a school has a faith ethos are identified as significant influencers over student perceptions of School Linking.

The chapter then turns to the teacher baseline and endpoint surveys which are structured around three levels: the teachers themselves, their students, and the wider school and community. My analysis reveals inconsistencies between the teachers' assessment of their students' experiences and the students' own reporting, and exposes a difficulty or reluctance from the teachers to articulate the contribution of School Linking to the wider community. It also identifies that challenges foreseen by the teachers stem from issues around capacity, resources and time management. The analysis further suggests that the low levels of religious literacy revealed in the student evaluation documents may stem

¹⁰⁸ An 'experienced' teacher is one which has been involved in School Linking before (see glossary).

from the teachers themselves. It also substantiates the student-level finding that the experience of the teacher can shape students' confidence.

Finally, the chapter addresses limitations and answers my first research question. Ultimately, although the critical analysis points to useful associations between programme outcomes and a number of demographic variables, I question the extent to which demographic information alone can explain, or supersede, the young people's *experiences* of School Linking. Ultimately, F&BF's evaluation documentation, as is designed, fails to capture complexities and inconsistencies of students' and teachers' accounts and so the assertions I can make about the impact of school Linking are limited.

5.2: Findings¹⁰⁹

5.2.1: Students

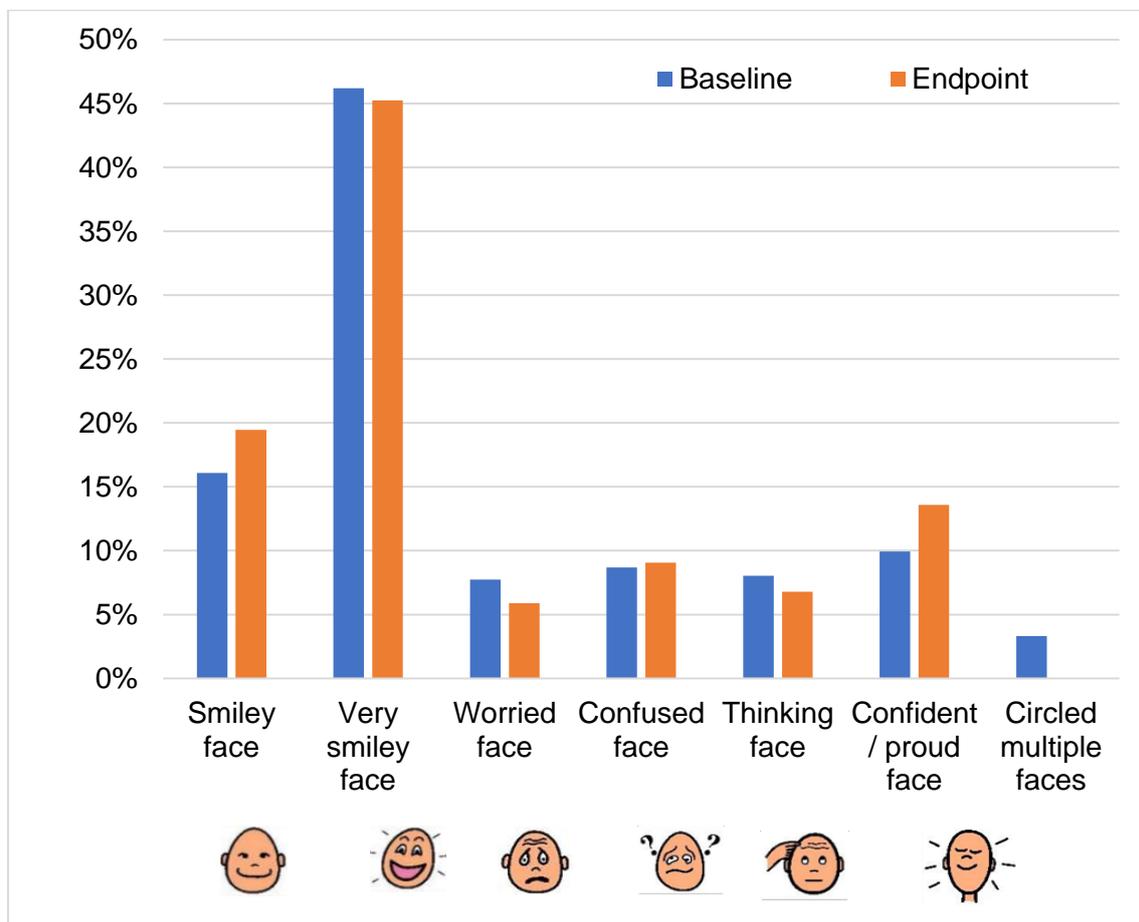
The student baseline and endpoint surveys represent the largest and most comprehensive dataset in my study. There are 777 baselines (653 primary and 124 secondary) from thirty classes and 260 endpoints (226 primary and thirty-four secondary) from thirteen classes. Within these, there are 189 baseline and endpoint surveys from twelve classes which I 'matched' per individual student. I approach the findings thematically, addressing in turn students' feelings towards Linking, interactions and discussions during Linking, attitudes before and after Linking, and students' enjoyment of Linking. Where necessary, analysis of the 390 student reflection forms is used to supplement some areas of discussion.

¹⁰⁹ In all analyses in this chapter, I have used the 0.05 significance level (p), standard in social science research. This means that I can be 95% confident that findings have not occurred by chance. If the p value is equal or smaller than 0.01 I can be 99% confident. In all cases in this chapter, where figures refer to '%', this is a percentage value that takes into account instances of participants not responding to all survey questions

Students' feelings about School Linking

Primary school students' baseline and endpoint surveys opened with the question, 'You will be meeting and working [or 'you have met and worked'] with new people. How do you feel about this?' Students were presented with six faces illustrating different emotions and asked to circle the one which best represented their feelings. The illustrations used in the survey are depicted in the Figure 5.1 below and to aid analysis I have added an adjective for each one.

Figure 5.1: Proportion of faces chosen by primary school students to illustrate how they felt at the start and end of School Linking



With regard to the frequency of the faces the students selected at baseline and endpoint, at baseline, of the 634 students who circled a face, almost three quarters (72.2%) chose the 'very smiley', 'smiley' or 'confident/proud' face. Only

16% of students chose the 'worried' or 'confused' face, and fewer than one in ten students chose the 'thinking' face. Among the 222 primary students who answered the question again at endpoint, the percentages of students selecting each face remained mostly unchanged, despite not having a sample representative of the students who completed the baseline survey, or the student Linking population in general. In fact, there is a slight increase in students circling the 'smiley' and 'confident/proud' faces, and a decrease in students identifying with the 'worried' face.

A number of demographic variables have statistically significant associations with the students' choice of face; relationships which become stronger when the faces are grouped into 'positive' and 'negative' perceptions of School Linking.¹¹⁰ Firstly, students were more likely to feel positive about the prospect of Linking if they had an 'experienced' teacher¹¹¹ or if they came from a faith school, with just one in five, or fewer, students circling a negative face.¹¹² When I undertook the same analysis by school faith ethos, there were minimal differences, supporting the REDCo project¹¹³ finding that "[i]rrespective of their religious position, a majority of pupils were interested in learning about religions in school" (Jackson and McKenna 2017: 6). Conversely, a third of students from community schools felt negative about the thought of Linking. When it came to the faith of the *Link School*, in all cases more than six in ten students felt positive about Linking with a school different from them, but negativity increased amongst students linked with Muslim-ethos, Jewish-ethos or community schools, reflecting literature which states that Muslim-ethos and Jewish-ethos school students are vulnerable to negativity or hostile behaviour (Parker-Jenkins and Glenn 2011, Runnymede Trust 2008).¹¹⁴ After Linking had taken place, the only consistent finding was negativity amongst the students linked with the three community schools was disproportionately high. This is the first association between reported hostility and the community school, a theme developed throughout this chapter.

¹¹⁰ The 'positive' category included the 'smiley', 'very smiley' and 'confident/proud' faces. The 'negative' category included the 'worried' and 'confused' faces.

¹¹¹ P = .029 N = 634.

¹¹² P = .004 N = 634.

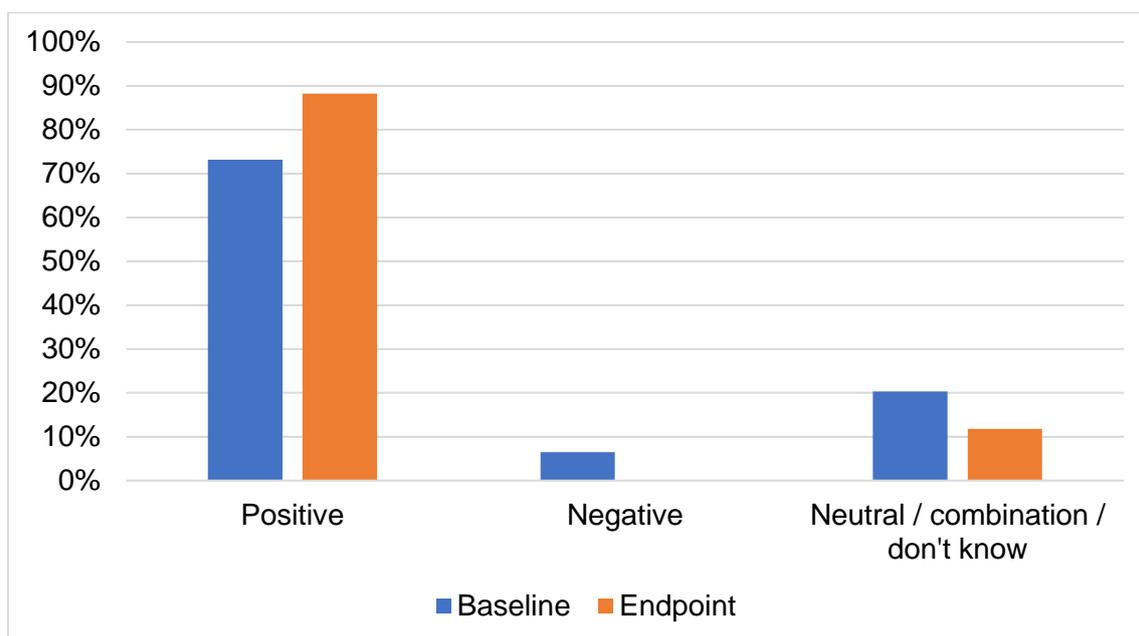
¹¹³ Discussed in Section 2.3.1.

¹¹⁴ P = .001 N = 634.

Secondly, the school year of the student, though not statistically significant, nonetheless indicates a pattern. Namely, students tended to feel more negative about the prospect of Linking as they got older. The proportion of students circling negative faces increased consecutively in every year group from 2.6% in year 3 to 20% in year 6. Conversely, the choice of positive faces falls by over 10% from years 3 to 6. This finding generally aligns with previous evaluations of similar programmes. Raw's (2006) evaluation of The Linking Network (TLN) identified year 6 students as the least effective primary year group for the programme because at that age, "children's focus is absorbed by their transition to secondary school" (2006: 58).

Unlike primary students, secondary school students were not given a choice of faces to choose from at the beginning and end of school Linking. Rather, they were asked to provide a free text response to, 'You will be meeting and working [or 'you have met and worked'] with new people. How do you feel about this and why?' I coded the responses to the first part of the question into 'positive', 'negative' and 'neutral' categories to aid comparison with the primary school responses. Figure 5.2 shows the frequency of each category.

Figure 5.2: Proportion of secondary school students' positive/neutral/negative responses to School Linking



Due to the small sample size (123 students answered this question at baseline and thirty-four at endpoint), it is not possible to identify any statistically significant demographic influences over the students' feelings towards Linking. However, at baseline level, ninety of the 123 students gave a positive response, and although they were not asked to write a single word to describe how they felt, adjectives such as 'excited', 'happy', 'friends', 'good', 'confident' and 'interested' appeared frequently in their longer responses. A typical response was:

I feel happy and excited because I get to meet new people and learn about their religion and culture. Also I get to make new friends from a different school. (Year 8 student from a Church of England-ethos school, linked with a Muslim-ethos school)

The eight students who gave a negative response tended to refer to shyness or nervousness:

I feel that it will be a bit weird as they are from a different religion and we may look at things differently. (Year 8 student from a Church of England-ethos school, linked with a Muslim-ethos school)

The remaining twenty-five tended to draw upon a combination of positive and negative feelings, in the same way that some primary students circled multiple faces. For example:

I feel quite nervous but really excited because I don't usually like talking to people I don't know. (Year 8 student from a Muslim-ethos school, linked with a Church of England-ethos school)

Only thirty-four students answered the question at endpoint, however answers were overwhelmingly positive, with students again using words such as 'happy', 'confident', 'good' and 'excited'. There were no outright negative statements and only four other responses in which, again, the students drew upon multiple feelings:

It made me a bit uncomfortable because I don't really meet new people but this was an enjoyable experience. (Year 9 student from a Muslim-ethos school, linked with a Roman Catholic-ethos school)

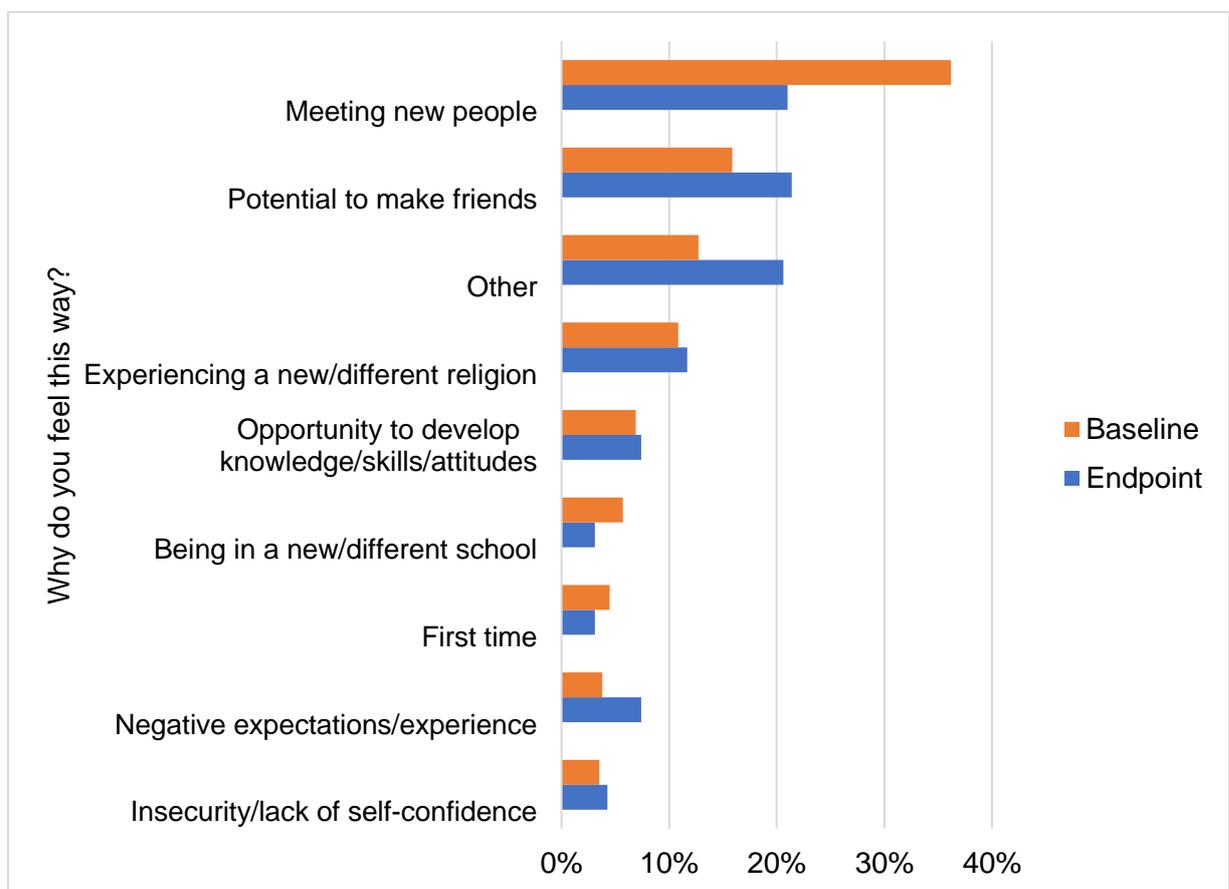
These thirty-four students had all completed baseline surveys, so it is possible to identify instances of negativity at baseline *changing* by the end of the programme. For example, the student quoted above who, at the start of School Linking, felt it would be "weird as they are from a different religion", stated in her endpoint:

It made me feel happy because even though our religions are different we are all still girls and like to do the same types of things.

All students, both primary and secondary, were then asked to give a free text response to, 'Why do you feel this way?' 615 primary school students and 123 secondary students completed this section, and I coded their open text responses into nine categories. Figure 5.3 shows the percentage of each category.

Figure 5.3: Reasons for students' emotions at the start and end of School

Linking



'Meeting new people' was the most frequent answer at baseline with over a third of students (267) stating this as the main driver behind their feelings. It remained popular at endpoint, with one in five students stating it then (fifty-four). The potential to make friends was also popular, as well as the 'other' category, in which students stated reasons such as missing school and relying on authority

figures to take part.¹¹⁵ At baseline, secondary school students were most likely to associate Linking with experiencing a new/different religion and developing knowledge/skills/attitudes:

[I feel] a bit scared because we don't believe in the same religion. (Year 8 student from a Church of England-ethos school, linked with a Muslim-ethos school).

I am interested in learning RE in a different environment and this may also help me in my GCSEs. (Year 9 student from a Muslim-ethos school, linked with a Roman Catholic-ethos school).

Primary school students, however, saw it more as an opportunity to make friends:¹¹⁶

Because ... I might start talking to her and then we'll just become friends. (Year 3 student from a Muslim-ethos school, linked with a Jewish-ethos school)

These age-based patterns of association remained unchanged in the endpoint surveys.¹¹⁷

Of course, the relationships between the students' feelings, and the reasons behind them, are complex. Some categories, such as 'insecurity or lack of self-confidence', though chosen by fewer than 5% of students, are almost exclusively linked with the 'negative' faces (the 'worried' and 'confused' faces). A typical response would be, "I am scared I will say something wrong" (Year 6 student from a Greek Orthodox-ethos school, linked with a Muslim-ethos school). However, other categories are not so clear cut. Appendix 3, Item 1 present a table

¹¹⁵ As well as saying 'don't know', just repeating the word they had written under their face (at primary school) and stating a combination of reasons.

¹¹⁶ P = .000 N = 738.

¹¹⁷ P = .002 N = 258.

summarising the most frequently stated adjectives and reasons given for feelings towards School Linking for both primary and secondary school students.

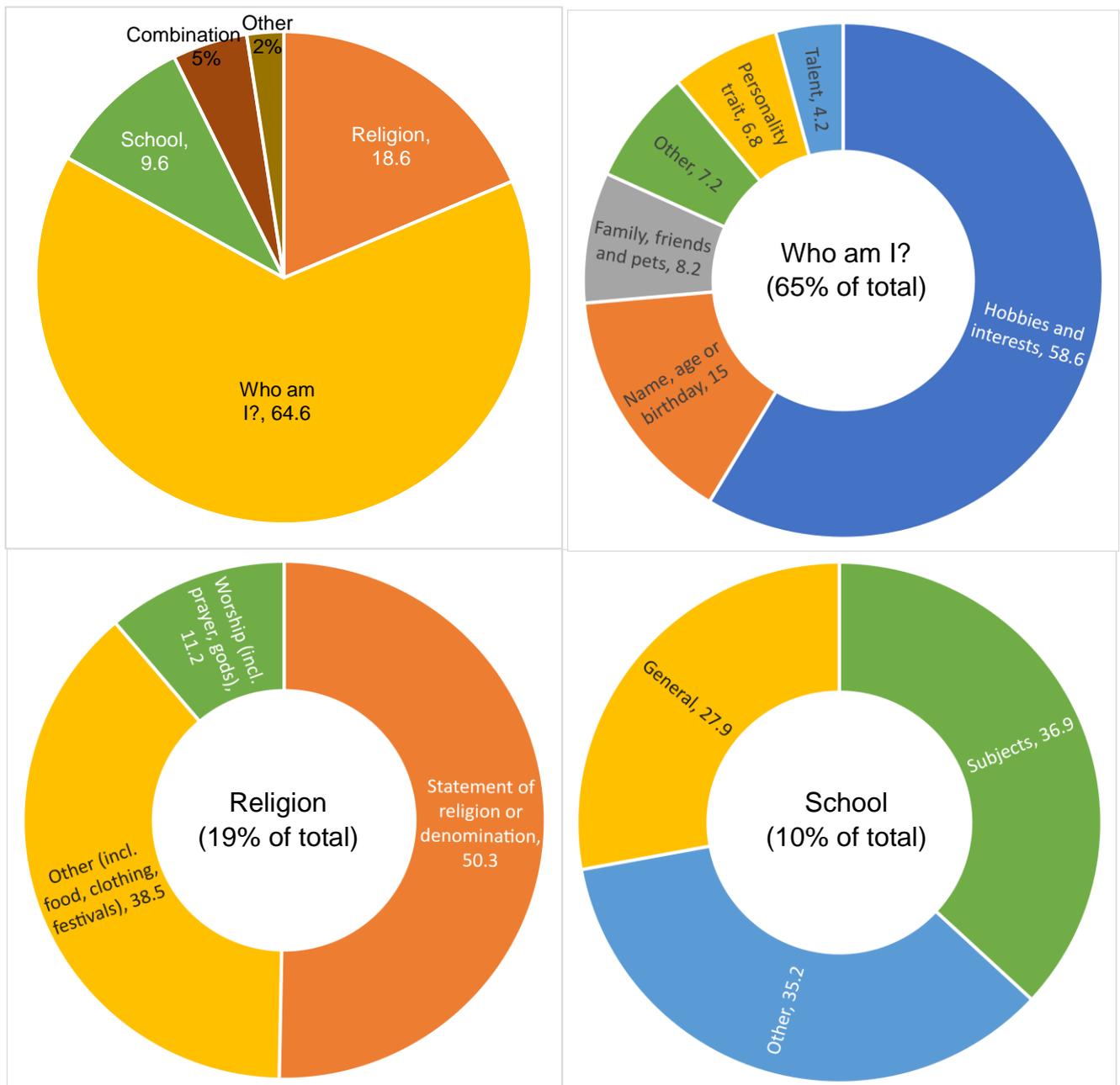
To summarise this section, the descriptive analysis portrays a very positive picture of attitudes towards School Linking, with generally encouraging responses both before and after School Linking in response to students being asked simply how they felt about the experience. However, the emotions and reasons given are complex. Two demographic variables appear to have an influence over students' perceptions: student age and whether or not the school has a 'faith ethos'. Within primary schools, students feel generally more negative about the prospect of School Linking as they get older, but by secondary school are more likely to see it as an opportunity for developing (and indeed state that they have developed) knowledge, skills or attitudes. Conversely, primary school students tend to frame the purpose of School Linking making new friends. At the start of School Linking, there is increased hostility from, and towards, students from the three community schools. Whilst the endpoint survey analysis indicates that this level of hostility remained after School Linking for students from faith schools linked with students from community schools, a lack of endpoint surveys renders it impossible to determine whether this negativity is reciprocated by community school students. Finally, students' feelings towards School Linking are most often driven by the idea of meeting 'new' people. This is the first time ideas of 'difference' are introduced in this analysis; a theme which occurs throughout this chapter.

Students' discussions, similarities and differences

Given the complexity of general feelings around School Linking, it is helpful to consider the discussions that took place *during* the Link Days. At baseline, primary school students were asked to state up to three things they would like to share with, and three things they would like to ask, students from their Link School. Secondary school students were given space for one free text response. At endpoint, students were again asked what they shared with, and asked, their

Link School. I coded the total of 4,288 statements and questions into the categories of 'religion', 'who am I?' and 'school' (see Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4: What did students want to, and what did they, ask and share with students from their Link School? (%)



As the figure illustrates, in both the baseline and endpoint surveys, almost two thirds of responses concerned 'who am I?', with 'hobbies/likes and dislikes'

overwhelmingly the most popular category. This finding is echoed in other studies, for example, Loader and Hughes' (2017b: 125) evaluation of the Shared Education programme (discussed in Section 3.3.1). Almost one in five responses concerned 'religion' (with half of students simply stating their religion or denomination) almost one in ten concerned 'school' (in which responses were split almost equally between a general statement about seeing a Link School, a statement about subjects, and 'other'). Additionally, 4.9% concerned a combination of 'religion', 'who am I?' and/or 'school' and 2.4% covered 'other'.

It is possible to identify statistically significant associations with demographic variables. Firstly, students were more likely to share or ask about religion if their teacher was new to the scheme¹¹⁸ and were more likely to frame School Linking explicitly in terms of religion as they got older, with the proportion more than doubling between key stage 1 (17.3%) and 3 (35%).¹¹⁹ In fact, almost seven in ten primary school students talked about 'who am I?' (especially hobbies or likes and dislikes), compared to fewer than two in ten secondary school students.¹²⁰ What is more, the sample of two community schools had the fewest students planning to talk about religion, with fewer than one in ten doing so.

When the 4,288 statements are divided into baseline and endpoint responses, at endpoint the proportion of statements about 'religion' increases, 'who am I?' drops by almost 20%, 'school' more than halves, and there's a jump of over 20% for 'a combination'.¹²¹ These changes are driven by students sharing and asking things that contradict their expectations at baseline.

Figure 5.5 illustrates the difference in approach that the primary and secondary students took to the interaction with their Link School at baseline and endpoint.

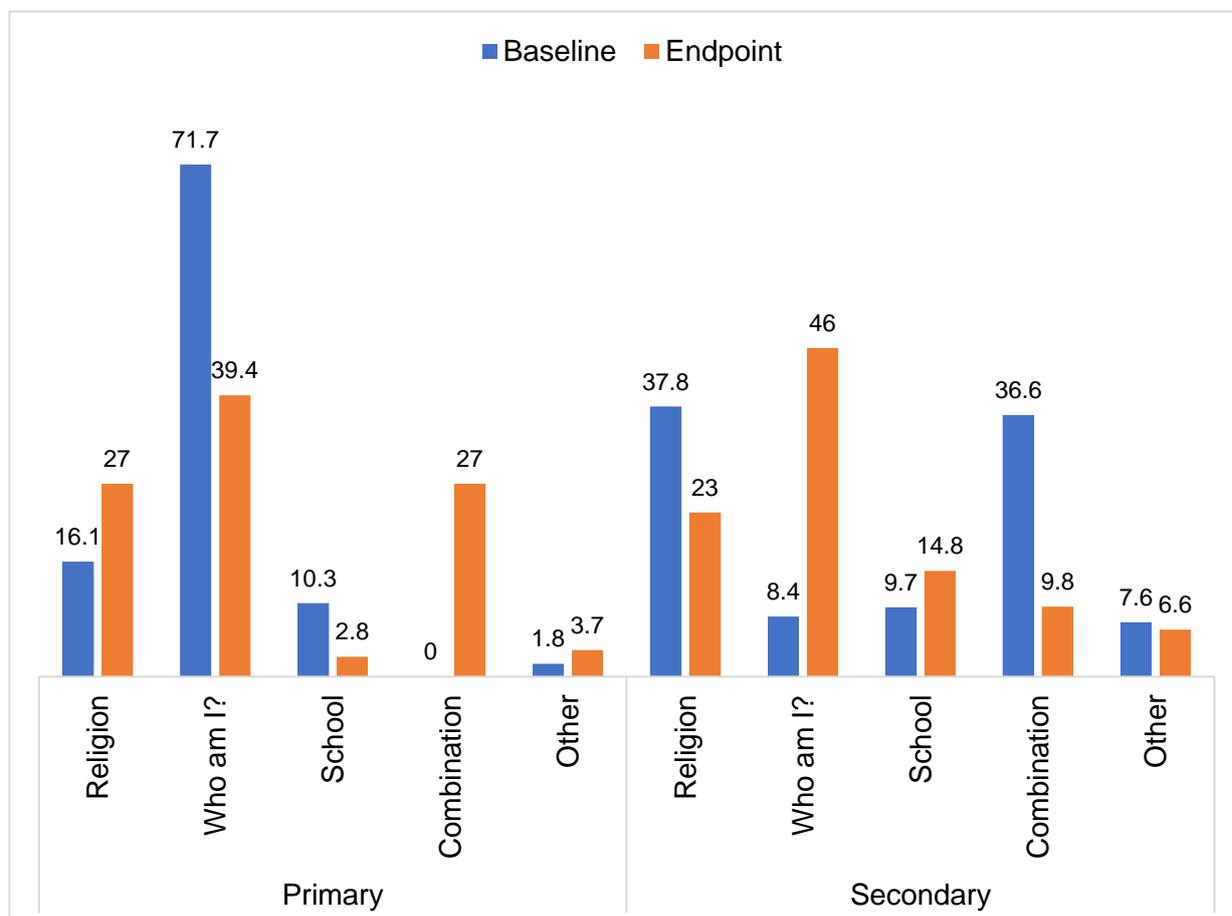
¹¹⁸ P = .000 N = 4285.

¹¹⁹ P = .000 N = 4285.

¹²⁰ P = .000 N = 4285. Note, the primary school baseline survey allowed space for more statements and questions, so primary students were overrepresented and therefore driving the overall tendency towards the 'identity' category in the above pie charts.

¹²¹ P = .000 N = 4285.

Figure 5.5: Statements students wanted to, or did, share and ask the children at their Link School, grouped by primary and secondary (%)

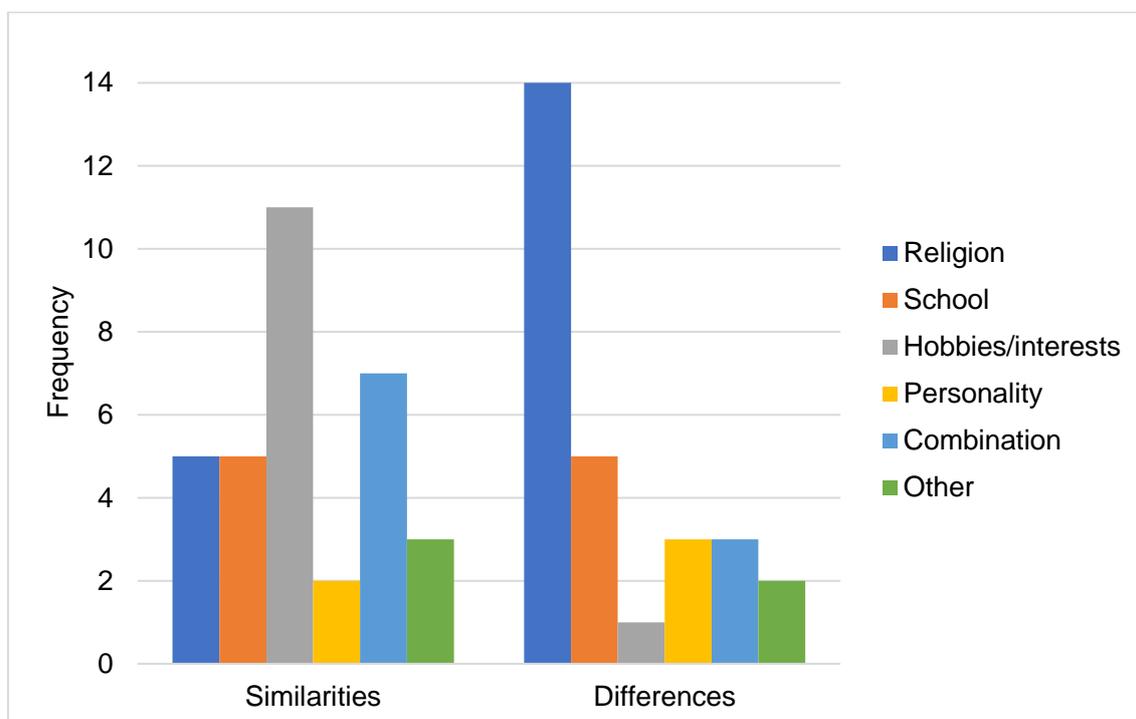


For primary school students there was a small jump in the proportion of students talking about religion and a large jump in the number of students sharing a combination of things. Primary school students did not share or ask about aspects of ‘who am I?’ as much as they had planned. For secondary school students’ there was an unexpected change in their approach to School Linking, from a religion-based exercise at baseline to one of interaction primarily formed through discussion of interests and hobbies at endpoint. The endpoint sample size is very small and therefore not generalisable. Nevertheless, the analysis illustrates how students’ experiences of Linking can contradict their expectations of the programme. Although this quantitative data points to this, it cannot give us any further information as to *why* this unexpected result occurred. My qualitative

analysis in Chapters 6 and 8 suggest that teachers' unstructured approach to the implementation of School Linking, or a lack of shared understanding of the aims of the programme, may contribute to a lack of clarification of students' expectations.

This section of the survey also asked students to identify similarities and differences with their Link School. Only secondary students were asked this (at endpoint), and they were prompted to give an open text response. I coded the thirty-three responses into six categories, 'religion', 'school', 'hobbies/interests', 'personality', 'combination' and 'other'. Figure 5.6 shows the results.

Figure 5.6: Secondary school endpoint responses to 'Can you tell us more about any similarities and differences you found?'



When it came to similarities, a third of students who answered this question found perceived similarities in hobbies/interests, mirroring findings from previous linking programme evaluations (Kerr et al. 2011: 55) and aligning with research into intercultural education which found that students perceive “shared interests” as a “precondition for peaceful coexistence” (Jackson and McKenna

2017: 7). This finding supports students' claims that they asked about, and shared, this aspect of identity with their Link School. For example:

We liked Netflix and watched similar movies. (Year 9 student from a Roman Catholic-ethos school, linked with a Muslim-ethos school)

One in five students stated a combination, for example, "We both like food and are both strong about our beliefs" (Year 9 student from a Roman Catholic-ethos school, linked with a Muslim-ethos school).¹²² All other categories were chosen by five or fewer students each. However, there are inconsistencies within similarities identified between schools linked with *each other*. For example, two classes linked together each submitted eleven endpoints. In one class, four students stated that they saw similarities in 'religion', three stated 'hobbies/interests', two stated a 'combination' and one each stated 'school' and 'personality'. No students from the Link School, however, saw any similarities with 'religion' or 'school'. Rather, seven stated 'hobbies/interests', three stated 'other' and one stated 'personality'. Fewer students from these classes answered the question on differences, but of those who did, over half of students in both classes stated 'religion' as the main difference. This data suggests either a) different student experiences of the same Link Days, or b) differences in how the survey was administered, or survey answer influenced, by their teachers.

When students were asked about the differences they found, half of all students stated 'religion', more than double that identified in evaluations of similar programmes (for example Kerr et al. (2011: 51) found that 23% of students identified differences in 'religious practices'). Responses from year 9 students from a Roman Catholic-ethos school, linked with a Muslim-ethos school included, "we don't have the same religion and we pray differently" and "Religion wise, we are extremely different but I deeply respect their opinions and reasons and faiths". The second quote contradicts Kerr et al.'s (2011: 55) finding that "pupils were more likely to perceive religious differences as problematic". However, this

¹²² The latter part of this quote raises an interesting question of question of whether children with strong but different faiths have more in common with each other than children of same but weakly held faith.

Chapter identifies that students' interpretations of the concept of "difference" in general are ambiguous at best, or explicitly negative at worst, a theme that Chapter 8 addresses directly. Only one student identified hobbies/interests as a difference and all other categories were chosen by five or fewer students.

This section has shown that, on the whole, students frame the Linking experience as one in which they primarily discuss a multitude of aspects around 'who am I?' (for example, hobbies and interests), with discussions explicitly around 'religion' a secondary theme. As Chapters 6 and 8 will argue, the extent to which teachers structure School Linking according to the CPD training, or agree upon the aims of the programme, may contribute to explaining this finding. This section has also corroborated some of the themes in the first section. First, the discussions taking place during School Linking are shaped by the same demographics: age and school faith ethos. It has also introduced the 'experience' of the teacher as another significant variable. However, despite these questions about discussion themes encouraging secondary school students to identify similarities and differences with their Link School, they do not capture the extent to which all students' perceptions *change* throughout the Linking process. I therefore turn to the next section of the findings which explicitly aim to capture this change.

Before and after – what's changed?

A significant portion of the student surveys was concentrated on seven 'Likert scale' statements. All students were asked to indicate to what extent they agree with a statement on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1, 'disagree', represented by a sad face and 5, 'agree', a smiley face (See Figure 5.7).¹²³

¹²³ Out of 847 baseline surveys, between 756 and 772 students responded to each statement (missing data ranges from 75-91). In the discussion below, descriptions of statistical significance exclude incorrectly inputted scores (by which I mean students who gave an answer between two possible options e.g. 2.5).

Figure 5.7: Likert scale questions asked to primary and secondary school students at the start of School Linking

Please circle a number 1-5 by these statements to show how much you agree with them.

The children from the Link School will be interested in me and will want to know more about me

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

I will feel able to work with the children from the Link School

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

I will feel able to talk to the children from the Link School

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

I know a lot about the faith and beliefs of my Link School

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

I think the students at my Link School will be similar to me

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

I know a lot about the faiths and beliefs of people in my class

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

I think the students at my Link School will be different to me

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

Students generally agreed with four of the statements. Firstly, over 60% of the students scored a 4 or a 5 for the statement ‘The children from the Link School will be interested in me and will want to know more about me’, with only 2.1% scoring a 1. Similarly, students were generally confident about the prospect of cooperation and interaction with their Link School, with scores for the statements, ‘I will feel able to work with the children from the Link School’ and ‘I will feel able to talk with the children from the Link School’ steadily increasing from 2% and 3.2% scoring a 1 to 43.2% and 46.4% scoring a 5, respectively. Finally, students went into Linking with good knowledge of the faiths and beliefs of their own class, with 60.8% of students scoring a 5 and just 2.9% scoring a 1 for the statement, ‘I know a lot about the faiths and beliefs of people in my class’.

Two statements followed the opposite trend, with students going into Linking seeing difference with, and knowing little about, the faiths and beliefs of, their link class. Finally, students are generally neutral about the statement, 'I think the students at my Link School will be similar to me'; the responses follow an almost perfect bell curve, with score 3 the most popular score, at 34.8%, and the range from 1-5 varying by only 25.9% each way (a far less extreme response than the agreement that students would be 'different'). As Chapter 8 will show, the approaches of some of the Linking Teachers feed into rhetoric that denigrates the concept of difference, potentially explaining this finding.

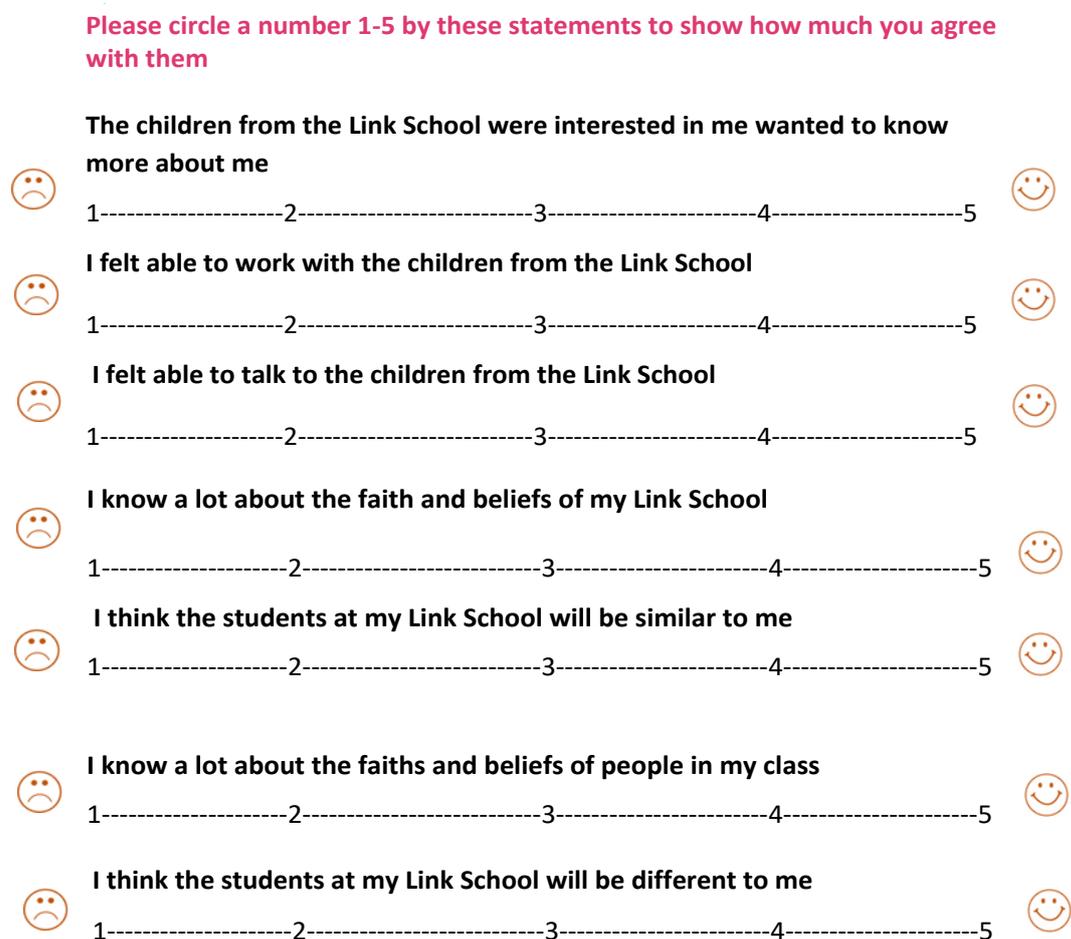
Agreeing with some statements makes it more likely that students will agree with others. The statements, 'I will feel able to talk to the children from the Link School', 'I will feel able to work with the children from the Link School', 'The children from the Link School will be interested in me and will want to know more about me' and 'I think the students from the Link School will be similar to me" are all positively correlated.¹²⁴

After the students' final Link Day, they were given the same (or slight variations on the) seven statements again, and asked to restate the extent to which they agree with the statement from 1 to 5 (see Figure 5.8).¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Correlation Coefficient .304, 393 and .510 P = .000, N = 753–767. For all statements of correlation, scores in between two possible options e.g. 2.5 are reintegrated into the statistical test.

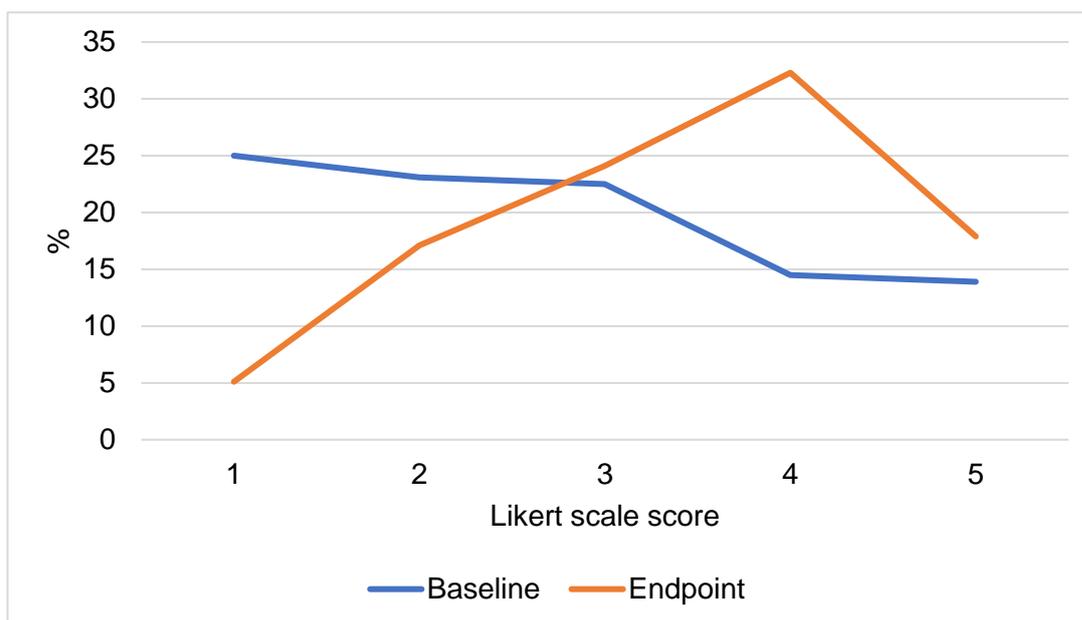
¹²⁵ Out of the 260 baseline surveys, between 255 and 257 students responded to each statement (missing data ranges from 3 to 5). In the discussion below, descriptions of statistical significance exclude incorrectly inputted scores (by which I mean students who gave an answer between two possible options e.g. 2.5).

Figure 5.8: Likert scale questions asked to primary and secondary school students at the end of School Linking



The most drastic change in score is seen in the statement, ‘I know a lot about the faiths and beliefs of my Link School’. The trend almost inverts, with half of students at endpoint now scoring a 4 or a 5, and only 5% scoring a 1 (compared to 25% at baseline). So School Linking reportedly significantly improves students’ reported knowledge of the faiths and beliefs of their Link School (see Figure 5.9), echoing Kerr et al.’s (2011) evaluation of the Linking Network (TLN), which found that over half of students taking part in linking programmes reported that they had “learned something new [...] about people from different backgrounds” (2011: 66). I investigate the *type* of knowledge reportedly gained later in this section.

Figure 5.9: A comparison of student's reported knowledge about the faith and beliefs of their Link School before and after School Linking



As the students expected, most felt able to work with, and talk to, the students at the Link School, with the 3.1% / 2.7% scoring a 1 and 45.1% / 47.3% scoring a 5. Similarly, students continued to feel confident that they had good knowledge of the faiths and beliefs of the students in their own class, with 67.2% scoring a 5 (an increase of 6.4% on the baseline statement). The final trend to remain unchanged is that for the statement 'I think the students at my Link School were different to me'. At both baseline and endpoint level, over half of the students scored either a 4 or a 5, indicating that students' feeling of 'difference' with their Link School remained at the end of the year.

Again, there are significant correlations between the different statement scores.¹²⁶ The positive relationship between feeling able to talk to, and work with, the children from the Link School, remain, and the students are more likely to feel confident in this aspect and if they feel the link students are interested, and similar to, them (or vice-versa).¹²⁷ As students reportedly learnt more about the faiths

¹²⁶ For all statements of correlation, scores in between two possible options e.g. 2.5 are reintegrated into the statistical test.

¹²⁷ Correlation Coefficient .492, .388 and .403, P = .000, N = 255.

and beliefs of the students from their Link School, so too did confidence talking to and working with the students increase. as well as feeling that the students were interested in, and similar to, them^{128, 129}.

To test for demographic influences, I ran a series of statistical tests for association with all baseline and endpoint statements, by grouping together the scores 1, 1.5 and 2 as 'disagree', 2.5, 3 and 3.5 as 'neither agree nor disagree' and 4, 4.5 and 5 as 'agree'. Appendix 3, Items 2 and 3 detail the full results.¹³⁰

When it came to faith school students, students from the one Greek-Orthodox-ethos and eight Jewish-ethos schools were significantly less likely to feel confident working with, and talking to, the students from their Link School. What's more, they were also least likely to know about the faiths and beliefs of their Link School. This negativity was not shared with the students from the other faith schools, however. Students from the four Roman Catholic-ethos, and two Sikh-ethos schools were mostly likely to feel confident working with, and talking to, the students from the Link School, despite not knowing much about the link students' faiths and beliefs at the start of the programme. Sikh-ethos, Muslim-ethos and Hindu-ethos school students were the most knowledgeable about the faiths and beliefs of their Link School students at baseline. Unfortunately, the endpoint sample size was too small and not representative enough to infer association with faith ethos at endpoint, so I cannot identify if these influences changed at the end of School Linking.

Students from community schools were significantly less likely to feel able to work with the Link School students, disagreed with the idea that they would be similar and overwhelmingly disagreed when asked if they knew about the faiths and beliefs of the students in their class before taking part in Linking. The latter finding disputes literature which suggests by nature of their diversity, community schools foster interfaith understanding between students who attend (Arweck 2017b, Burtonwood 2006: 74, Jackson 2003a: 79, MacMullen 2007: 32).

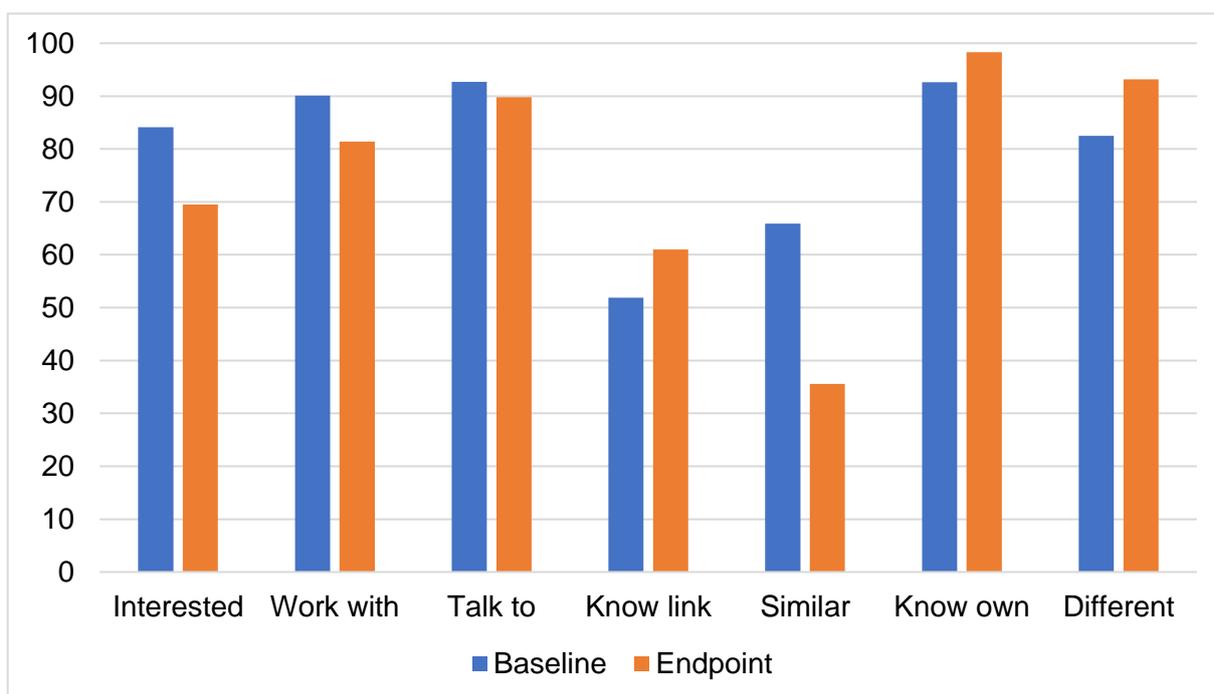
¹²⁸ Correlation Coefficient .255, .244, .458 and .420, P = .000, N = 255-256.

¹²⁹ Of course, with all correlations, I am unable to infer causation, that is, I cannot conclude whether the increased knowledge led to the increase in other scores, or vice versa.

¹³⁰ All statistically significant demographic associations discussed in the forthcoming paragraphs have a p-value of at least ≤ 0.05 .

These students' *change* in attitude cannot be measured since no community schools returned their endpoint surveys. However, faith schools *linked with* community schools, returned theirs. Figure 5.10 shows the percentage of these students scoring 4-5 (i.e. agreeing with) each statement before and after School Linking.

Figure 5.10: How many faith school students linked with community school students agree with the Likert scale statements before and after School Linking?(%)



The figure shows that students' agreement with four statements reduced after linking with a community school. On average, students felt that the students were less interested in them than expected and felt less able to work with, or talk to, the students (although all percentages were still relatively high in general). What is more, two thirds of faith school students thought that community school students would be similar to them before the programme; this dropped to just one third after. To put it the other way, more than eight out of ten faith students assumed difference with community school students before the programme, increasing to nine in ten at the end. However, more students agreed that they

knew about the faiths and beliefs of their own class, and students in their Link Class after the programme had taken place, emphasising knowledge as a key outcome of the programme.

Student age was once again significant. Secondary school students were neutral in feeling that the Link School students would be interested in, and similar to them (reflecting the first section's pattern that students are more likely to feel negative as they get older). However, the scores generally increased after School Linking, indicating that perceptions can indeed change.

Primary school students were much more likely than secondary school students to feel that their Link School students would be similar to them (and more likely to disagree that they would be different), and were confident about the prospect of talking to them. After Linking, however, they were far less likely than secondary school students to feel similarity with their Link School students (almost 40% of primary school students scored 1-2, compared with just 2.9% of secondary school students). So, there was an increase in either a) secondary school students' awareness of similarity, or b) primary school students' awareness of difference.¹³¹

What is more the 'experience' of the teacher is once again significant. At baseline, students whose teachers had been on the scheme before were more likely to feel that the students from the Link School would be interested in them, with students of teachers new to the scheme more sceptical (four in ten either disagreeing or neutral), At endpoint, however, students with 'new' teachers were more comfortable talking with the Link School students and more likely to feel that the Link School students were similar to them. Conversely, the students with 'experienced' teachers were significantly more likely to score a 1-2 for 'I felt able to talk with the students from the Link School'. Chapter 6 will explore a potential reason for this finding. My qualitative analysis reveals an overconfidence on the part of the teachers, as well as tendency to stray from F&BF's prescribed School Linking structure.

¹³¹ These findings, when combined with the differences between primary and secondary school students outlined in the previous sections, add weight to MacMullen's (2007: 10-12) argument that "religious primary schools should be treated differently from secondary schools because of the particular developmental needs and capacities of pre-adolescence".

Lastly, there are positive correlations (of varying statistical strength) for *all but one* Likert scale statements with higher levels of academic performance at both primary and secondary school level. In general, the better the academic performance of the school, the more likely it is that its students will agree with every statement.¹³² However, at endpoint level, there are moderately strong negative correlations for those *linked* with higher performing schools. In fact, the more academic the Link School, the less likely students will feel able to work with and talk to, its students. Similarly, those linked with higher performing schools were more likely to feel that the students weren't interested in them, and, at primary level, were more likely to see difference.

This last demographic finding reaffirms a potential issue identified in the opening of this chapter; F&BF does not hold social demographic data and as such has little control over how schools are 'linked' in this regard. Although the majority of links were between schools with 'above average' levels of academic performance, the sample at endpoint is not representative of this. In fact, one class that returned their endpoints came from a secondary school performing at 25% which was linked with a school performing at 80%.¹³³ If this link is in fact driving the correlation, it too points towards the success of School Linking being challenged by matching drastically 'different' schools. I revisit this theme in the 'Limitations' section of this chapter.

So far, the Likert scale scores have been compared at baseline and endpoint through the lens of different demographics. To test the statistical significance of *changes* in responses between baseline and endpoint surveys, I conducted a Mann-Whitney U test, the purpose of which is to test for differences in median Likert scale scores, before and after School Linking. A table listing the full results can be found in the Appendix 3, Item 4. Whilst the results indicated a

¹³² As a reminder, the statements are: 'The children from the Link School will be interested in me and will want to know more about me', 'I will feel able to work with the children from the Link School', 'I will feel able to talk with the children from the Link School', 'I know a lot about the faiths and beliefs of my Link School', 'I think the students at my Link School will be similar to me', 'I know a lot about the faiths and beliefs of people in my class', 'I think the students at my Link School will be different to me'.

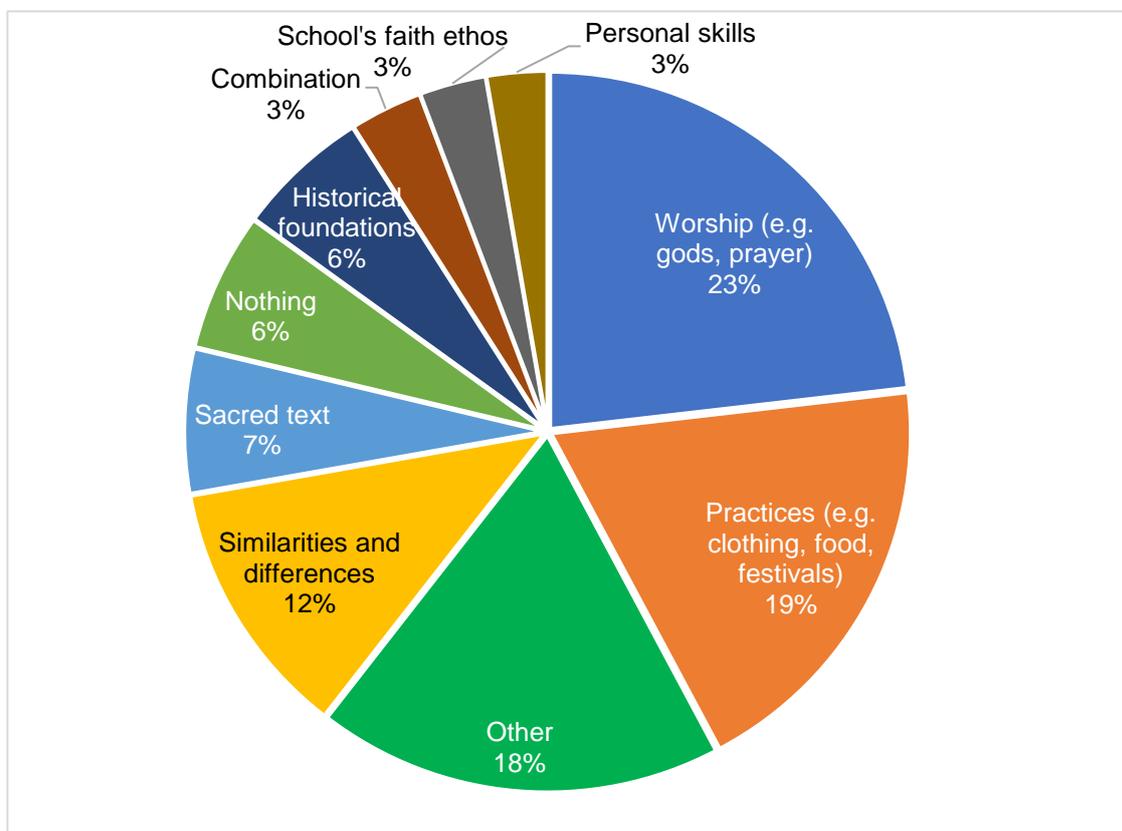
¹³³ Indicator of secondary school academic performance as described in Chapter 4 as the percentage of students achieving grade 5 or above in the 2016-17 English and Maths GCSEs. The English school average is 39.6%.

significant difference in median score at endpoint for four statements, only one statement, 'I know a lot about the faith and beliefs of my Link School', sees enough of a change to increase its median Likert scale score by one point. This re-emphasises reported knowledge as a key outcome of School Linking.

However, the baseline and endpoint surveys cannot point to the *type* of knowledge reportedly gained. I can fill this gap (to an extent), by analysing the 'student reflections forms' (see Appendix 1, Item 8), which were completed at the end of individual Link Days. Because the forms were given to a limited number of students it is impossible to conduct statistical tests on the sample. Rather, descriptively reporting on the responses can illustrate the finding above.

In the student reflection forms, the students were asked to write or draw something that they 'learnt about the faith or belief of someone else'. I coded the 367 responses into ten categories covering aspects of faith and belief, as well as other themes (see Figure 5.11).

Figure 5.11: What did you learn about the faith or belief of someone else?



The most popular responses related to 'worship' and 'practices'.¹³⁴ with more than four in ten students covering these themes. Typical responses revealed an emphasis on generic factual knowledge. For example, responses in the 'worship' category included, "Buddhists pray at a temple" and "Muslims pray five times a day" and responses in the 'practices' category included, "Hindus eat only veg" and "They eat halal meat" and "When someone dies they can't be burnt". More nuanced responses were rare, although some students recognised the complexity or plurality within contemporary religious practice, for example, "That some people in the Jewish faith still do Xmas".

Almost one in five students reported something categorised as 'other' and 48 of the 67 responses came from one link between a Jewish-ethos school and a community school.¹³⁵ The accuracy of the knowledge reportedly gained is questionable. For example, three individual students reported: "Catholicism is similar to Christianity", "Catholics and Christians are different" and "I didn't know that Catholics and Christians are not the same". Other students reported, "atheists don't believe in anything". The first statements in particular, combined with the generic factual statements reported above, point to low levels of religious literacy, an issue identified in my qualitative analysis and discussed in Chapter 8.

The students were also asked to describe what they thought the students from their Link School learnt about them. This time, the question was not phrased explicitly in terms of 'faith or belief'. I coded the 367 responses under the headings 'religion', 'who am i?' and 'school' (as were used in the above analysis of the baseline and endpoint surveys) to aid comparison.

The baseline and endpoint survey results showed that 'who am I?' was by far the most common topic of discussion during Link Days, rather than 'religion' or 'school'. In this sample, however, the theme of 'religion' was the most common thing that students felt other people *learnt* about them, with 43% specifying this. Second, was 'who am I?' with 32.2% of responses. 'School' only received 3.8%

¹³⁴ I recognise that these two categories can overlap. For clarification, the term 'worship' exclusively consists of the act of prayer and its associated relationship with god(s).

¹³⁵ The forms may have been collected from any, or a combination of, their three Link Days. Unfortunately, the Link Day to which the response refers is not specified on the form.

of responses. Whilst the frequency of categorised responses is different to the baseline and endpoint survey data, the content of the students' statements is largely similar and based on generic factual knowledge. Typical responses in the 'religion' category included, "That we pray five times a day", or "that we keep kosher and boys cover their heads". Responses about 'who am I?' included, "I have two siblings" and "That I love dogs", and responses about school included, "My school is only for Jewish people" and "We have longer lessons and we are mixed groups".

The responses also reveal that a third of students from community schools felt that the students from their Link School had learnt something to do with religion, despite the baseline and endpoint data indicating that community schools had (by far) the fewest students talking about religion during the Link Days (only 6.2% reported doing so). Responses were generally statements of self-ascribed religious belief and included: "I think they learnt about my religion, Islam", "I think they learnt that I am non-religious!" and "I think my partners learnt that I'm a Christian", illustrating the religious plurality within the community school that might be assumed to be missing when directly compared against a faith school.¹³⁶

Therefore, looking further at what students have 'learnt' about each other reveals that the majority of statements are based on a generic factual knowledge, questioning the validity of the reported 'knowledge' as an outcome of School Linking. It also adds a further level of complexity to the role of the community school. These issues are revisited in Chapters 8 and 9.

As a final test of the Likert scale scores, I conducted a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test on the 189 baseline and endpoint surveys that I matched per individual student. It enabled me to test how the *same sample's* response changed by the end of School Linking by tracking the numbers of students whose Likert scale scores increased, decreased and stayed the same at endpoint level. The test revealed significant increases in the scores for 'I know a lot about the faith and beliefs of my Link School'¹³⁷ and 'I think the students at my Link School

¹³⁶ I recognise that the student reflection form sample is from one community school only and not generalisable to all three community schools taking part in School Linking in 2016-17.

¹³⁷ P = .000 N = 189.

were different to me'.¹³⁸ I thus isolated the participants whose surveys contributed to this pattern and considered their experiences in more detail.

Firstly, ninety-eight students' scores increased for the statement 'I know a lot about the faith and beliefs of my Link School'. In reviewing the endpoint survey questions that these students reportedly asked their Link School students, more than six in ten asked their Linking partner a question that I did not categorise under 'religion'.¹³⁹ This points to the potential for school Linking to facilitate the development of knowledge of faiths and beliefs through informal or unstructured interaction. Again, however, it is impossible to know the *type* of knowledge reportedly gained from this test without further descriptive information.

Secondly, seventy-four students' scores increased for the statement 'I think the students at my Link School were different to me'. These students were disproportionately linked with students from community schools (31% in this sample compared to 11% overall) and analysis of their endpoint surveys reveal ambiguity around their interpretation of 'difference' (something implied earlier in this section). One year 5 student from a Jewish-ethos school linked with a Church of England-ethos school stated in his endpoint, "I wasn't worried about if they did different things to us", however another year 5 student from a Jewish-ethos school linked with a community school circled the 'confused' face at endpoint, wrote 'clueless' underneath it, and stated, "Because they had a whole different religion"¹⁴⁰. Again, these two examples exemplify a wider problem of (mis)interpretations of 'difference' that this survey data alone cannot capture.

As a result of manually 'matching' the 189 individual baseline and endpoint surveys, the findings have pointed to the complex process of change that is revealed through a direct comparison of Likert scale scores; it enables supplementary analysis of the individuals' survey responses to provide explanatory detail for specific score changes. While I recognise that these findings are not generalisable, they introduce the notion that School Linking can develop a reported knowledge of the faiths and beliefs of students' Link Schools

¹³⁸ $P = .014$ $N = 189$.

¹³⁹ Although students who asked about religion did give particularly high endpoint Likert scale scores (73% of students asking about religion scored a 3.5 - 5 at endpoint).

¹⁴⁰ This latter statement also illustrates the issues with religious literacy identified in the student reflection form analysis.

through unstructured interaction. The analysis also reaffirms my suspicion that there are conflicting interpretations of 'difference'. I question the extent to which the documents used by School Linking (upon which this analysis is based) inform or exacerbate these perceptions in the 'Limitations' section of this chapter.

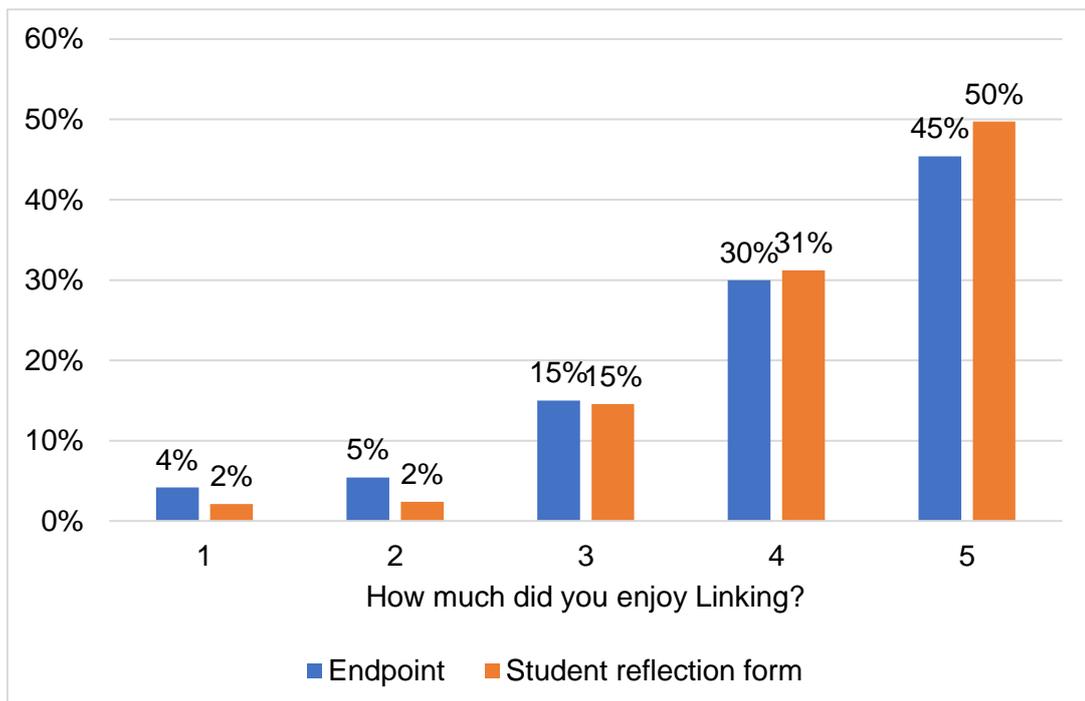
To summarise, this section's analysis has illustrated the following. Students consistently reported confidence in talking to, and working with, the students from their Link Schools. There were also high reported levels of knowledge of the faiths and beliefs of people within students' own classes, and there was a drastic increase in knowledge of the faiths and beliefs of students from the Link Schools was reported at the end of School Linking. However analysis reveals low levels of religious literacy when the *type* of reported knowledge was considered through descriptive information in the student reflection forms. This section also revisited the notion of 'difference' reportedly felt between Link School students, although at this stage the analysis does not indicate to what extent the difference is being interpreted in positive or negative terms. The analysis of the 189 'matched' baseline and endpoint surveys further demonstrates that a) knowledge of the faiths and beliefs of the Link School can increase despite the conversations not being explicitly about religion, and b) in cases where faith schools and community schools are linked, feelings of difference are exacerbated. In terms of demographics, age again proved significant, as did the experience of the teacher and whether the students came from a faith or community school. Finally, significant findings regarding schools' academic performance indicate that the absence of F&BF's knowledge of such information when 'linking' schools could unintentionally undermine the positive outcomes of the programme.

What contributes to the enjoyment of Linking?

Whilst 'enjoyment' does not constitute a formal component of the 'knowledge, skills and attitudes' framework for my primary data collection and analysis (see Chapter 4), it is nevertheless important to consider as a measure of success

outlined in F&BF’s evaluation material. Students were asked in their endpoint surveys to indicate on a scale of 1 to 5 how much they enjoyed School Linking overall. The students were asked the same question after individual Link Days in the Student reflection forms.¹⁴¹ Figure 5.12 shows the response.

Figure 5.12: Students’ reported enjoyment of School Linking in general (endpoint survey) or the Link Day in particular (student reflection form)



Again, the overall picture is very positive, with more than three quarters of students (75.4% at endpoint and 80.9% in the student reflection forms) circling a 4 or a 5.

Secondary school students were the group most likely to report overall enjoyment, with more than nine in ten students scoring 3.5 to 5. All 1 to 2.5 scores were by primary school students only (although seven in ten scored 3.5 to 5). More than 75% of students led by ‘new’ teachers scored 3.5 to 5, compared to

¹⁴¹ These forms were given to a limited number of students to complete after each individual Link Day.

just over half with 'experienced' teachers, echoing the previous sections' findings that students with 'experienced' teachers are more positive and confident at the start of School Linking, but those with 'new' teachers report a more positive impact at the end of the process. When enjoyment levels were tested for correlation with the other Likert scales, I found that students were more likely to enjoy Linking if they felt that the Link School students were interested in them,¹⁴² they felt able to work with,¹⁴³ and talk to,¹⁴⁴ the students from the Link School, they had developed knowledge about the faiths and beliefs of their Link School,¹⁴⁵ and if they thought the Link School students were similar to them,¹⁴⁶ or vice versa. Conversely, the higher a student scored for the statement 'I think the students at my Link School were different to me', the lower they scored on the enjoyment scale.¹⁴⁷ Although this final correlation is weak, it is also the first indication that, overall, students associate 'difference' with negativity, a finding which Chapter 8 explores in more detail.

In terms of the student reflection forms, the unrepresentative nature of the student response rate makes tests for significance impossible.¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the high number of responses from one community school link enables an in-depth look at the levels of enjoyment from a sample otherwise not represented in the endpoint surveys. The analysis in the previous sections has reported hostility towards students from community schools, however both the Jewish-ethos and community school students equally enjoyed their Link Days, suggesting that a) their views are not being accounted for in the previous analysis, or b) students may enjoy School Linking despite reporting negative emotions towards each other.

Students were asked to state their favourite part of School Linking in the endpoint surveys and student reflection forms. I coded the responses into ten categories (See Figure 5.13).

¹⁴² Correlation coefficient .378 P = .000 N = 250.

¹⁴³ Correlation coefficient .525 P = .000 N = 250.

¹⁴⁴ Correlation coefficient .382 P = .000 N = 251.

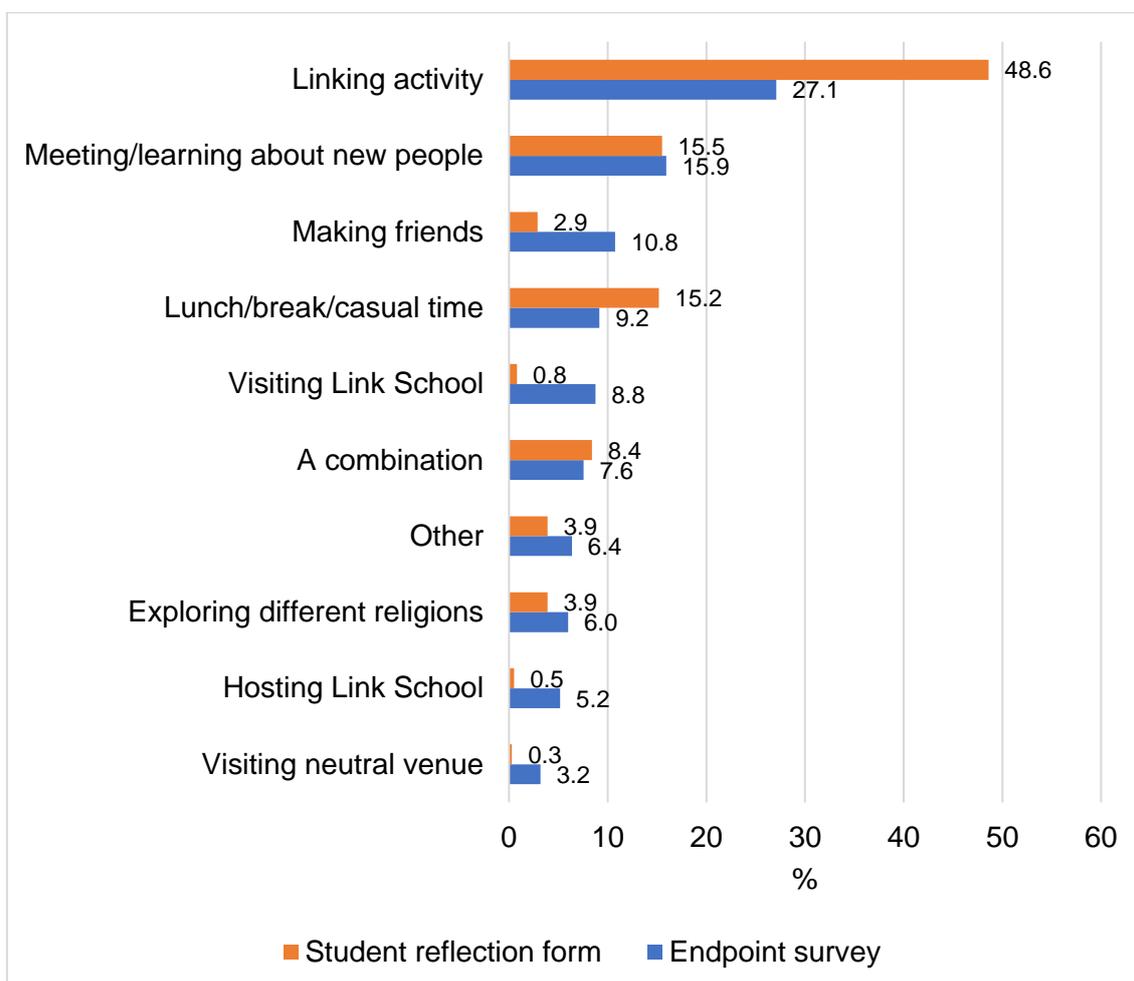
¹⁴⁵ Correlation coefficient .393 P = .000 N = 252.

¹⁴⁶ Correlation coefficient .511 P = .000 N = 251.

¹⁴⁷ Correlation coefficient -.173 P = .006 N = 252.

¹⁴⁸ Four in ten (162 of the 390) student reflection forms were from one single link (between and community school and a Jewish-ethos school).

Figure 5.13: What were students' favourite part of School Linking in general (endpoint survey) or the Link Day in particular (student reflection forms)?



Just over a quarter of students identified the Linking activity as their favourite part in the endpoint survey, echoing Hughes' (2014) finding that working on a task is particularly effective in student interfaith encounters.¹⁴⁹ This was followed by meeting new people and making friends. The fourth most popular part was the lunch/break/casual time, reflecting an implication from the previous section of the positive outcomes of unstructured conversation and/or interaction. There is a similar trend in the student reflection forms, with a greater emphasis

¹⁴⁹ Examples of activities detailed in my secondary analysis include the 'bean hunting game', 'designing our countries' and 'making identity backpacks'. Hughes' (2014) argument is based within contact theory, the theoretical lens through which I discuss School Linking in Chapter 9.

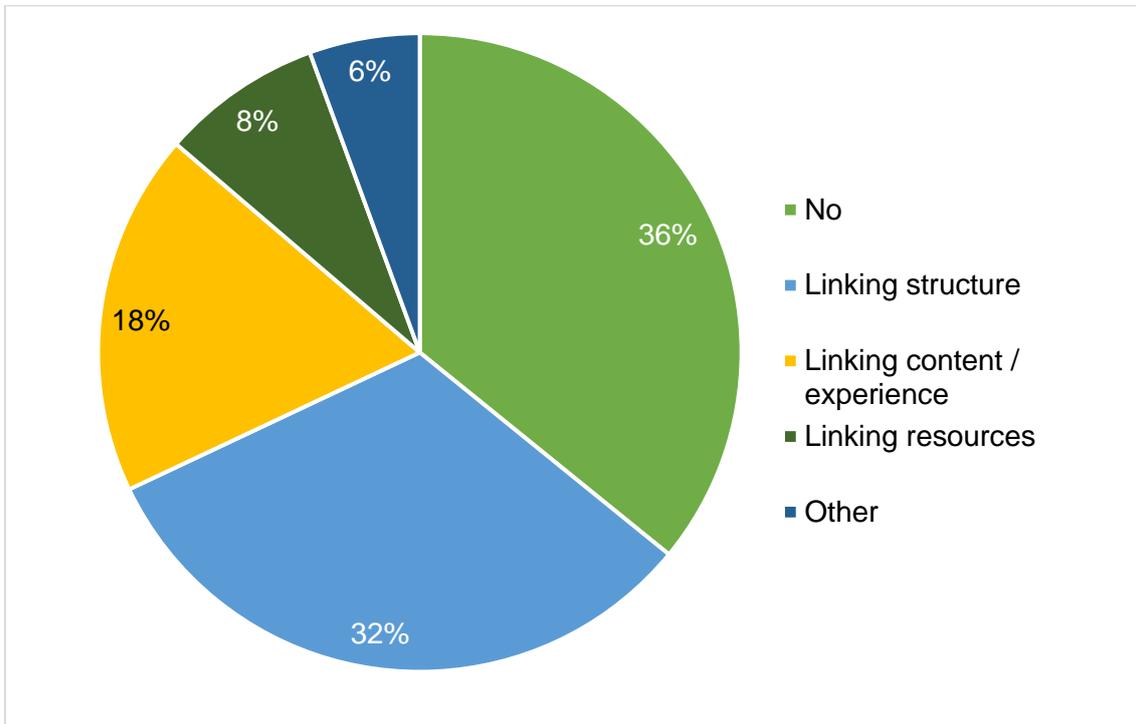
on the Linking activity. This may be explained by the student reflection forms' emphasis on the favourite part of a specific day, rather than the experience in general. Visiting the neutral venues, visiting the Link Schools and hosting the Link Day was the favourite part for over a third of students from schools with above average levels of academic performance, whereas only 3.8% of students from schools performing at below average levels favoured this part. Conversely, students from underperforming schools were more likely to favourite the Linking activity.¹⁵⁰ The differences in reported enjoyment may contribute to understanding why students from vastly different academically performing schools reported a hostility or tension in their Likert scale scores.

In the student reflection forms, both the students from the Jewish-ethos school and the community school generally favoured the Linking activity, once again showing agreement in their responses. Combined with the enjoyment scale above, this bucks the negative trends associated with community schools posited in the earlier analysis.

Finally, students were asked in the endpoint survey if there was anything F&BF could do to improve School Linking. Again, students gave free text responses, which I coded into five categories (see Figure 5.14).

¹⁵⁰ P = .000 N = 182.

Figure 5.14: Is there anything to improve?



The figure shows that over a third of students stated that there was no room for improvement, and just under a third specified the School Linking structure, for which typical responses included adding more Link Days or incorporating classes from more than two schools (both positive suggestions concerning longevity and inclusivity, and echoing previous evaluations which identified similar student desires, for example Kerr et al. (2011: 60)). Almost one in five students specified improvements to the Linking content or experience, for example more free time (similarly identified by Raw (2009: 26) in her evaluation of TLN), and a minority of students referred to the Linking resources or gave another suggestion.

In terms of academic performance, over half of all students from above average-performing schools suggested improvements to the Linking structure, whereas over half of students from below-average schools stated that no improvements were needed.¹⁵¹ The differences in opinion here corroborate the

¹⁵¹ P = .000 N = 234.

second section's finding that matching linking schools with drastically different levels of academic performance can impact the outcomes of School Linking.¹⁵²

To summarise this section on enjoyment, the small endpoint sample and the unrepresentative nature of the student reflections forms limit the opportunity for statistical testing. Thus, it is difficult to establish whether, and to what extent, the enjoyment of School Linking affects the impact of School Linking. Descriptively, however, enjoyment levels are generally high. Where statistical testing has been available, the analysis corroborates previous sections' claims that differences in reported experience are associated with the age of the student and the experience of the teacher. What is more, the student reflection form analysis develops an argument that the posited hostility towards community school students may not be as significant as previously thought. However, the demographic variable of academic performance appears increasingly significant; differences in student's reported enjoyment of School Linking may explain why students from over- and under-performing schools reported drastically different attitudes towards each other in the previous section on Likert scale scores.

Summary

To conclude, this secondary data analysis of student documents has considered students' emotions and perceptions at the beginning and end of School Linking, discussions that took place during the Link Days, the extent to which levels of knowledge, confidence in skills and attitudes changed during School Linking and the students' enjoyment of School Linking. Three demographic variables have proved particularly significant: the age of the student, whether a teacher is 'experienced' in School Linking, and whether the school has a faith ethos (although the specific role of this last demographic remains unclear). Other social demographics, such as schools' academic performance, have fewer statistical relationships with School Linking outcomes in and of themselves, but where they

¹⁵² In one case for example, a secondary school performing at 25% was linked with a school performing at 80%. I note, however, that academic performance may be a reflection of the background of the students and not the input from the school.

do have an effect, have served to indicate how a lack of awareness of this data when matching the schools can potentially undermine positive outcomes. Thematically, analysing the student baseline and endpoint surveys in light of the additional descriptive information in the student reflection forms has revealed a potential problem related to religious literacy (although at this stage it is unknown if this stems from the student, or teacher, level) and ambiguity around the concept of 'difference'. With this in mind, I now turn to the analysis of the teacher baseline and endpoint surveys which will, in some instances, provide further clarification to the role of the significant demographic variables and emerging thematic issues, while presenting new information about the role and perceptions of the teachers themselves.

5.2.2: Teachers

The following analyses are based upon the teachers' 49 baseline surveys (representing 75% of teachers) and 12 endpoint surveys (representing 21% of teachers).¹⁵³ The low response rates, especially at endpoint level, mean that statistical testing is at times impossible,¹⁵⁴ therefore the majority of this section is restricted to descriptive reporting only.

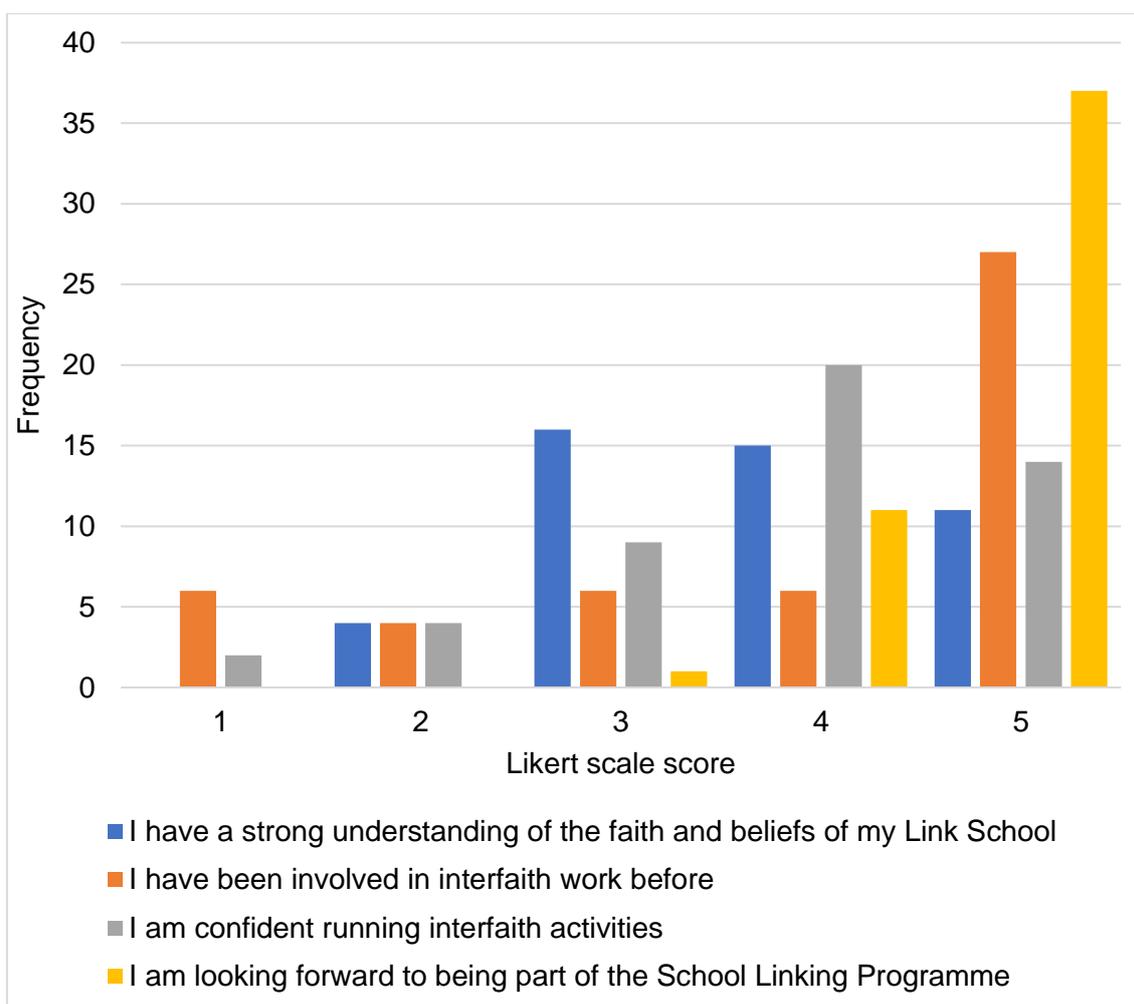
'Me'

The opening of the teacher baseline survey used Likert scales to enable teachers to reflect on their own understanding of the faiths and beliefs of the Link School, their previous experience with, and confidence in, running interfaith activities, and how much they are looking forward to School Linking. Figure 5.19 shows the results.

¹⁵³ In addition, teachers completed evaluation forms after each CPD training day. However, Chapter 4 describes why I have chosen to exclude them from this chapter.

¹⁵⁴ For example, I cannot test differences between faith school and community school teachers' responses because the three community school teachers on the scheme represent too small a sample.

Figure 5.15: Teachers' personal reflections at the start of School Linking



Responses to the statement ‘I have a strong understanding of the faith and beliefs of my Link School’ are relatively positive at the start of School Linking, with over half of teachers scoring a 4 or a 5. Their levels of ‘understanding’, then, are generally higher at the start of School Linking than their students’ reported ‘knowledge’. The higher scores were driven by ‘experienced’ teachers (i.e. those who had taken part in School Linking in previous years) and secondary school teachers. At the end of School Linking, nine teachers responded to this statement again. Seven scores increased by one point, one stayed the same and one dropped by one point. This is very positive, since researchers emphasise a need for teachers to be “aware of the religious and ideological backgrounds of

students” to ensure that their teaching is “sensitive and focused” (Jackson 2003b: 20).

Over half of all teachers (53%) scored a 5 for ‘I have been involved in interfaith work before’, with (unsurprisingly) almost 80% of ‘experienced’ teachers doing so (with the remaining 20% scoring a 4). Despite ‘new’ teachers accounting for all scores of 3 and below, over 50% of these teachers also scored a four or a five. Therefore, even if a teacher is new to School Linking, they may well have had interfaith experience elsewhere. The three community school teachers scored a 3, 4 and 5, which perhaps pertains to experience of religious plurality by virtue of diversity within the community school.

The majority of teachers also scored a 4 or a 5 for ‘I am confident running interfaith activities’, a positive start since evaluations of similar linking programmes associated “a lack of conviction” on the part of the teacher with low levels of student confidence” (Raw 2006: 60). Once again, the higher scores were generally represented by ‘experienced’ teachers, with more than 8 in 10 scoring a 4 or 5. This tallies with the analysis of student baselines, which showed that students with experienced teachers felt more able to talk to, and work with, the students from their Link Schools at the start of School Linking. This trend, however, inverted at the student endpoint level, with students of ‘new’ teachers reporting higher levels of confidence at the end of the programme. The limited number of teacher endpoint surveys in this analysis prohibits me from testing for further associations, however the theme will be revisited in Chapter 6.

Of the ten endpoint responses to this statement, eight teachers’ scores increased by between one and three points and two stayed the same. Comments included, “I feel confident enough to run an interfaith activity on my own” and “This is my second year as a link-up teacher. This time I lead the link-up.” Again, this increase in teacher confidence mirrors previous evaluation findings (Raw 2009: 21). There are also positive correlations between the statement, ‘I am confident running interfaith activities’ and two others: ‘I have been involved in interfaith work before’¹⁵⁵ and ‘I am looking forward to being part of the School Linking

¹⁵⁵ Correlation coefficient .560 P = .000 N = 49.

programme'.¹⁵⁶ So, confidence in running interfaith activities, experience of interfaith work and positive anticipation of School Linking are positively interrelated.

Finally, 75% of teachers scored a 4 or a 5 for the statement, 'I am looking forward to being part of the School Linking programme', with no demographic variables appearing to affect teacher response. The endpoint survey was similarly extremely positive. Of the 11 endpoint responses, five scores remained at 5 and six increased from a 4 to a 5. The comments tended to focus on the students, such as "It was wonderful to see them grow more confident and mature each time we had a Linking day" and "Hugely! Was great to see them broaden their ideas and develop their ability to interact with others - a hugely important life skill".

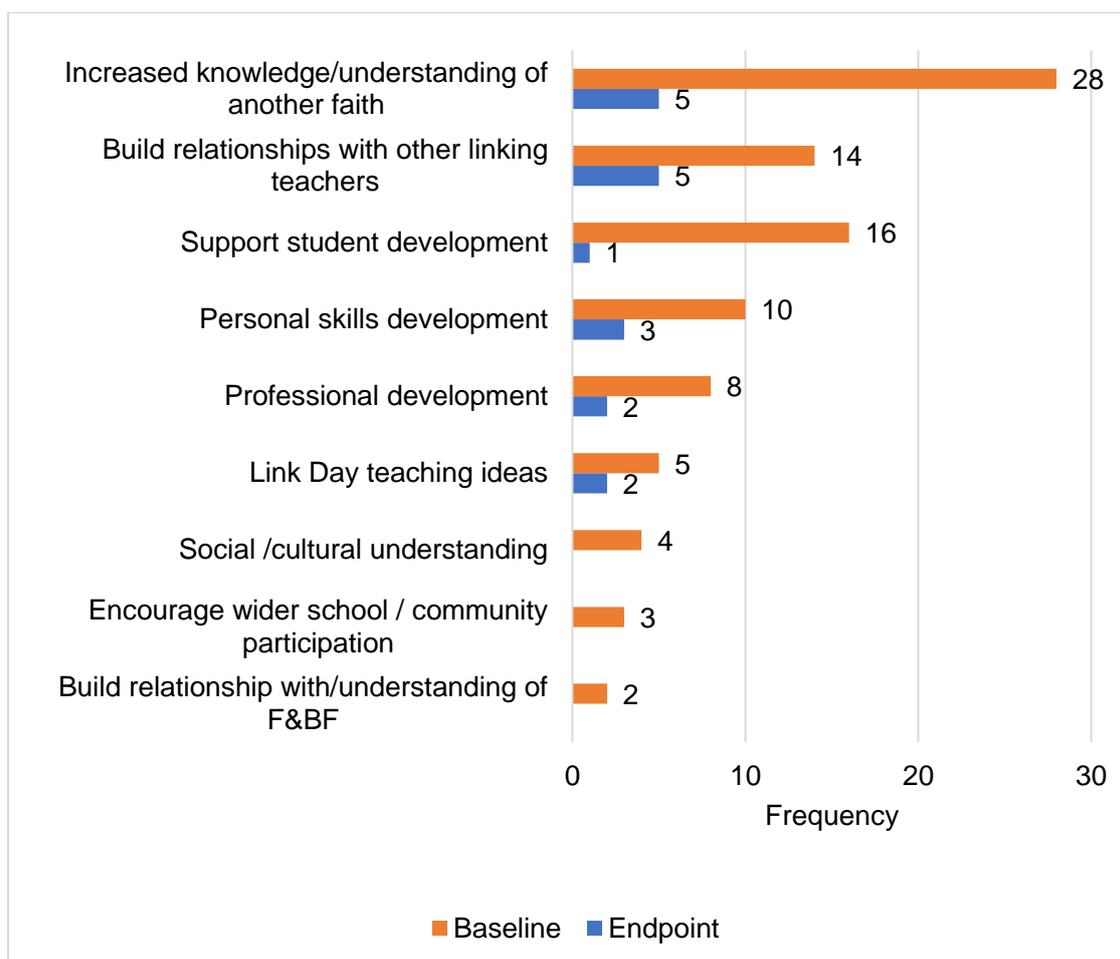
The endpoint survey alone asked teachers if they had developed a good relationship with their Linking partner. All but one response scored a 5, and there is a positive correlation between developing a good relationship with the Linking partner and reporting an increased understanding of the faith and beliefs of the Link School¹⁵⁷. The single low score (a 2) came from a teacher in Birmingham, who said, "I only met the teacher on the day - we did not meet up to plan activities". The issue of lack of attendance at CPD training is one I identify in Chapter 6.

Lastly, this section of survey closed with the free-text question, 'what do you [or 'what did you' at endpoint] personally hope to get out of being involved in the programme?' I coded the teacher responses into nine categories (with some responses incorporating multiple categories), illustrated in Figure 5.16.

¹⁵⁶ Correlation coefficient .358 P = .012 N = 49.

¹⁵⁷ Correlation coefficient .577 P = .049 N = 12.

Figure 5.16: What do you want to / what did you personally get out of being involved in the programme?



31% of teachers stated an increase in their knowledge or understanding of another faith as a personal aim of the programme. Whilst the questions within the student evaluation documents have prompted students to frame School Linking in terms of knowledge, this is the first indication that teachers (without being prompted) view the development of knowledge as a key part of the programme. The student reflection form analysis above revealed the problem of religious illiteracy, discussed in Chapter 8; if the teachers state a desire to increase their own knowledge or understanding through School Linking, this may indicate that the low levels of religious literacy indicated from the students documents may stem from the teachers themselves.

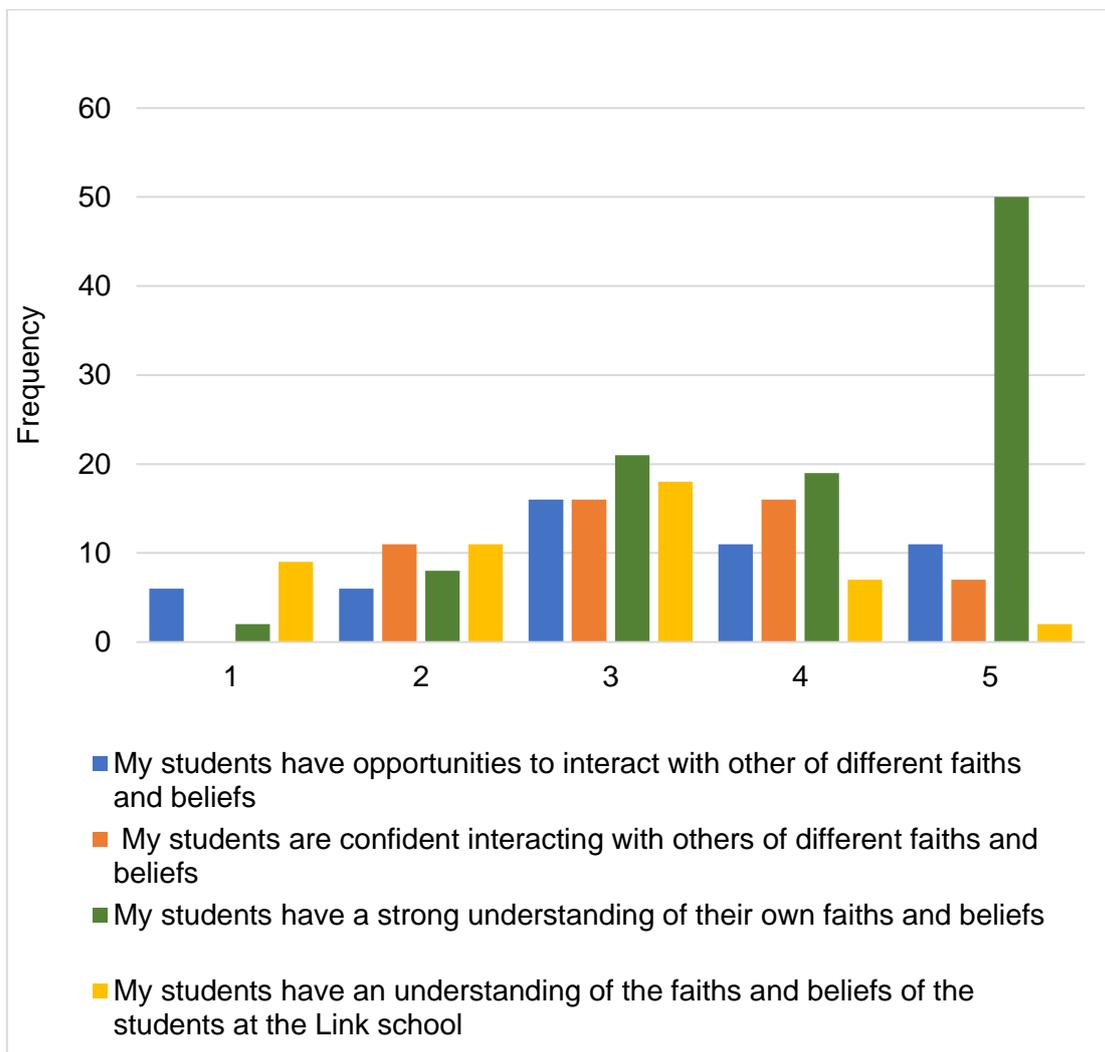
To summarise, teachers’ personal reflections at the start and end of School Linking has indicated positive levels of prior experience with, and

confidence about, running interfaith activities. Teachers overwhelmingly look forward to School Linking, and report moderate to high levels of understanding about the faiths and beliefs of the Link Schools prior to School Linking. Where teachers have completed endpoint surveys, they have shown increased levels of understanding and confidence. There are apparent differences in 'experienced' teachers' responses, who report higher levels of religious understanding and confidence at the start of Linking than 'new' teachers. The student document analysis revealed that students with 'experienced' teachers were subsequently *less* confident after School Linking, an issue Chapter 6 will suggest is created, or exacerbated by, experienced teachers' tendency not to implement the CPD training. At the start of School Linking, secondary school teachers report greater levels of religious understanding, reflected in the finding that secondary school students are more likely to have high levels of knowledge of the faith of the Link School at the start of the programme.

'My students'

The baseline and endpoint surveys subsequently asked the teachers to respond with their thoughts on student experiences indicated by a further four Likert scale statements (see Figure 5.17).

Figure 5.17: Teachers' perceptions of student experience at the start of School Linking



There is little consensus among responses to the statement 'My students have opportunities to interact with others of different faiths and beliefs', with 3 the most popular score. 73% of secondary school teachers scored a 4 or a 5 compared to 25% of primary school teachers; this may reflect the increase in the number of opportunities presented to students outside of school as they get older. There are strong positive correlations between increased opportunities for students to interact with others of different faiths and beliefs, and a) confidence interacting with students of other faiths and beliefs¹⁵⁸ and b) an increased

¹⁵⁸ Correlation coefficient .810 P = .000 N = 50.

understanding of the faiths and beliefs of the students at the Link school,¹⁵⁹ indicating that they are positively interrelated.

Teachers also gave generally low scores to the statement, 'My students are confident interacting with others of different faiths and beliefs'. Despite no teachers scoring a 1, over half scored a 2 or a 3. There are higher scores amongst community school teachers, perhaps owing to the inherent diversity of the community school. Then again, a comment from a teacher who scored a 5 illustrates the similar potential for religious plurality within a faith school (a reminder of the argument of Section 3.2.2):

Though a C of E school we are multi-faith, and 25% Muslim, but it is good to meet outside of their comfort zones. (Christian-ethos school teacher linked with a Muslim-ethos school)¹⁶⁰

Of the eleven endpoint responses, eight teachers' scores increased by 1 to 3 points, two teachers' scores stayed the same and one dropped by a point. This is a positive outcome, and I can question the accuracy of the teachers' response which dropped by a point in light of her contradictory comment: "The girls are now a lot more confident with themselves and able to speak openly with others".

The teachers' scores were very positive for the baseline statement, 'My students have a strong understanding of their own faiths and beliefs', with 8 out of ten teachers scoring a 4 or a 5. This tallies with the students' own reporting of this in their baseline surveys, in which the median score was 5. Community school teachers were confident in this aspect; two scored a five and one scored a 3, however this contradicts the community school *students'* responses; they overwhelmingly disagreed in this aspect.

Of the 11 endpoint responses, three increased by one to two points, six stayed the same and two decreased by one point, a neutral finding. What is more, in the endpoint surveys, students responded to a similar statement ('I know a lot

¹⁵⁹ Correlation coefficient .514 P = .000 N = 47.

¹⁶⁰ I undertook participant observation of this teacher's 2017-18 class and the qualitative findings are presented in the next three chapters.

about the faiths and beliefs of the people in my class') and in nine cases I was able to match the teachers' scores to their students' average score in order to determine to what extent teachers' views of their students' development tally with the students' own reporting. Three teachers gave the same score as their students, one overestimated their students' knowledge by 0.5 point, and the other five underestimated their students' knowledge by between 0.5 and 1 point. This comparison indicates that students are learning slightly more about themselves and others within their own class than the teachers report.

Responses to the final baseline statement of this section, 'My students have an understanding of the faiths and beliefs of the students at the Link School' follow a bell curve distribution, with 3 the most popular score. The proportion of secondary school teachers scoring a 4 or a 5 almost triples compared to primary school students (36% compared to 13%), potentially reflecting exposure more year of Religious Education (RE) teaching. I matched twenty-six teachers' responses to their students' average scoring at baseline¹⁶¹ and found that twelve teachers underestimated their students, eight overestimated and six gave the same score, indicating inaccuracies in the teachers' perceptions of their students' knowledge or understanding. In one case, a teacher scored a 1 for this statement, but their students, on average, scored a 3.

Of the nine endpoint responses, one teacher's score increased by 4 points (from a 1 to a 5), seven increased by one to three points and one stayed the same, mirroring the students' own reporting that knowledge significantly increased at the end of School Linking. Scoring higher on this statement correlates with higher levels of the teachers' own knowledge of the faiths and beliefs of the Link School¹⁶² and higher levels of the students' understanding of their own faiths and beliefs.¹⁶³ In other words, the teacher sees their own knowledge and understanding of the faiths and beliefs of the Link School develop alongside their students', and sees their students' understanding about the faiths

¹⁶¹ Although I recognise that teachers are reflecting on 'understanding' and students on 'knowledge' due to different wording in the surveys.

¹⁶² Correlation coefficient .629 P = .028 N = 12.

¹⁶³ Correlation coefficient .616 P = .033 N = 12.

and beliefs of their own class develop alongside their understanding of the faiths and beliefs of their Link School.

At endpoint, I matched nine teachers' scores to their students' average score for their equivalent statement. One teacher gave the same score, one underestimated their students by 1 point, and the other seven overestimated their students by between 0.5 and 1.5 points. So, whereas teachers underestimate the extent that students are learning about themselves and others within their own class, teachers *overestimate* the extent to which their students are learning about the faiths and beliefs of the students in their Link School.

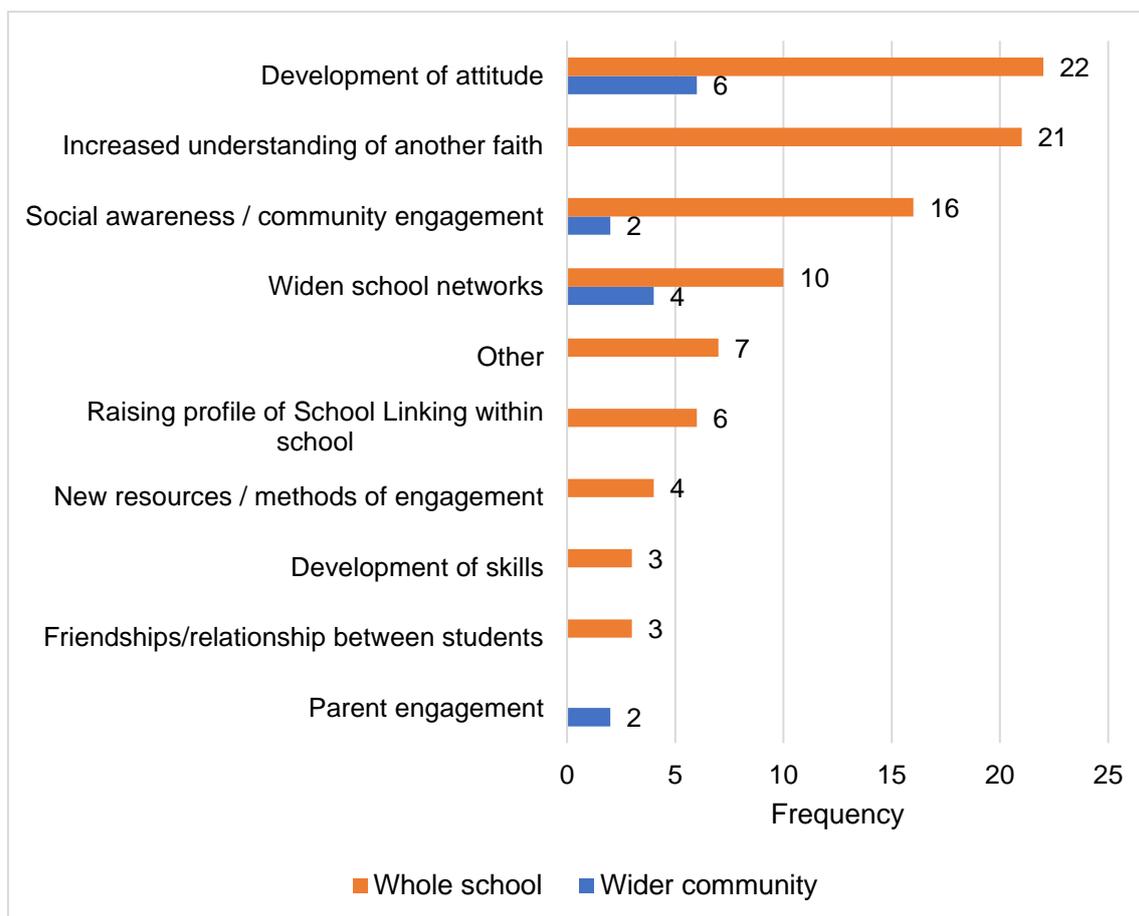
To summarise, this section has demonstrated that, teachers generally agree that their students enter School Linking with a good understanding of their own faiths and beliefs. However, when it comes to teachers reporting their students' opportunities for, and confidence in, interactions with students with different faiths and beliefs, there is little consensus. At the end of School Linking, comparison of the teacher and student survey responses revealed that teachers underestimate the extent to which students learn about their own (and their classes') faiths and beliefs, and slightly overestimate the extent to which students learn about the faiths and beliefs of the students at their Link School. Likert scale correlations indicate that teachers view their own knowledge development as interdependent with their students', and also perceive their students' knowledge of their own faiths and beliefs to develop alongside student knowledge of the faiths and beliefs of the Link School. Finally, teachers report an increase in knowledge or understanding about faith and belief as their personal aim of the programme, indicating that the low levels of religious literacy identified in the student reflection forms may originate from the teachers themselves.

'My school and community'

The final section of the baseline survey asks teachers to reflect in free text what they hope being involved in School Linking will bring to the 'whole school' and the

'wider community'. I coded their responses into ten categories, illustrated in Figure 5.22.

Figure 5.18: What do teachers hope being involved in School Linking will bring to the 'whole school' and the 'wider community'?



In terms of the 'whole school', teachers hoped that School Linking will develop attitudes. Typical responses in this category include, "Open mindedness and accepting others" and "A consistent presence and voice to the importance of tolerance. A moral awareness to start spreading through the school to combat careless intolerance".¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, a greater understanding of a different faith, the primary aim of many teachers themselves, as well as secondary school students, remains a popular answer. Responses include, "A better understanding

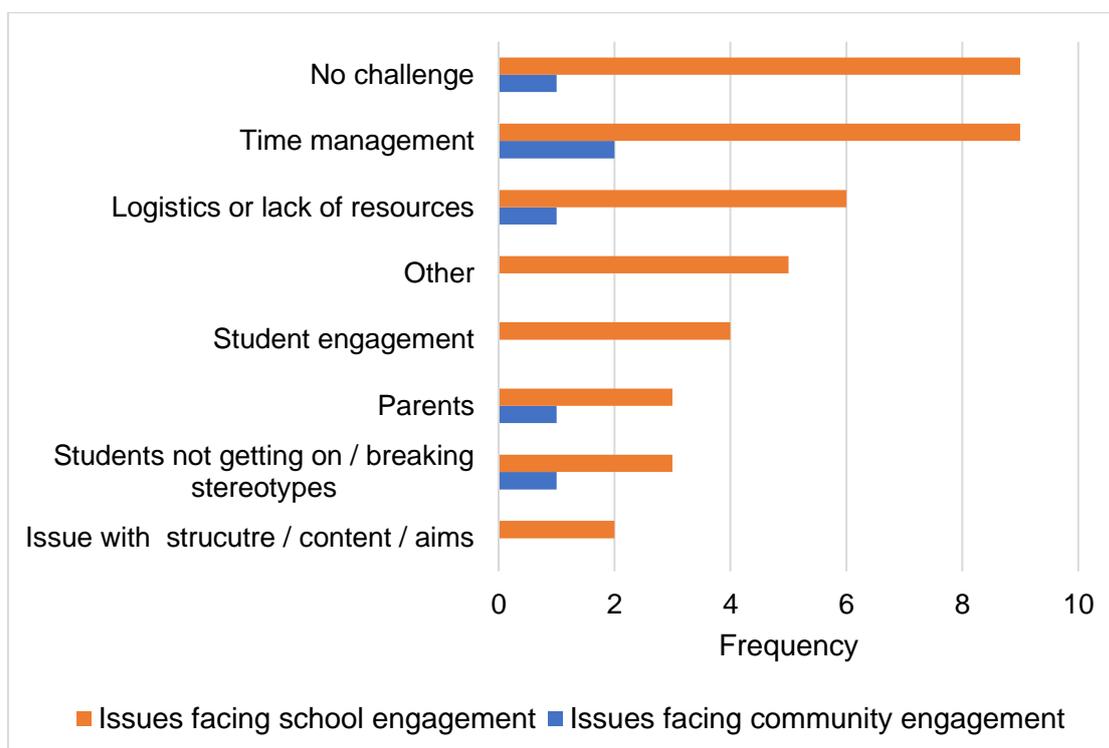
¹⁶⁴ It is not clear, however, whether these responses are applicable to religious difference or difference in general.

of the faith Judaism”. Teachers also advocated social awareness or community engagement, for example, “An enhanced and clearer vision of the world and the people in it and learn how to promote social harmony” and “further integration with the community through sharing values and traditions with members of other faiths”.

In terms of School Linking’s contribution to the ‘wider community’, however, responses drastically dropped in number, with only nine teachers providing answers which collectively relate to four categories. This suggests either a hesitancy for teachers to view School Linking as an exercise that extends beyond the school, or a difficulty in articulating the expected impact at the community level at the start of the programme (raising the question of to what extent School Linking has responsibility for addressing issues within the wider community). For those who answered, again the development of attitudes was a popular category, with responses including, “Togetherness. Appreciation of diversity” or “Filter their [the students’] good experiences to their parents - which hopefully will promote tolerance and friendships with others of other faiths”. The theme of parents recurs throughout the thesis; parental consent for students’ participation in School Linking is reviewed in Chapter 7 and parents’ role in shaping students’ attitudes to religious diversity discussed in Chapter 8.

Teachers were also asked ‘Do you anticipate any challenges in involving the rest of the school or wider community, and how could 3FF [now F&BF] support you to overcome these?’ Again, I coded the free text responses into eight categories, illustrated in Figure 5.19.

Figure 5.19: What challenges do teachers foresee in School Linking contributing to the 'whole school' or 'wider community'?



Aside from the nine responses that stated that no challenges were foreseen, time management was the most frequently stated issue facing school and community engagement. Typical responses focused on overstretched teachers and busy calendars, such as “School calendar restrictions”, “Time-restraints in getting the whole school involved”, and “School calendar. Impending Ofsted. GCSEs cover / short staffed”. Linked to this response were issues regarding logistics (“Logistics with a large school”, “Travel to different locations”) or lack of resources (“Coach journey funding”). These reported challenges recur in my own primary data analysis of Chapter 6, in which I argue that they significantly impact the delivery of School Linking. They also allude to findings from other evaluations; Raw (2009: 6) identified “confused, unsupported, overburdened or uninspired link teachers” as “common criteria for struggling, challenging or poorly performing links”.

Teachers again appeared hesitant to engage with the role of School Linking in relation to the wider community. Of the five comments, one teacher

stated that he or she did not foresee any issues, two comments concerned issues with timing and conflicting priorities, two a need for ideas of events that can include members of the wider community, and one explicitly referenced a lack of parental participation.

After School Linking had taken place, the endpoint survey asked whether the programme had an 'impact on the wider school' (There was no question on the impact on the 'wider community', so I do not know if the teachers' expectations were met in this regard). . Of the ten teachers who answered the question, typical responses focussed on opportunities for other students to hear and ask questions about, the School Linking class' experience. For example, "The girls love being involved in link programme. They speak in assembly about their experience" and "The class did a lovely presentation on Judaism for the whole school". Others organised specific events that incorporated the school community, such as "We had an Iftar in our school!" Lastly, one teacher referred to an atmosphere of anticipation for younger students: "The children all anticipate year 5 and their Linking experience. They benefit from seeing other children at their school".

The endpoint survey subsequently asked if there were challenges involving the wider school community. Four teachers stated that they faced no challenges. Two described how participation is limited, particularly when some students are absent on Link Days and two focused on logistics, including long traveling time between schools and limited time spent at the Link Days themselves (a theme addressed in Chapter 6). One teacher suggested they would improve the process next year by holding an assembly about School Linking to share learning with the wider school. I observed an example of such an assembly in my participant observation that informed the qualitative data analysis of Chapters 6 to 8.

The final question was, 'Do you have any suggestions for changes to the programme for next year?' Four teachers' referred to the CPD training (two expressing frustration that one CPD day clashed with SATs week, one requesting more planning time in the CPD training, and one requested that both Link Teachers attend training to ensure the planning and delivery of the Link Days are

shared equally).¹⁶⁵ Two teachers requested a larger financial budget for increasing travel costs and to ease the pressure on finding a suitable neutral venue and one requested a presence from an F&BF staff member at their Link Days. These suggestions reflect the largely logistical and practical challenges that teachers specified, covered in the previous paragraph.

To summarise, when teachers framed the impact of School Linking at a level beyond that of themselves and of their students, the development of general positive attitudes, for example, tolerance or appreciation of diversity, was as important (if not more important) than the development of understanding of a specific faith. Teachers appeared to find it easier to comment on their expected impact on the wider school than the wider community, though the reasons for this hesitancy are unknown. The majority of the challenges foreseen, and experienced, by the teachers stemmed from time or logistical constraints, corroborating findings in previous sections and literature in Chapter 2.

Summary

To conclude, the secondary data analysis of the teacher documents presented here has provided insight into the teachers' understanding, confidence and experience prior to School Linking, highlighted discrepancies in students' reporting and their teachers' perceptions of student experiences, revealed how teachers frame School Linking within the wider school, and exposed a hesitancy or inability to articulate the impact on the wider community. Finally, it has introduced the challenges faced by teachers, many of which link back to previous literature on capacity and constraints in Chapter 2.

This analysis has reinforced the previous claim that teacher experience affects student experiences and has identified differences between the experiences of secondary and primary school teachers. However, due to the small sample size, this section was unable to clarify the role of the community school in School Linking. Similarly, this analysis has not provided clarification for

¹⁶⁵ Something that I identify in Chapter 6 does not necessarily happen.

the ambiguity around the concept of 'difference' identified in the student document analysis. However, it has revealed that the low levels of religious literacy identified in the student document analysis are reflected in, or potentially originate from, the teachers themselves.

5.3: Limitations

Aside from the challenges associated with small and sometimes unrepresentative samples (discussed in relation to this analysis in Chapter 4), during the data cleaning and analysis process I further identified three issues that could limit the validity of my findings. First, I suspect that some teachers did not comply with F&BF's guidance to circulate the baseline surveys to their students prior to the first Link Day; some of the student baseline responses were in the past tense (such as "It was exciting because I met a new friend and I had fun", suggesting that they were completed after the first Link Day had taken place. If this is the case, these responses may not accurately represent students' feelings at the start of the process, and may subsequently over- or under-represent the extent to which attitudes have reportedly changed. Furthermore, some responses were almost identical across an entire student class, suggesting that the survey was undertaken as a group activity and/or the teacher was 'leading' the students' responses.

Second, none of the evaluation documents analysed in this chapter were anonymous. Identifying individual responses by name enabled me to match 189 student baseline and endpoints, which offered deeper analysis opportunities. However, if individuals know they are identifiable, they may respond in such a way they deem to be 'desirable'. Raw (2009: 18) identified this during her second evaluation of TLN:

Children very often stated [...] that they wouldn't be able to share their real feelings about linking with their teacher; for example if their feelings were negative, or complex, or if they just were unsure how their teacher would

react. Some feared anger (being told off, being in trouble), and some feared disappointing their teacher.¹⁶⁶

Similarly, teachers were asked to complete their (identifiable) baseline and endpoint surveys during F&BF's CPD training itself, suggesting that they may also be influenced by a desire to please.¹⁶⁷

Third, I have identified issues arising from the wording and formatting of the evaluation documents. For example, the student baseline and endpoint surveys ask students what they have learnt about "the faith or beliefs of [their] Link School", rather than the students *within* the school. This phrasing could be interpreted as assuming that all participating schools have a 'faith ethos' and that all students in a faith school are members of that faith group. Faith school students may be more comfortable or used to such phrasing than community school students. Moreover, some of the endpoint survey language is in the past tense; by asking students to reflect on how they felt *during* School Linking, therefore the responses may not accurately capture how students feel now, after the programme. In the same way that some baseline responses may not accurately reflect feelings before School Linking, these endpoint responses may contribute to inaccuracies in reported changes of attitude. Lastly, the Likert scales are accompanied by visual faces representing agreement/disagreement with the statement. Equating a 'sad' face with disagreement with the statement 'the students at my Link School will be / were similar to me' attaches negative connotations to the concept of 'difference', either generating or exacerbating negative attitudes to difference which this analysis has captured amongst some students.

¹⁶⁶ This quote also foresees a theme I discuss in Chapter 7 concerning the extent to which students feel that the Link Day classroom is a teacher 'owned' space, and the implications this has on mixing and communication between students.

¹⁶⁷ Note, Chapter 4 outlines that there was a further teacher evaluation document that I excluded from this analysis for this reason (see Section 4.4.1).

5.4: Conclusion: What impact can be captured by the Faith and Belief Forum's evaluation data?

This section first presents my findings at three levels (descriptive analysis, demographic influencers and emerging themes), before addressing my first research question. As discussed in the previous chapter, the baseline surveys are generally representative of students and teachers in the 2016-17 School Linking year, enabling me to make valid arguments concerning perceptions at the start of the programme. However, I recognise that the endpoint surveys in particular are not representative, so I cannot legitimately assume generalisability beyond this sample.

With this in mind, at a descriptive level, this chapter's findings positively represent the School Linking programme. At a student level, almost three quarters of both primary and secondary school students felt positive about the prospect of School Linking, and the proportion increased after the programme had taken place. What is more, in general, students felt that their Link School students would be interested in them, and they were generally confident with the prospect of communication and interaction with their partners. Their confidence remained at the end of the programme. Significantly, students' reported a drastic increase in the knowledge of the faith and beliefs of their Link School during the programme. More than three quarters of students reported enjoying School Linking and the Link Day activities were identified as students' favourite part. Over a third of students could not see how School Linking could be improved, but the most popular suggestions were positive, including extending the length of the programme and incorporating more classes.

At the teacher level, there were reported increases in understanding the faith and beliefs of the Link Schools, and increased confidence in running interfaith activities. However, some of the weaker findings were also identified in the teacher survey analysis. Teachers appeared to have difficulty articulating the desired impact of School Linking on the wider school and community, and at times teachers are over- or underestimating their students' perceptions of the programme. What is more, there is a key limitation of the data; the survey

documents were not anonymised, potentially leading to responses that participants deemed to be desirable for either teachers or F&BF.

I conducted statistical analysis to determine association between School Linking perceptions and outcomes and a number of demographic variables (discussed in Section 4.4.1). The variables of city,¹⁶⁸ borough, gender, levels of ethnic diversity and levels of socio-economic deprivation were found to have minimal impact on the survey data (despite previous evaluations highlighting their significance).¹⁶⁹ A small number of findings were attributed to academic performance. Namely, in the student baseline surveys, the higher the school's level of academic performance, the more likely the students are to a) feel positive about the prospect of School Linking, b) feel able to work with their Link School students, c) know about the faith of their Link School students, and d) know about the faith of their own class. However, when schools have been linked across high and low levels of academic performance, after School Linking students reported lower levels of confidence in being able to work with, and talk to, each other. Similarly, they reported more perceived difference. Three key demographic variables emerged as having multiple and significant associations with School Linking outcomes: student age, school faith ethos and teacher experience. Figure 5.20 summarises the key findings relating to each variable.

¹⁶⁸ Birmingham classes were underrepresented at both baseline and endpoint, which would have contributed to their lack of significance.

¹⁶⁹ For example, Raw's evaluations of The Linking Network (TLN) identified that "girls tended to benefit more than boys" (2009:3) and that there were "generally greater impacts from the project amongst BME children than white children" (Raw 2006: 44). However, my findings relating to borough reflect her finding that "There is no indication that the proximity of linked schools to each other affected the impacts of the project on children, across all evaluation fields" (2006: 46).

Figure 5.20: Key findings pertaining to student age, school faith ethos and teacher experience

<p style="text-align: center;">Age</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •As students got older, negative perceptions of the prospect of School Linking increased. •Older students were more likely to feel neutral/indifferent about their Link School students being interested in, or similar to, them. However, these perceptions were more positive at the end of the programme. •Primary school students were more likely to share aspects of 'who am I?', such as interests, and associate School Linking with the potential to make new friends. •Secondary school students were more likely to view School Linking as a religion-based exercise and associate School Linking with experiencing a new/different religion and developing knowledge/skills/attitudes. •After School Linking, primary school students were more likely to report making friends, and secondary school students more likely to state that they had developed knowledge/skills/attitudes, meeting their expectations.
<p style="text-align: center;">Teacher experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Students with experienced teachers felt relatively more positive at the prospect of School Linking than students led by a teacher new to the programme. •Students with experienced teachers were more likely to feel that the Link School students would be interested in them than students of teachers new to the programme. •At the end of School Linking, however, students with new teachers were significantly more likely to feel able to talk to their Link School students and feel that they were similar to them.
<p style="text-align: center;">School faith ethos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •In general, faith school students felt positive about School Linking, regardless of their school faith ethos. •A third of community school students felt negative towards the prospect of Linking (compared to one in five for faith school students). •Community school students were significantly less likely to feel able to work with the Link School students, disagreed with the idea that they would be similar and disagreed when asked if they knew about the faiths and beliefs of the students in their own class before taking part in Linking. •Faith school students who were linked with the three community school students, on average, felt that the students were less interested in them than expected. The proportion of students who thought that community school students would be similar to them before the programme halved by the end of School Linking.

That the age of the student has proved significant in my analysis contradicts previous research. Francis and McKenna (2017), for example, found “no significant association” between age and attitude to religious diversity. The finding that teachers’ experience of the School Linking programme is significantly associated with student outcomes is specific to this case study. Nevertheless, my qualitative analysis findings presented in Chapter 6 develops understanding of this relationship further; I uncover an overconfidence among experienced teachers, as well as a preference for an unstructured approach to the Link Days.

The findings relating to school faith ethos are more complex, particularly those that assert hostility between faith and community schools, since there were three participating community schools and only two represented in the baseline analysis. Within the literature, where research explicitly refers to students attending faith and non-faith schools, academics disagree on the impact of schooling on attitude to religious diversity. Whilst Bruegel (2006: 2) argues that children from non-faith secondary schools are “largely opposed to ‘faith’ schools”, Francis and Village (2014) found that church school attendance results in “neither a more positive nor a less positive attitude toward religious diversity, compared with students attending schools without a religious foundation” (2014: 264). Similarly, Raw’s (2006) evaluation of TLN did not identify any association between the outcomes of the programme and religious character of schools. Other research asserts relationships among young people between self-ascribed non-religious belief and negative attitudes to religious diversity (Francis and Penny 2017, Francis, Penny and Pyke 2013, McKenna and Francis 2018). However, my findings cannot contribute to such debate, since I do not hold pupil-level data and, as Chapters 2 and 3 emphasised, I can neither assume that all faith students subscribe to their school’s faith ethos, nor that students in community schools are religiously unaffiliated. Rather, the limitations section of this chapter identified that survey wording could potentially drive my negative findings. I also revisit these findings in detail in Chapter 8, in which I uncover that religious illiteracy is prominent among community school teachers on the programme, potentially contributing to the negativity reportedly perceived and experienced by their students.

Indeed, this chapter also reveals two emerging themes: apparent low levels of religious literacy at the student and teacher level, and ambiguity around students' (sometimes negative) interpretations of 'difference', both of which are revisited alongside the community school findings in Chapter 8. Here, my qualitative primary data will reveal that teachers' focus on exploring similarities and differences during the Link Days side-lines the concept of difference and thereby exacerbates rhetoric denigrates difference. Similarly, question and answer sessions held during Link Days are found to reinforce a form of religious illiteracy that understands religious plurality as finite, potentially explaining the oversimplified 'knowledge' that students exhibited in this chapter.

To return to my first research is 'what impact can be captured by F&BF's evaluation data?', whilst the key findings and themes from the evaluation data analysis are presented above, it is difficult to legitimately state the extent of the programme's impact using this data alone. Chapter 3's literature review addressed the difficulties of capturing impact if the researcher assumes that the concepts involved (in this case, perceptions and attitudes) can be operationalised and measured. Rather, the students' *experiences* of School Linking outweigh potential characteristics driven by demographic variables. There are several inconsistencies in the data that cannot be explained through quantitative analysis. First, the reported student discussions during Link Days, in some instances, contradicted what the students had originally planned to share and ask; their experience contradicted their expectations. Second, two 'linked' schools can report vastly different experiences of School Linking (which may be a true reflection of their experiences or influenced by the different ways in which their surveys were administered, or influenced by, their teachers). I thus turn to the following three chapters to present the findings of my qualitative primary data analysis. They serve to illustrate the processes underlying *how* School Linking impacts on students and teachers in a way that quantitative data alone cannot achieve.

CHAPTER 6

Qualitative findings and discussion part one: Teacher approaches

6.1: Introduction

The previous chapter answered my first research question, ‘what impact can be captured from the Faith and Belief Forum’s (F&BF’s) evaluation data?’ Although the statistical analysis in the chapter pointed to useful associations between the outcomes of School Linking and a number of demographic variables (such as the age of the students, the experience of the teachers and the faith ethos of the schools), I questioned the extent to which demographic relationships alone can explain the young people’s *experiences* of School Linking. This, and the following two chapters, draw upon my analysis of primary qualitative data that I collected through an open-ended survey, participant observation and focus groups to address my second and third research questions, ‘How does School Linking inform or inhibit ‘peaceful relations’ at the interpersonal level?’ and ‘How does School Linking inform or inhibit ‘peaceful relations’ at the institutional level?’ In contrast to the statistical analysis in the previous chapter, this approach is inductive and open to uncovering new and alternative meanings for ‘peaceful relations’ in the context of School Linking, to be discussed in Chapter 9.

The first of three qualitative analysis chapters, this chapter discusses teachers’ approaches to School Linking. It opens with a commentary on the prescriptive nature of the CPD days¹⁷⁰ and the extent to which the teachers engage in, and implement, the training. The finding that some ‘experienced’¹⁷¹ teachers appear to show apathy towards the CPD training, taking an unstructured approach to their Link Days, goes some way to explaining the relationship inferred in the previous chapter between the ‘experience’ of the teachers and a

¹⁷⁰ See Glossary

¹⁷¹ See Glossary.

decline in student confidence. It also questions the positive portrayal of experienced teachers made in previous evaluations of The Linking Network (TLN, for example Shannahan 2018).

The second section of this chapter, which describes teacher challenges, corroborates findings from my quantitative analysis. I show that challenges such as time constraints and teacher-perceived poor student behaviour are interdependent. Furthermore, the professional role of the teacher proves significant, impacting on their capacity to commit to, and implement correctly, the CPD training. The final section explores wider school engagement with School Linking, revealing motivations to take part that were not reported by teachers in Chapter 5's survey data. I show that headteachers tend to encourage teachers to participate as part of wider school agendas, while other teachers express a desire to frame School Linking as complimentary to Religious Education (RE). The section closes by exploring the ongoing challenge of disseminating the work of School Linking within the school community.

The findings in this chapter largely build upon previous research evaluating the work of TLN (Kerr et al. 2011, Raw 2006, 2009, Shannahan 2018). Moreover, this chapter introduces wider debates around teacher agency and neoliberalism in education.¹⁷² Teacher challenges arising from an increasingly politicised education system are an ongoing theme in this and the following chapter.

6.2: CPD: prescription, implementation and engagement

As outlined in Chapter 1, School Linking explores three key questions, 'who am I?', 'who are we?' and 'where do we live and how do we live together?' Each question is the focus for a different CPD day and Link Day. In their first CPD day, the teachers were immediately told, "[T]he key questions are integral to the

¹⁷² By which I mean the marketisation of education, the aim of which is to "make the kind of fundamental change to teachers' practice that is seen as essential for pupils' success" (Pratt 2016: 18).

process of learning” (F&BF staff member). Alongside the key questions, the concept of ‘safe space’, (which is discussed in detail in the next chapter), was regularly emphasised:

[The F&BF staff member] emphasised that when [F&BF] staff visit Link Days, how the safe space is introduced and maintained throughout the day is one of the key things they’ll be looking for. (Fieldnotes, Waltham Forest CPD 1)

[The F&BF staff member] played the new safe space video.¹⁷³ The video covers the five key principles of safe space [...] Key phrases from the video included “These principles should be revisited at the start of any session, even if the groups have met before” and “Safe space, an invaluable tool for dialogue.” (Fieldnotes, Waltham Forest CPD 3)

The training also emphasised the importance of reflection and feedback after each activity and at the end of each Link Day. Similarly, reflection was integrated into the CPD training itself:

The teachers were asked to look through the resource packs and decide on activities that they’d like to use. [the F&BF staff member] emphasised that there needs to be time for reflection at the end of the day. (Fieldnotes, London CPD 2)

What you might do with your students is you might want to reflect. (F&BF staff member, Waltham Forest CPD 2)

Beyond the prescribed elements of key questions, safe space and reflection time, the CPD training consisted of the sharing and trialling of resources and activities for Link Days, as well as planning time. A staff member announced, at the start of the second CPD day in Waltham Forest, “You should leave here

¹⁷³ The video is available in the references under Faith and Belief Forum 2017

with everything you need, if you haven't actually planned your entire day". To aid with planning, teacher resource packs included a suggested plan for each Link Day (incorporating approved activities, safe space and reflection time). Some teachers appreciated these, telling me: "It's really handy and makes you feel more confident, because as a teacher you're used to things being laid out like this" (female teacher, Roman Catholic-ethos school, Waltham Forest CPD 2). As Shannahan (2018: 15) noted in his evaluation of The Linking Network (TLN), this provision has "the potential to ensure consistency" among the teachers' approaches, as well as demonstrating an awareness on the part of TLN (or in this case, F&BF) of the pressures that teachers are under; something discussed in more detail in the following section of this chapter.

Despite the CPD training's emphasis on the importance of structure, my primary data reveals a tendency for experienced teachers to disregard the prescribed approach. In Teacher A's words during his third Link Day, "this will be exactly as it normally is. We'll plan 15 activities, do about three then make everything up as we go along!" His sentiments were echoed by a number of other experienced teachers, who framed their unstructured approaches to Link Days in positive terms during the CPD discussions and focus groups:

We found yesterday we abandoned the whole plan because the children did it themselves. (Focus group, female teacher, Jewish-ethos school)

We really went off topic. Our plans went out the window. (Focus group, female teacher, Roman Catholic-ethos school)

I guess then that's not being afraid to abandon the plan. (Focus group, female teacher, Muslim-ethos school)

There is evidence pointing to the benefits of unstructured approaches to School Linking or similar projects. In her TLN evaluations, Raw noted that "unstructured time offered the opportunity for children to choose to spend time

with each other, talk more personally and play together” (2006: 19).¹⁷⁴ Raw also reported that students were hesitant to provide data for her study unless reassured that their teachers would not hear the recordings (2009: 26), pointing to a preference for conversations to be free from teacher monitoring. Similarly, Ipgrave (2009: 216) quoted a student as saying, “I think sometimes our teacher made us ask certain questions and it sort of moved us on to another topic and stopped us from writing, talking”, reiterating the issue of teacher control over student exchanges.¹⁷⁵

However, I am hesitant to accept the teachers’ accounts of their students’ Link Day perceptions as accurate without further evidence, since the previous chapter’s findings illustrated that their perceptions of their students’ experiences did not always tally with what the students themselves report (see Section 5.2.2). Indeed, my participant observation indicated that unstructured Link Day activities in some instances resulted in a lack of engagement, or other disruptive behaviour, from students.

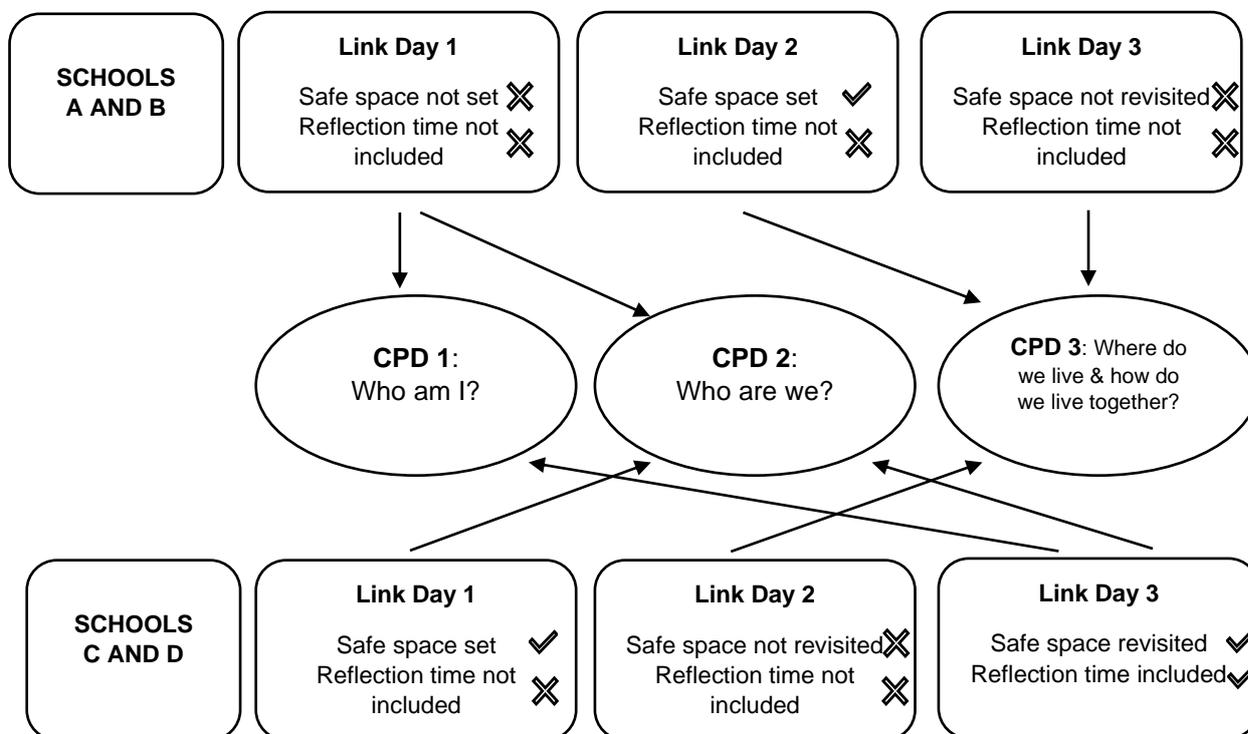
The extent to which my focus school teachers (all experienced in School Linking) accurately implemented the CPD training is illustrated in figure 6.1, providing a visual aid to Kerr et al.’s (2011: 9) evaluation finding that, “Though the importance of impact and outcomes is articulated through SLN’s¹⁷⁶ CPD training and support, it is clear that this is not always translated through into actual practice on the ground”.

¹⁷⁴ In the previous chapter, casual time was also the fourth most popular part of School Linking, although three times more students preferred the Link Day activity (see Section 5.2.1).

¹⁷⁵ The extent to which teachers are controlling, or monitoring, how students are mixing and interacting with each other is revisited in relation to power dynamics in the following chapter.

¹⁷⁶ School Linking Network, now called The Linking Network (TLN).

Figure 6.1: The extent to which safe space and reflection time are included in the focus school's Link Days



As the figure illustrates, very few Link Days adhered to the relevant key question.¹⁷⁷ What is more, the teachers' implementation of reflection time and safe space was inconsistent. Whilst safe space is addressed in more detail in the following chapter, that only one in six Link Days included reflection time further corroborates findings from Raw's 2009 TLN evaluation, in which she identified a lack of reflection as an area of weakness. In Raw's case, she identified this as a problem largely confined to 'new' teachers,¹⁷⁸ who may prioritise "the more mechanical aspects of taking part", such as logistics and building relations

¹⁷⁷ Although I acknowledge that this was recognised in the second CPD day by Teachers C and D. As my fieldnotes describe, "My focus school teachers C and D reflected that perhaps the question and answer session that they held this year in their first Link Days was more suited to the theme of the second day. I had agreed and was glad that they had recognised this" (Fieldnotes, London CPD 2). This example also serves to demonstrate the benefits of reflection during CPD training.

¹⁷⁸ See Glossary

between teachers over reflection time (2009: 30). I have found, however, that this issue is still prevalent among teachers with experience of School Linking.

This unstructured approach was observed to lead to a breakdown in student cooperation. For example, a seemingly negative atmosphere characterised by shouting, a lack of collaboration between students and extreme competition,¹⁷⁹ stemmed from Teacher A using an activity which was not suggested in the CPD training resource packs.¹⁸⁰ During School A and B's second Link Day, Teacher A introduced an interactive game in which each table (where the students were sitting relatively mixed between classes) was assigned a 'family name' and the students comprising each 'family' were expected to act as a team to produce paper shoes in return for 'money'. The purpose of the activity was to explore issues around poverty and social justice, however the apparent chaos and competition generated by the activity, combined with no reflection, undermined the intended objective:

The game came to an end at 1.45pm [...] School A had to leave at 2pm, so there was little time to hold a discussion about the implications of this (despite page eight of the activity instructions stating there should be a game 'debrief') [...] My overall impression of the activity was that, whilst it encouraged the students on the tables to work together (which for the most part they did), the underlying competition between tables at times got out of hand. The students were screaming, shouting and stealing equipment from other tables. At times, the chaos of the activity eclipsed any meaning or purpose it might have had. (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 2)

In other cases, F&BF-endorsed activities were used, but teachers implemented them differently from the advice given during the CPD training. For example, during Schools A and B's first Link Day, Teacher A ran an activity based around interpreting statements. It was initially run during the first CPD training:

¹⁷⁹ The specific negative outcomes to competition will be discussed in more detail in the 'safe space' section of the following chapter.

¹⁸⁰ An activity produced by an international development charitable organisation, the identity of which is anonymised in the thesis.

[The F&BF staff member] circulated statements about faith and belief to the teachers and asked them, in groups, to decide how 'helpful' they are, in line with the agenda discussion activity. She emphasised that if doing this activity with the students, the teachers should always say 'helpful' and 'unhelpful' rather than 'right and wrong'. (Fieldnotes, London CPD 1)

Observing the activity during the CPD training, I saw that the teachers were engaged in intense, productive discussion with one another, and recognised that the purpose of the activity was to assess the usefulness of language. When Teacher A repeated the activity with the students, however, he did not adapt it, as F&BF recommended. He asked the students' to simply categorise the statements (the content of which was the same as during the CPD training) as either 'good' or 'bad', which resulted in a lack of positive engagement from the students:

Two School A students from Table 1 called me over. Their card stated, 'why are Jews always trying to conquer Muslims?' They didn't know how to engage with this question and threw it back into the middle of the table to get a different one. I circulated the room and noticed that the School B students in the middle of the room were turning around to chat to each other. (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 1)

The F&BF staff member who had delivered this session during the CPD was also present at this Link Day and shared her concerns with me:

Firstly, she emphasised that this is normally used in CPD training but needs to be adapted for Link Days because the content isn't age-appropriate. Secondly, [...] she would have asked the students to place the statements on a scale from 'helpful' to 'unhelpful', as is done in the CPD training. (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 1)

The fact that Teacher A's instructions prevented students from identifying the nuances of the language within the statements may similarly exacerbate the low levels of religious literacy found in my quantitative analysis.¹⁸¹

The unstructured approach advocated by Teacher A and other focus group teachers may also explain the negative relationship between teacher 'experience' and student confidence asserted in the previous chapter.¹⁸² Namely, teachers' *overconfidence* in their approach potentially blinded them to negative outcomes:

Teacher A is clearly confident that his (unstructured) approach to School Linking is successful, and I'm reminded of a finding from my analysis of 3FF's secondary data [...] I question to what extent his approach has developed sustainable relationships or an improvement in his students' knowledge, skills and attitudes and wonder if this can be linked to his overconfidence? (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 2)

This finding echoes Raw's (2006: 24) observation that, "Teachers cited many examples of successful teamwork during link days, [...] but] The extent of teamwork or cooperation actually taking place during these processes has varied, depending on the skill and attentiveness of teachers".

Teacher A's CPD training comments uncover a potential reason for his observed overconfidence. During his final Link Day he shared with me that, having participated in School Linking for seven consecutive years, he felt that the training did not cater to his needs: "I think that's the reason why people don't go to the CPDs – it's too prescriptive [...] we lost those training wheels a long time ago". He also said "it makes me lazy, it [the training] is too regimented and the

¹⁸¹ The subject of religious literacy is addressed in detail in Chapter 8.

¹⁸² To summarise the findings, at the start of School Linking students with experienced teachers were more likely than students with new teachers to feel positive at the prospect of School Linking and feel that the Link School students would be interested in them. At the end of School Linking, however, students with new teachers were significantly more likely to report being able to talk to their Link School students and reported higher levels of similarity with their Link School students than students with experienced teachers.

resources cater to the lowest common denominator”, despite F&BF holding different sessions for new and experienced teachers during the CPD training. Other experienced teachers appeared to share this view, either implying that the final CPD training is irrelevant, “I’m just here to collect my certificate and tie up loose ends” (Female teacher, Jewish-ethos school) or sharing with me that they planned the content of the Link Days before attending the relevant CPD training, “We already have a plan, we just came for the food!” (Male teacher, Jewish-ethos school). These views were rare amongst the new teachers I spoke to, despite the previous chapter’s finding that teachers new to School Linking are reporting having interfaith experience elsewhere.

Since my findings question the assumption that experienced teachers’ implementation of the CPD would be accurate in the future, it is possible to similarly question previous evaluations’ recommendations that appear to be based upon the same assumption. For example, Shannahan’s (2018) evaluation of TLN defines ‘experienced’ teachers as those “who have been engaged in schools linking for many years” (2018: 15). He recommends that such teachers train colleagues within schools and act as “ambassadors” within councils to develop scalability of TLN (2018: 62-63). He argues that these teachers have “a vision for holistic, inclusive and empowering education that brings people together and the ability to translate this into sustainable practice” (2018: 61).¹⁸³ My findings concerning F&BF’s teachers, however, question whether this is the case.

Furthermore, I observed F&BF staff members occasionally sending mixed messages to the teachers about the prescribed structure. On two occasions during the London CPD training, a staff member implied that teachers could discard the F&BF resources:

¹⁸³ In this comment, Shannahan also quotes ‘experienced’ teachers as having a “theoretically sound understanding of inter-group contact”, something I question in Chapter 9.

Feel free to use whatever you want from our plan, but equally if you have your own ideas go with it. So long as it plays along with our key theme of 'who are we?' you know your classes so go with what will interest them. (Fieldnotes, London CPD 2)

She indicated that ideas for planning are on the screen, but said, "of course is entirely up to you what you do on the day". (Fieldnotes, London CPD 3)

What is more, F&BF staff were present at some of my observed Link Days, but did not step in when the approach of the experienced teacher did not adhere to the prescribed structure or appeared to be derailing the activity. I recognise that there may be power relations at play, a topic which I address in the following chapter. But this begs the question to what extent does, or should, F&BF have control over the Link Days? Whilst Kerr et al.'s TLN study identified "good service" as one where the schools conduct Link Days "largely independently of [the facilitator] without much need for ongoing support" (2011: 36), I would argue that in this case there is a tension between asserting adherence to the CPD training as prescribed, and respect for teacher agency.¹⁸⁴ There is an increasing body of global academic literature arguing the importance of teacher agency as vital for enhancing student learning (Toom, Pyhältö and O'Connell Rust 2015) or creating opportunities to "challenge educational structures" (Quinn and Mittenfelner Carl 2015: 751). However, my examples discussed above suggest that challenging the prescribed structure of School Linking does not necessarily result in a positive learning experience for students.

This section has investigated the alignment (or lack thereof) between the prescriptive nature of the CPD training and the unstructured implementation of Link Days employed by a number of experienced teachers. Findings concerning Teacher A's unstructured approach to School Linking has revealed that incorrectly implemented activities can result in poor outcomes for student behaviour and engagement. A contributing factor to the unstructured approach is

¹⁸⁴ Defined as "a combination of a teacher's *capacity* to initiate and the *enactment* of this capacity to actively direct his/her professional life in accordance with his/her own will, judgement and choice" (Hadar and Benish-Weisman 2019: 139).

a lack of engagement in CPD training on the part of the teachers, exacerbated at times by a hesitancy on F&BF's part to step in, through concern about undermining teacher agency. The findings in this section have corroborated, and in part explained, statistical relationships stated in the previous chapter,¹⁸⁵ and the significance of negative findings around experienced teachers have questioned the validity of previous evaluations' recommendations.

6.3: Teacher challenges

F&BF recognises the possibility that challenges can prohibit or disrupt teachers' School Linking work. Survey questions on 'barriers' to School Linking formed part of F&BF's evaluation documents (discussed in the previous chapter) and time is dedicated to the subject during CPD training. In my primary data collection, I too asked teachers to discuss barriers they faced, many of which I witnessed first-hand during participant observation.

A recurring issue teachers mentioned concerned Link Day logistics.¹⁸⁶ Despite schools being offered financial assistance from F&BF, financial constraints still pose a challenge:

I spoke to a female teacher from a Roman Catholic school and a male teacher from a Muslim school (paired together). Their first Link Day was supposed to be at the William Morris gallery but it was too costly so they went to the Museum of London instead. (Fieldnotes, Waltham Forest CPD 2)

¹⁸⁵ For example, the negative relationship between experience of teacher and student confidence (see Section 5.2.1).

¹⁸⁶ Challenges such as transportation and timetabling issues are similarly identified in evaluations of the Northern Irish Shared Education programme (for example, Blaylock and Hughes 2013: 485) and are recognised as challenges by those who advocate linking or 'twinning' programmes (Parker-Jenkins and Glenn 2011: 8).

We've had a barrier in terms of [...] the money, the budget. But that's the only barrier we've had. You know, when it gets to Link Day 3, the budgets run out [...] we have to ask the children to pay for the trip [...] coaches are quite expensive nowadays. (Focus group, female teacher, Sikh-ethos school)

Similarly, schools have access to different resources. F&BF proposes the 'buddying system' in which an equal number of students from each school take part and individual students are paired across schools. However, practical challenges regarding transport result in inconsistent implementation of the system. Teacher B left a very small number of her year 8 students behind during her first Link Day with Teacher A, because Teacher A (whose year groups consist of 100+ students) could only take thirteen students in the school minibus:

Teacher B explained that this year there are twenty-two students in year 8, but they could only take thirteen because that is the number that School A takes, and sometimes they 'buddy up' students for the duration of the link [...]. Of the twenty-two in the year, eighteen applied to take part [...]. She expressed disappointment that eager students could not attend: "I felt so bad leaving five behind!" (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 1)

For the second and third Link Days, however, Teacher B allowed the additional students to take part, despite not attending the first one. Unfortunately, the new students were not introduced and exhibited extremely introverted behaviour during the Link Days, even among their own classmates.

Alternatively, timing can pose a challenge in that it often presents scheduling conflicts with religious festivals or holidays, key academic dates, or school administrative obligations:

[Teacher C's] third link date is provisional because he is struggling to avoid a clash with Ramadan: "We can't host the children during Ramadan and force them to not eat". (Fieldnotes, Schools C and D Link Day 1)

The teacher from the Muslim school [...] was unable to link last year because of time restrictions around GCSEs. (Fieldnotes, Waltham Forest CPD 1)

So we haven't had our Link Day 2 yet. We have had some issues in our school with Ofsted and all that stuff so it's gone over and we've planned it for next week. (Focus group, male teacher, Muslim-ethos school)

A F&BF staff member explained to me at the first Waltham Forest CPD day that schools can drop out because they do not have the time to commit to School Linking. This reflects Kerr et al.'s (2011: 79) finding that in the instances in which School Linking has a reported negative impact, teachers said that the commitment required "reduced the time available to be innovative in other ways and in other lessons".

What is more, although some teachers try to run "full days" to have "time to break it up" (female teacher, Roman Catholic-ethos school), others are limited in the amount of time they have to spend on the Link Day: "We agree that we don't have a lot of time [...] We tend to meet for two and a half hours maximum" (Female teacher, Jewish-ethos school). The six Link Days I observed generally ran from 10am to 2pm, and on a few occasions the students had to depart the venue or host school very abruptly or earlier than planned due to traffic or other factors which impeded upon their time.¹⁸⁷

The logistical constraints are symptomatic of a wider issue; teachers are under increasing and multiple pressures from neoliberal ideologies, by which I mean the movement that, "schooling has increasingly been constructed in market terms" Pratt (2016: 2). My discussions in Chapter 2 demonstrated the need to support specialist and non-specialist teachers (CoRE 2018, Everington 2018, NATRE 2017) in the teaching of religious issues, but teachers experience a multitude of other pressures as a result of neoliberal education policy.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ The amount of time that students are in contact with each other is revisited in the Chapter 9's assessment of contact theory.

¹⁸⁸ For a summary of neoliberal English education legislation since the mid-1990s see Pratt (2016: 3-5).

Researchers have argued that the objectives of educational systems have moved towards “quantitatively measurable productivity and efficacy” (Noula and Govaris 2017, Westheimer 2008). In England, Gillborn and Youdell’s (2000) study of two English secondary schools found that result-driven pressure on teachers led to “a series of interlocking constraints” on the wider school and the students themselves” (2000: 33). Similarly Pratt’s (2016) small-scale study of assessment practice in English primary schools asserted a tension between teachers being “encouraged to work towards their own personalised areas of professional development” and the requirement for them to “mould themselves into the shape of the government prescribed Teachers’ Standards” (2016: 19). For Pratt, the marketisation of education, though structured towards competition *between* schools, has inadvertently “altered the dynamics *within* schools too” (2016: 3). Teachers taking part in School Linking, then, are working within these complex dynamics, and as such, practical challenges are inevitable. However, as this chapter will go on to argue, teachers can also use School Linking strategically to meet school agendas.

Another challenge that teachers did not necessarily convey to me, but which I witnessed, was the varying levels of behaviour on the part of the students. Positively, some instances of traditionally ‘bad’ student behaviour (in this case shouting during lesson time and running in the school corridor) can instigate interaction between the two link classes:

I noticed that the girls were becoming louder and most had eaten the sweets from their goody bags. Both teachers were happy with the noise levels, and although I felt that behaviour was slipping, there was certainly interaction between the students of the different schools. (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 2)

As a F&BF staff member said to me during that Link Day said, “It’s not how we would like to see things go, but that’s not to say that we won’t see positive interactions”.

However, in Schools C and D's Link Days, the students' rowdy behaviour (within school groups, not between) significantly disrupted the activities and group discussions. This is despite Teacher C demonstrating best practice in preparing his students at the start of each Link Day.¹⁸⁹ For example:

Teacher C addressed the students, outlining that the point of the trip was to visit the museum with a group of boys from a Muslim school. He managed their expectations by briefly covering what the boys will be wearing etc. He asked the students to be open, friendly and professional and briefed them about his expectations of their behaviour. (Fieldnotes, Schools C and D Link Day 1)

During School C and D's first Link Day at an RAF museum, the students' free time to tour the exhibits was cut short:

The F&BF intern came into the room and asked me and Teacher D to go down – the students had been told off by museum staff for misbehaving. We went downstairs and found Teacher C grouping the students together and speaking to them about their behaviour. (Fieldnotes, Schools C and D Link Day 1)

What is more, during their third Link Day, Teacher D repeatedly warned the students against misbehaving, made a list on the whiteboard of students whose behaviour has cost them their break time and identified individuals from his own class who would stay after school. Raw (2006: 60) identified poor behaviour as a characteristic of unsuccessful TLN Link Days, because it necessitates "extraordinary behaviour management and the full attention of teachers".

¹⁸⁹ Student briefings are recognised as an integral part of the process; briefing students on the expected activities and outcomes of the day as well as required behaviour is described as a "basic requirement" (Raw 2006: 60) and identified as a responsibility for the teacher in Jackson's (2014a) commentary on schools as a site of hosting and visiting.

In the case of the third Link Day, however, Teacher C wondered whether the event taking place during Ramadan (despite attempts to avoid this) would affect his students' behaviour:

There is no food or drink allowed in the school at any time, so students will eat in the minibus on the way [at 10am], then won't have any lunch until 2pm. [...] [Teacher C] wondered what effect this will have on the behaviour and concentration of the students. (Fieldnotes, Schools C and D Link Day 3)

If a lack of food and drink, then, contributed to the disruptive behaviour observed in the third Link Day, it demonstrates that the challenges are not mutually exclusive. In this case, the implications of timing problems directly influenced the students' behaviour.

There was also a lack of communication between the teachers about how to deal with the behaviour; Teacher C expressed frustration that Teacher D was giving constant warnings but no disciplinary action. This reflects a lack of effective communication between teachers generally, identified in my research and observed in previous evaluations, with Shannahan commenting that "poor communication can inhibit the growth of linking relationships" (2018: 51). I experienced a lack of communication about the Link Day plans first-hand, when I almost missed Schools A and B's final Link Day because it was communicated to me by F&BF (rather than the teachers) one week before it took place. This issue was also experienced by some of the teachers:

There is no doubt that Teachers C and D get on well on a personal level, but Teacher C showed frustration at a lack of communication by Teacher D about the Link Days. Up until a week ago, Teacher D had forgotten he

was hosting (until prompted by Teacher C)! Teacher C does not know what is planned for the day. (Fieldnotes, Schools C and D Link Day 3)¹⁹⁰

In the past, depending on link partners [...] more links haven't worked than have worked [...] We found that sometimes it's just very one-sided. We've got to do all the planning and we've got to make it work if it's going to happen at all. (Focus group, male teacher, Jewish-ethos school)

[My linking partner] actually left the school and that class. I'm not working with her anymore. So there's a new teacher that I need to communicate with. (Focus group, female teacher, Muslim-ethos school)

What is more, I identified that teachers' roles within their schools can affect their capacity for effective communication. Both of my focus school partnerships consisted of one class teacher linked with a different member of staff (in one case the school chaplain and in the other an 'Informal Jewish Educator'). During the CPD and Link Days, references were made regarding their roles and capacity:

Teacher A emphasised that he wouldn't have the capacity to do School Linking if he were just a class teacher: "I wouldn't be able to do it if I were a regular class teacher. The planning would just become overtime". (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 3)

Teacher C has been at the school for two years and really enjoys his job [...] because it is much more flexible than a formal teacher and allows him to focus his efforts on activities such as Linking. (Fieldnotes, Schools C and D Link Day 3)

¹⁹⁰ This issue was exacerbated by non-attendance at CPD training on the part of my focus school teachers, an issue identified in the previous chapter when teachers were not present at the last CPD day to complete their endpoint survey.

I overheard Teacher C saying [to Teacher D], “we’re lucky that we have an interfaith department which does this sort of thing. We have the resources. It’s more work for you”. (Fieldnotes, London CPD 2)

This finding reflects Kerr et al.’s (2011: 45), who observed that teachers had greater capacity for School Linking if the work was part of their existing role: “In some links, the work held a different status or priority within the two schools and this was often reflected in the amount of time spent on the project. This in turn caused tensions between the schools.” In the previous chapter, I was unable to use the Linking teachers’ roles as a variable in my secondary data analysis since F&BF did not hold the information. In my own schools’ survey, I asked teachers to state their role and of the thirty-six Linking teachers who completed the survey, twenty-four indicated they were a class teacher (some non-religion specialists, such as geography, humanities and science teachers). Others encompassed multiple roles alongside teaching, including Deputy SENCO, Head of Department and Citizenship Coordinator. So teachers’ roles, combined with the pressures stemming from the neoliberalisation of education and low levels of attendance or engagement at the third CPD day, suggest that non-specialist teachers are not accessing the training they need to facilitate discussions around religion and receive clarification on the expected aims and outcomes of School Linking.¹⁹¹

To summarise, this section opened with a commentary on teacher challenges. The common themes of logistical issues and time restraints reflected findings in the previous chapter of the thesis, as well as previous evaluations of F&BF and TLN, RE literature and research into neoliberal education policy. The additional challenges associated with student behaviour were found to overlap with issues concerning Link Day timing and religious festivals, indicating that challenges are not mutually exclusive. A lack of communication between teachers was found to exacerbate challenges, and teachers’ roles within the schools can affect their capacity to overcome them.

¹⁹¹ The extent to which teachers agree on the aims of School Linking is discussed in Chapter 8.

6.4: Wider school engagement

The previous section outlined a number of challenges that teachers face prior to and during School Linking. I now turn to the wider school community to investigate the support that Linking Teachers receive, how this might be shaped by the schools' motivation to take part in Schools Linking, and how teachers are feeding back about the School Linking experience.

My primary data analysis indicates that support by school senior leadership can greatly assist with time constraints:

[I've] got the deputy head saying, "of course you can have those three days", [...] you definitely need a supportive deputy head, or whoever is in charge [...] I think that's probably part of why it works well. (Focus group, female teacher, Roman Catholic-ethos school)

Teacher A is grateful that his headteacher gives him one day a week facilities time (Wednesdays) and is really on board with his linking commitments: "In his words, we want it to be like I don't exist on a Wednesday so that people won't try and bother me. It's very sweet and protective". (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 3)

It appears that the extent to which senior leadership is involved in School Linking varies, however. In some cases, teachers shared through my survey that management actively encouraged them to sign up to School Linking. Some teachers simply stated, "Headteacher wanted us to be involved" or, "Headteacher was keen for us to be a part [of the programme]". In others, the incentive for the senior leadership was explained. For example, a teacher from a Sikh-ethos school stated "Ofsted requirements" as their reason for taking part, suggesting that School Linking can be used to meet neoliberal education agendas. A focus group conversation between two female teachers from Jewish-ethos and Muslim-ethos schools echoes this:

Teacher 1: Don't forget to send me the photos! [...] It's just the fact that they're there and it's also good for our folders for when Ofsted come.

Teacher 2: We just had Ofsted.

Teacher 1: And us.

Teacher 2: And they put the information in their folders.

Teacher 1: Yes, they did with us too. It was a big part of the report.

So, wider school agendas can serve as the motivation for, or a benefit from, taking part in School Linking. This is a finding that was not apparent in the previous chapter's secondary data analysis, in which the most frequent teacher responses for School Linking's impact on the wider school were the 'development of attitudes' and/or 'an increased understanding of another faith'. Kerr et al.'s (2011) evaluation of TLN similarly identified Ofsted requirements (specifically the 'community cohesion duty' outlined in Chapter 3) as a reason for participating:

[Some] school staff felt that joining the network would help their school meet the Duty to Promote Community Cohesion, as part of the Ofsted requirements. At the time of joining the network, the duty on schools was a relatively new aspect of Ofsted inspections and consequently schools were exploring ways of evidencing their commitment to the duty (2011: 39).

I explore teachers' perceptions of the aims of School Linking in more detail in Chapter 8, in which I identify that a 'strategic ambiguity' in F&BF's presentation of School Linking aims can foster a general unity of purpose whilst allowing space for teachers and schools to satisfy specific agendas.

Then again, during my participant observation of School A's post-Link Day assembly, I spoke to the headteacher, whose primary motivation for School Linking was not to satisfy an agenda, but was personal and resulted from an unexpected event:

We had a brief chat, during which I asked [the headteacher] why he decided to join the scheme seven years ago. He explained that he gets “four to five emails” about extracurricular schemes every day, “plus bags of post”. He continued, “if there’s not a personal connection then it goes in the bin”. When prompted as to the personal connection with School Linking, he told the story of opening the letter and noticing [a senior figure in F&BF’s] name on the letterhead. It turns out that, coincidentally, his aunt worked for [the senior figure] which made him feel that this is a cause that he wanted to support. In his words, “all because my aunt [worked for] [the senior figure]!” (Fieldnotes, School A assembly)

This example reminds us that ‘impact’ can have origins in chance events that cannot be predicted or controlled for. The recognition of these events, and the implications they have for the evaluation of School Linking is central to the methodology of this thesis and will be revisited in Chapter 10.

In my survey, other teachers reflected on the overlap between School Linking and RE. When teachers were asked about their motivation for participating in School Linking responses included; “Support study of RS” (community school), “Raises the profile of the RE department at school” (Roman Catholic-ethos school) and, “Part of our RE curriculum is living / practising your faith so by teaching others signs and symbols / celebrations of Catholicism we are fulfilling the curriculum” (Roman Catholic-ethos school). Similarly, School Linking’s connection with RE is used as a tool by teachers to encourage students to participate in the Link Day activities, with Teacher A telling his students during the second Link Day, “as well as being important for interfaith relationships, everything we’ve covered here will be part of your GCSEs in six months’ time.”

Shannahan’s evaluation of TLN recommends embedding School Linking into the curriculum. This will address the “concern of overstretched teachers” since School Linking resources can be used as curriculum material (2018: 58). I acknowledge that this aligns with the comments from the teachers above, addresses the multiple challenges outlined in the previous section and would provide greater control over the correct implementation of the CPD training, so

avoiding the negative consequences of an unstructured approach. However, some argue that teacher autonomy is a key factor to 'progressive approaches' to RE, which "challenge traditionalist curriculum and open spaces for innovative, connected and academically rigorous social and moral learning" Keddie (2015: 372). Similarly, Jackson (2003b: 22) praises multifaith and dialogical approaches to RE which emphasise "the engagement of pupils with their own beliefs and values in relation to understanding others" and "do not fit comfortably with national or local syllabuses that specify the systematic coverage of large amounts of information, leaving little interaction, reflection and criticism". Then again, he warns against RE becoming "too unstructured", something I have identified in the opening section of this chapter. Ultimately, the complexity suggests that greater thought must be given to the relationships between CPD implementation, RE and teacher capacity and teacher agency.

The relationship with the wider school community has so far been framed in terms of support *during* School Linking and investment in the linking process *prior* to the programme itself. The only remaining question is whether there is sufficient feedback about School Linking within and beyond the school environment. This could be a sign of long-term impact that has yet to manifest itself. My research reveals that, largely, the teachers are making the effort to share their linking experiences, though the onus is on them to do so (reiterating the importance of support from school leadership).

In the focus group discussions, a number of teachers shared the ways in which they feed back to the school about School Linking:

We're going to get them [the students] to do a video, sort of about the experience so far, at the beginning of our final Link Day. Then [linking partner] is going to get his technician to edit it. Then at the end of the day we're going to have the premiere. We're going to be at [linking partner's Jewish-ethos] school so the headteacher will be there. (Female teacher, Roman Catholic school)

Well we have an interfaith display board. So when we have a link we try to get photographs and feedback from the children and we put it up and we hope that other children will stop and look at it and the governors when they come. And other members of staff, parents, when they come will look at it and know what we're doing. (Female teacher, Jewish-ethos school)

We haven't displayed them [the photos], but what we have done is put it on our termly newsletter that goes out. (Male teacher, Muslim-ethos school)

No teachers shared attempts to feed back to the wider community beyond parents, echoing the previous chapter's finding that teachers appeared unable to articulate the programme's impact at this level. Attempts to disseminate information and experiences of School Linking were noted in previous evaluations (Kerr et al. 2011; Raw 2009), however Kerr et al. found this to be "an area that teachers were aware that they needed to build on" (2011: 80). My findings indicate that the responsibility for dissemination falls on the (often overstretched) Linking Teacher. In a focus group, a female, Roman Catholic-ethos teacher clarified, "We've put a thing in our school magazine, twice actually. Well, / put a thing in the school magazine [emphasis added]". Furthermore, despite School A students working on the content for their feedback assembly to years 7-9 the day before, Teacher A said to me, "what the girls do today will amount for 10% of the entire assembly. I'll be planning it all tonight".

Despite efforts to share School Linking with the wider community, there are cases where there is still little awareness of the programme within schools, echoing Kerr et al.'s (2011) statistically-significant finding that there is no evidence of awareness of TLN amongst students who have not been part of the programme. Indeed, Teacher C's colleague expressed a similar sentiment to me as I left his school following the first Link Day:

As we left the department, the other teacher pointed out a canvas on the wall. It was created at one of his Link Days last year. [...] He explained that no one else in the school knows what it means. [...] They bluntly said that they [the Linking Teachers] do a lot of activities and there "aren't enough

hours in the day” to share them all with the school. (Fieldnotes, Schools C and D Link Day 1)

Furthermore, in my survey a teacher from a Roman Catholic-ethos school responded to a question on challenges with, “does everyone read the school magazine? Does everyone listen in assembly?” To a large extent, my research cannot answer these questions, however having observed Teacher A lead a feedback assembly to approximately 300 students, the student audience indicated that they were listening to the students’ delivery:

There was an interested murmur of agreement from the students in response to their description of ‘oops and ouch’¹⁹² [...] The students in the audience laughed in appreciation of the gifts from School B students: “They kept us well fed with snacks and chicken and chips for lunch and We’re pretty sure that they were happy to meet us. They brought us home-made cupcakes and even bottles of slime!” (Fieldnotes, School A assembly)

This is one example of apparent engagement with School Linking from the wider school community. However, Teacher A’s school role allows him more time than class teachers, and he was vocal about his support from school management. For the most part, the limited capacity of teachers to fulfil School Linking commitments extends to feeding back to the wider school community.

This section has explored motivations for taking part in School Linking, revealing instances where senior leadership has encouraged participation as a means of tackling wider school, political or social agendas. The extent to which the relationship between School Linking and RE may be formalised was discussed, highlighting that a balance must be achieved between easing pressure on overstretched teachers whilst ensuring that the structure of School Linking is respected. The section closed by identifying an ongoing issue: how School Linking is communicated to the wider school. Whilst attempts are made,

¹⁹² One of F&BF’s ‘safe space’ principles, discussed in more detail in Section 7.4.

this is yet another pressure on the Linking teacher, and at this stage I am unable to determine if and how long-term impact has stemmed from their attempts.

6.5: Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the alignment (or lack thereof) between the prescriptive nature of the CPD training and the unstructured implementation of Link Days employed by a number of experienced teachers, explored challenges faced by teachers signed up to School Linking and examined ways in which the wider school community is engaged in School Linking. The findings have built upon previous evaluations of TLN, on one hand corroborating findings regarding teacher challenges, and on the other questioning previous research's positive portrayal of experienced teachers. Furthermore, my findings about the Linking Teachers' roles in their respective schools provide an additional evidence base for RE literature (discussed in Chapter 2) that asserts the need for training in religious topics for both specialist and non-specialist teachers. Finally, the first section of this chapter hinted at wider bodies of literature on teacher agency and neoliberal education policy; future investigation could explore my findings in relation to this literature in more detail.

Returning to my research questions my primary data analysis aims to answer, the first asks how School Linking informs or inhibits peaceful relations at the interpersonal level. Three key findings contribute to my argument. First, experienced teachers' overconfidence in their unstructured approach to School Linking has resulted in activities being incorrectly implemented. This led to a lack of communication between, or disruptive behaviour among, Link School students (seen in Teacher A's F&BF's statement-based activity and his 'shoe making' activity not prescribed by F&BF). These examples could illustrate why the previous chapter found that students with experienced teachers were less likely to report being able to talk with their Link School students than those with new teachers, despite being more confident at the beginning of the programme. Second, logistical challenges affected relations between the students.

Inconsistent use of the buddying system, for example, resulted in students joining the programme midway through. If not handled sensitively, these students could exhibit introverted behaviour and a lack of communication with the Link School students. Lastly, while there is evidence of strong interpersonal relations between Linking Teachers, where communication broke down (sometimes driven by non-attendance at the CPD training), a lack of joint planning resulted in teachers being unaware of the student activities and therefore unable to manage the day effectively.

My primary data analysis also aims to answer how School Linking informs or inhibits peaceful relations at an institutional level. It is clear that Linking Teachers appreciated support from school management. School Linking could therefore offer an opportunity to develop relations between teachers and school leaders. Where support was lacking, for example putting all responsibility on the Linking Teachers to feed back to the wider school community, opportunities for communication and interaction among teachers (and possibly parents) were missed. Lastly, School Linking is used as a tool to satisfy school agendas; while external pressures on schools (for example Ofsted and the community cohesion agenda) are found to exacerbate the challenges faced by Linking Teachers, School Linking can simultaneously serve the school in meeting these demands.

CHAPTER 7

Qualitative findings and discussion Part two: Selection, power and space

7.1: Introduction

The previous chapter explored teachers' approaches to School Linking. It provided an explanatory account of quantitative findings in Chapter 5 concerning teacher experience and student confidence. Furthermore, my findings built upon previous evaluations of The Linking Network (TLN) by identifying practical challenges facing teachers, including the barrier of disseminating information about School Linking to the wider school community.

In this chapter, I examine factors influencing the dynamics between individuals and schools during School Linking, including selection of students, power relations between students and teachers, the construction of physical space and the concept of 'safe space'. I respond to a number of questions: Who is in the room and how were they selected? How is power distributed within and between teacher and student groups? How are the power dynamics shaped by the space which the participants share?

This chapter illustrates a number of themes identified in the literature review chapters. The third and fourth sections, 'Sharing space' and 'Safe space', build upon themes in religious and intercultural education outlined in Chapter 2 and 3. The first two sections, 'Selection' and 'Power dynamics', however, highlight unexpected findings not applicable to the literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3, or previous evaluations of TLN. First, the teachers' selection of students reveal a number of challenges, including legal issues concerning parental consent and gender segregation. Second, gender is a key aspect of power imbalance identified within a Linking Teacher partnership, a finding explored in relation to issues around interfaith dialogue. Throughout the chapter, the different power dynamics in School Linking are explored in relation to the 'four dimensions' of

power, (empirical phenomena developed in power-related academic literature, re-theorised by Haugaard 2012).

My unexpected findings have implications for the research's methodological position. My reflective stance respects the uncovering of programme outcomes that do not align with stated aims and is also open to alternative measures of 'success'. For example, despite research associating student 'mixing' between schools with positive relations,¹⁹³ my analysis identifies that a *hesitancy* to mix can be explained by other factors driven by power and space that are not necessarily 'negative'. Findings such as these will contribute to discussions in the following chapter's analysis of the aims of School Linking.

7.2: The selection of students

The ways in which teachers selected students to participate in School Linking during my primary data collection varied. My analysis revealed three popular criteria upon which teachers based their selection: written applications, parental choice and gender, all of which are associated with dimensions of power.

My focus schools' Teachers B and D, as well a number of other teachers, used a system of written applications. Teacher D talked me through his process. That year, twenty-two of his twenty-eight year 9 students applied for School Linking and he selected fifteen based on who he thought would "get the most out of" the day. He was impressed that one student emphasised a desire to ask questions, for example. Other teachers judged the applications on academic writing ability. As one teacher explained in her focus group discussion, she asked students who had previously taken part in School Linking to act as a 'selection panel' thereby sharing her own power of selection with students themselves:

¹⁹³ See, for example, literature around integrated schooling in Northern Ireland reviewed in Chapter 3, such as Gallagher, Smith and Montgomery (2003), Hughes et al. (2013), McGlynn et al. (2004) and Schubotz and Robinson (2006). The literature is supported by Bruegel's (2006) research in England.

[Year nine students] have to write an anonymous letter which I number. Then my old 3FF [now F&BF] girls are my judging panel. [...] one said to me “she clearly hasn’t proofread it so she doesn’t care about this opportunity. She must go on the ‘no pile’”. They are much more critical than I am! [...] Then we’ll hear “wow look what she’s written! She is genuinely interested in this programme”. (Focus group, female teacher, Roman Catholic-ethos school)

The very act of judgement presupposes an absence of equal opportunity for students’ right to participate in School Linking. I do not know whether School Linking students are part of their schools’ formal ‘Gifted and Talented’ programme,¹⁹⁴ but assessing applications on the basis of writing ability suggests that those who are academically brighter in a traditional sense are prioritised. This method of selection certainly reflects schools’ treatment of gifted and talented students; Koshy and Pinheiro-Torres (2013) found that that the “main method of provision [for gifted students] consisted of withdrawing pupils from the classroom for outings and special activities” (2013: 971), which, I argue, includes schemes such as School Linking.¹⁹⁵

This selection process exhibits the ‘third dimension’ of power, which “works by making certain acts of structuration appear reasonable because they are part of the perceived natural order of things” (Haugaard 2012: 44). The previous chapter referenced how teachers in the ‘politicised’ classroom are under pressure from neoliberal education principles. By enhancing the profiles of academically talented students through participation in School Linking, the programme is implemented in such a way to confirm with the neoliberal ideals of the results-driven school.

¹⁹⁴ The ‘Gifted and Talented’ policy was pronounced as part of the ‘Excellence in Cities’ agenda in 1999 (DfEE 2000b). Geared towards tackling underachievement in secondary schools, the policy advocated that schools develop provision for ‘gifted and talented’ pupils.

¹⁹⁵ Koshy and Pinheiro-Torres (2013) also found that teachers are failing to monitor gifted students’ racial and socio-economic backgrounds despite research suggesting that students with lower socio-economic status and those in inner-city UK schools (i.e. those in a high proportion of schools taking part in School Linking, see Section 4.4.1) suffer from underachievement and low aspiration (Casey and Koshy 2002, Office for Standards in Education 2001). Teachers are therefore “not adequately addressing inclusion even though this issue lay at the heart of the gifted and talented education policy” (Koshy and Pinheiro-Torres 2013: 973).

The issue of exclusivity driven by written applications was recognised in one of my focus groups, indicating that teachers are aware of the problem:

[The written application process] is a disadvantage as well, because [...] I don't know if our children are ever not accepting of different faiths and cultures. Especially the young people that choose to do a linking programme [...] I think almost we want the programme to hit students that don't opt in. (Focus group, male teacher, Jewish-ethos school)¹⁹⁶

Teacher A did not use application forms but told me during his first Link Day that he asked teachers to put forward students who they deemed to be “the best of the best”. When pressed for his view on the exclusion of students who are less confident, willing or eloquent, he bluntly replied: “It’s practical. I don’t need people saying no”. His response illustrates the predicament that teachers face. They appear to select talented students, in part, to ensure that the selection process can be managed as efficiently as possible. The previous chapter demonstrated that teachers have varying levels of capacity to engage in School Linking. However, recognising the issues with written applications does not lessen the fact that it is an inherently exclusive process.

My final focus school Teacher, Teacher C, opted for a different method of selection. He circulated an open letter to all parents of year 9 students, asking for them to sign up their child. This process exemplifies the ‘first dimension’ of power, that is, “the ability of A to prevail over B, by making B do something which B would not otherwise have done” (Haugaard 2012: 35).¹⁹⁷ This assertion of power over the individual, however, led to one School C student being unaware that he had been signed up to School Linking until he was retrieved from his class for the first Link Day. At the end of the day, he explained that he did not want to take part in future Link Days:

¹⁹⁶ This quote also alludes the issue of selection bias in contact encounters, discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.

¹⁹⁷ This dimension of power was asserted by Dahl (1957), however previously comprised the core of Weber’s view of power (Weber, Gerth and Mills 1948).

He said, “Miss. I really don’t want to do this. How do I get out of the other ones?” I explained again who I was and asked him if he would like me to get Teacher C. He looked at the floor and shook his head. I asked if he would prefer me to have a private word with Teacher C and he agreed. [...] He said his parents must have completed the permission slip without telling him. (Fieldnotes, Schools C and D Link Day 1)

When I explained the situation to Teacher C, another teacher (who was running a second Link with a different school) exclaimed “I can’t believe a parent has done that again!” indicating that this was not the first instance. The consequences of involuntary participation in School Linking are discussed in Chapter 9.

Teacher discussions during CPD training, however, suggested that it is more common for parents to *refuse* permission, again exhibiting the first dimension of power. Teachers gave a variety of reasons including security fears, “They think someone will jump out from behind a tree with a machine gun” (female, Jewish school London CPD 1) and hesitancy to miss school, “one of the parents didn’t want one girl to be part of it because she’d miss three days of school” (focus group, female teacher, Roman Catholic-ethos school). Another teacher, whose school policy is to inform parents that their child is being taken out of school for an event, explained that when a parent disagrees, the child in question will simply not attend school that day (fieldnotes, Waltham Forest CPD 1).

These examples open up discussion about the extent to which parents have responsibility for, or the right to, decide on the opportunities given to their children in school. I faced similar questions during the process of gaining ethical approval for my fieldwork (see Section 4.5.2). There is a moral argument for students’ personal autonomy to override parental choice, on the basis that it is in the students’ ‘best interests’ (Macedo 2000, MacMullen 2007), but then again, the first dimension of power is purportedly legitimatised if parents know their children’s interests better than the children themselves (Lukes 2005: 83). Furthermore, there is a legal argument for the right of the parent to dictate, to a degree, their child’s education. This adds a further level of power to the dynamic;

the 'second dimension' of power, where individuals are structured in and out by legal rights or institutional policy (Haugaard 12: 38). In this case, the European Convention on Human Rights Article 2 of Protocol 1 states:

[T]he State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions. (ECHR 2019: 5)

This right applies to both state- and privately-funded schools (ECHR 2007). Therefore a parent can uphold their right to remove their child from activities on religious grounds, exercising two-dimensional (or possibly first-dimensional depending on the students' desire) power.

One could argue that the ECHR Article is flawed in the cultural assumption that the child holds the same religious belief as the parents (Ahdar and Leigh 2005: 203). As literature around attitudes to religious diversity demonstrated in Chapter 2, and as will be explored in detail in the following chapter, young people's religious identities can be informed by a number of components, including youth culture and relationships (McKenna, Neill and Jackson 2009) or ethnicity and culture for those in mixed-faith families (Arweck and Nesbitt 2010). The Article similarly does not take into account the added complexity of students' 'personal worldviews', including those that are non-religious, the implications of which were discussed in Chapter 2, and will similarly be revisited in the next chapter.

A balance must therefore be struck between parental rights (a legal challenge) and student interests (a cultural challenge) to ensure fair selection of students for School Linking. This is an ongoing issue which my thesis cannot resolve. However, authors researching these issues recommend steps for the "cultivation of positive relations with parents" (Jackson 2014a: 17). A practical example may be to communicate with parents about religious diversity to "pre-empt issues of resistance or confusion" (Hemming, Hailwood and Stokes 2018: 12). Furthermore, one could explore how class, ethnicity, gender and family culture shape parents' willingness for school involvement (Vincent 2016, Vincent

and Martin 2002). Lastly, it is helpful to distinguish between parents' motivation for school involvement and their engagement in their child's learning (Goodall and Montgomery 2014). These steps could also mitigate against evidenced instances where parents from minority communities (including non-religious parents whose child attends a religious school) feel that their needs are not being accommodated (Hemming, Hailwood and Stokes 2018: 39, Hemming 2015, Nesbitt 2004).

The final method of selection is based on gender. Chapter 5 did not find statistically significant associations between class gender (girls, boys or co-educational) and students' reported perceptions of School Linking. However, it was impossible to tell, in that academic year, which classes from co-educational schools were segregating students by gender when linking with a single-sex school.

Gender segregation took place in both of the Links that I observed during my primary data collection. Teacher A only took female students from his co-educational Church of England school to link with Teacher B's Muslim-ethos all girls' school, and Teacher C only took male students from his co-educational Jewish-ethos School to link with Teacher D's Muslim-ethos boys' school. The teachers were responding to, in one case a request, and in the other case a demand, from the single-sex Muslim schools to segregate the co-educational classes. Both Teacher A and Teacher C expressed frustration at their positions:

Teacher C explained that his preference would be to mix boys and girls from his school, however School D explicitly requested a boys-only link [...] He expressed disappointed resignation at this fact, saying, "aside from perhaps [a different Muslim girls' school on the programme] I haven't seen a progressive Muslim school". (Fieldnotes, Schools C and D Link Day 1)¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ A quote reflected in Parker-Jenkins and Glenn's (2011) article addressing their research project on Jewish and Muslim schools' responses to the community cohesion duty. One of their participants told them, "We have been trying for some time to find a Muslim school that will engage with us. It's trying to find a liberal Muslim school because we want our children to meet moderates of other religions." (2011: 8)

Although Teacher A organised School Linking with School B, he believed they had “a certain perception of him”. They only allowed a female teacher to lead the visit to their school. This changed a couple of years ago, after he led two lessons at School B on Remembrance Sunday. [...] He expressed further frustration that he only takes girls on this link. (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 1)

Other teachers in co-educational schools mentioned that they were segregating their students by gender. One Roman Catholic teacher, linked with a Muslim school, told me during the first Waltham Forest CPD day, “we wanted to respect the decision of the parent to send their child to a single sex school.” When I spoke to one of F&BF’s staff members, she expressed that it’s “not a ‘one policy fits all’ thing” although she suggests that teachers segregate by gender because faith schools “can be quite particular” (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 1).

As it stands, these decisions exhibit the third dimension of power in that they are based upon cultural assumptions. However, they are at risk of becoming entangled with political and conflictual narratives around school segregation and community cohesion (discussed in Chapter 2), which arguably invoke the two-dimensional power of legal rights to push their cultural agenda.

Arguments about school segregation often target gender. Consequently, it is not surprising that anti-faith school campaigns, such as the 2015 British Humanist Association's *An Unholy Mess*, claim that instances of faith school segregation are in fact unlawful and regularly breach the 2010 Equality Act (BHA 2015c). This is despite faith schools having exemptions on the basis of religion or belief as a protected characteristic (for example, discrimination on the basis of religion or gender in admission policies is allowed for schools with a ‘religious character’).

In the case of School Linking, however, the issue is not just about the gender policies within faith schools, but also the co-educational schools’ selection of students to participate in the programme on the basis of gender. The

Department for Education's 2018 Non-statutory guidance of gender separation in mixed schools states:

In a mixed school, any separation of pupils of either sex that denies them the choice or opportunity to interact socially, or to interact in an educational setting, with pupils of the other sex is likely to involve subjecting the pupils to a detriment [...] If pupils are separated by sex (or by reference to any other protected characteristic) in specific classes, assemblies and/or for any extra-curricular activities, school leaders and governors will be expected to justify to Ofsted and other inspectors, parents and the wider community the reasons for the separation. (DfE 2018: 4)¹⁹⁹

The guidance originated from a ruling from Ofsted versus Al-Hijrah School and generally applies to educational opportunity, such as curriculum access.²⁰⁰ However, if co-educational schools on the School Linking programme segregate a mixed class because they are linking with a single-sex class, caution needs to be exercised to ensure that the school is aware of a) the possible negative perceptions of this action from the wider community, and b) that they are to be held accountable to Ofsted, parents and students for their decision.

In sum, this section has explored who is in the room during the Link Days, identifying written applications, parental or guardian consent and gender as three student selection methods. Each invokes power dynamics of different theoretical 'dimensions'. Instances including prioritising academically talented students and segregating students by gender based on cultural assumptions invoke third dimensional power in that they reinforce the perceived 'norm'. Other selection processes are reinforced by the two-dimensional power of legal or institutional obligation, including the duty of co-educational schools to provide equal opportunity for students regardless of gender, or the legal right of the parent to

¹⁹⁹ I recognise that the guidance title refers to 'gender' and the content to 'sex'.

²⁰⁰ The 2017 ruling concerned the case between Ofsted and Al-Hijrah, a voluntary aided Muslim-ethos school, based in Birmingham. The ruling upheld the claim that Al-Hijrah's segregation of male and female students in all aspects of school life (including lessons, school trips and breaks) contravened the 2010 Equality Act (HM Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills v The Interim Executive Board of Al-Hijrah School 2017).

decide if their child participates in School Linking. The latter, however, also illustrates how parents can invoke the first dimension of power *over* their child if the child would have otherwise made a different decision. The question of agency of young people is one I tackled in relation to the ethical aspect of my research in chapter 4. Ultimately, the selection of students is an ongoing issue with no clear way forward, but how the students have come to be in the room, and whether their teachers have used different selection criteria for the same Link Day, has the potential to establish power dynamics before the Link Day starts.

7.3: Power dynamics

This section examines the ways in which power dynamics can shape a Link Day experience. Whilst the modelling of positive teacher relationships is identified, the findings reveal instances of relationships in which one teacher's personality dominates their partner teacher's (which, when also gendered can feed into narratives around gender inequalities in interfaith work more generally). This section also shows that unequal power relations between Linking Teachers can be mirrored in their students' interaction, compounded by other factors regarding selection (discussed in the previous section) and space (to be discussed in the following section).

The modelling of values through teacher behaviour has been attributed to the academic success of, and as a characteristic of, faith schools (Bryk, Lee and Holland 1993, Lovat and Clement 2014: 569). It is clear from my primary data that positive relations are being modelled to students as teachers form friendships.²⁰¹ Teachers reflected on what is sometimes a conscious decision:

²⁰¹ Hine, Lemetti and Trikha (2004) and Susie Weller (2009) identified an "inherent danger" (Weller, S. 2009: 25) of teacher modelling. Namely, that "alternative or less conventional understandings of participation may be deemed anti-social" (Weller, S. 2009: 25). I recognise that, if approaches of teachers and students do not align with a 'positive' finding in my analysis, their approach may not necessarily be 'negative'. The question of what indicates a successful and unsuccessful outcomes recognised within my research methodology and explored in further detail in the following section, in which students' use of space is analysed.

We create friendships between teachers of different faiths. We are very conscious of that with our linking schools. [...] When we greet each other, the children see that we are friends and we are modelling to them. (Focus group, female teacher, Jewish-ethos school)

[Students] see you and I embrace at the beginning and at the end. And they also see our teachers embracing the other teachers. [...] So if we can get on with each other, we're modelling it for them but we're not doing it in a false way because we're actually doing it because we're friends. [...] It's modelling in the best way. (Focus group, female teacher, Roman Catholic-ethos school)

During the first London CPD day, I witnessed these positive relations myself:

The atmosphere was immediately friendly and lively, with many teachers clearly pleased to see each other. As I wandered around the room, teachers were catching up on what they've been up to during the summer, or introducing themselves to each other. (Fieldnotes, London CPD 1)

However, issues of power imbalances driven by personality differences were visible both in the CPD training and during the Link Days. In some cases, one or two 'big personalities' dominated the discussions, channelling the first dimension of power over the quieter individuals. When they did not speak, other teachers more frequently contributed:

A few individuals dominated whole room discussion, but towards the end of the day some quieter individuals spoke up. (Fieldnotes, London CPD 1)

I felt that in general there were more opportunities for contribution because the dominant individuals were quieter. (Fieldnotes, London CPD)

There was a major power imbalance between Teachers A and B. As the Link Days progressed, I observed Teacher A dominating the teaching of his and Teacher B's students. It began during the first Link Day at the neutral venue:

As Teacher A introduced the second activity, I also noticed that he was dominating the leadership role (aside from a few minutes when Teacher B spoke about the activity). (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 1)

The second Link Day was at School B; however Teacher A had planned the activities. Despite Teacher B being the host, Teacher A told me, "I'll run it because it makes sense". The morning consisted of a tour to the local mosque. At the end of the tour, I observed:

Teacher A stood up, thanked the Imam and addressed the students, while Teacher B and her teaching assistant sat in silence with the students. (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 2)

The afternoon was run by Teacher A, who assigned us roles as part of his activity:²⁰²

I was the 'money collector' who collected weekly 'rent' from each table and Teacher B and the English teacher manned the 'market' (a desk with pens, shoe templates etc. at which students can purchase items with pretend money). Once again, Teacher B did not have a vocal role. (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 2)

The final Link Day was hosted by School A. Whilst Teacher A would understandably host this day, the power imbalance was accentuated through Teacher B's silence:

²⁰² This activity is the one first described in Section 6.2.

I was acutely aware that Teacher B had not addressed the students since the day began (1hr 45mins into the day). (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 3)

There are two consequences of this imbalance. First, there is a gender aspect. Throughout School A and B's School Linking year, Teacher A was the only male in the room; both classes were exclusively girls and Teacher B and her teaching assistant were both female. Although this does not appear to be a trend in School Linking, it does run the risk of intensifying harmful narratives around gender imbalances that shape problematic norms in interfaith dialogue more generally.

Authors have promoted a feminist critique of patriarchal tendencies in the teaching of citizenship education (Tobler 2003: 127) and Religious Education (RE, Hanlon 2002: 12, King 1998: 4) and likewise, feminist perspectives have been advocated as the "missing dimension of interreligious dialogue" (King 1998). In the decades that followed King's remark, literature has supported this claim. Some, including Orton (2016: 357) and Grung (2011) are critical of what they argue is the gender bias within the process of dialogue itself:

[I]nterreligious dialogue is seen as an encounter between representatives of religious traditions deeply marked by patriarchy [...]. If this is not challenged, the dialogue can confirm and strengthen the traditions and respective practices. (Grung 2011: 29)

Others (for example Weller, P. 2009) highlight and critique a bias towards male participation in interfaith forums. Indeed, despite the Interfaith Network for the United Kingdom reporting an increase in women's participation in interfaith dialogue in general terms (Mubarak 2006: 5, 2016) including the development of "leadership skills among Muslim women" (Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom 2016: 46) their reports emphasised ongoing challenges. These included the perception that women's groups are "places for discussing minor issues or 'home' issues" (2016: 38) and that the "ways and attitudes of some men" were

seen by female survey respondents as “hindering women’s participation in inter faith activity” (2006: 10). This literature highlights the need to challenge perceptions and readdress power imbalances; in the case of School Linking, where examples of first dimension power (power over) is exhibited with a gender bias, it can be assimilated into third dimension power structured around cultural norms.

The second consequence of the imbalance between the two Linking Teachers is that it can be mirrored in their respective students. I observed this with School A and School B students. During their first Link Day, the imbalance was visible in the students’ movement:

[School B students] filed in and lined up against the back wall. They were clearly nervous, and their silence contrasted with the restless behaviour of the School A students. (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 1)

School A students were noisily playing football in the empty space, and School B students were watching. (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 1)

During lunch, the groups yet again remained split. School B students sat quietly eating their lunch while the School A students played football inside again. The noise and volume levels were high. (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 3)²⁰³

During the morning of the second Link Day, my conversations with School B students and their teacher appeared to validate this power imbalance:

One student shook her head to indicate that she felt unable to talk to the School A students during the first Link Day. (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 2)

²⁰³ The role of seating arrangements (for example, during lunch) and students’ interpretations of the space in which the Link Days take part will be discussed in Section 7.4.

Teacher B commented that some of her students were too shy to ask questions to the School A girls and instead talked freely on the way home. (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 2)

One table of students talked about how sporty the School A students were [...]. Many commented that the other girls are much taller than they are. This group was particularly self-deprecating about how they lost the sports game. (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 2)

The final quote refers to competitive sports, a topic discussed during the second CPD training day. The F&BF staff member suggested that teachers stay away from sports, particularly football, which can be divisive. If a sporting activity takes place, teams should be mixed, rather than between school groups (the teams were not mixed during Schools A and B's Link Day). F&BF's suggestion to avoid competition is reflected in research. Raw's (2006: 60) TLN evaluation evidenced that "here - in place of non-competitive cultural activities - competitive sports activities were used [...] if children competed in school groups this was less likely to enhance trust and relationships across the school divide". Similarly, Parker-Jenkins and Glenn (2011: 14) suggest that between-school initiatives "should be structured around cooperation, not competition, which traditionally tends to characterise inter-school activities". Then again, Teacher C held a competition during his first Link Day with Teacher D. He asked for one student from each school to stand at the front and eat a donut without licking their lips. The students were asked to cheer on the challenger representing the other school and at the end the teachers announced the competition a draw. In this situation, the students were enthusiastic during the competition and happily backed the student from their Link School. The implications of competition will be revisited in Chapter 9.

Aside from sports, teachers talked of first dimension power imbalances between their students during my focus group discussions. Having not observed their Link Days I am unable to state whether the student imbalances mirrored the teacher relationships. In these cases, the teachers attributed the imbalance to the

‘step up, step down’ principle of ‘safe space’, a concept discussed in detail in the Section 7.5:

I think with my group, there are some students who would take the limelight all the time, and there are others who want to sit back and let them take the limelight. And it’s trying to get the balance so that the others can step down and some can step up. (Focus group, male teacher, Roman Catholic-ethos school)

We’re going to try to do that as well, [...]. Maybe more in a way of, if some child is speaking too loud too much, have a quiet word and say to them “remember the ‘step up step down”, rather than say, like, “let someone else speak”. (Focus group, female teacher, Roman Catholic-ethos school)

A similar finding was shared by Knauth (2009) in his REDCo²⁰⁴ research project on RE in Hamburg. He found that the classroom’s ‘safe space’ (discussed in more detail in Section 7.4) can encompass “‘hidden conflicts’ related to power-structures [...] associated with students’ different levels of ability to communicate and their level of self-confidence” (cited in Jackson 2014a: 53). The connection between self-confidence and communication skills reflects a finding in this chapter’s first section. Students who are in the room because of their written application skills may be more eloquent in their communication and are at risk of creating, or worsening, these ‘hidden conflicts’. Consequently, the barriers to achieving a successful power balance between individuals are not mutually exclusive since my findings suggests that the interplay between power imbalances at the teacher and student-levels, though potentially reflected in each other, may be exacerbated by issues around space. These concepts will be explored in Sections 7.4 and 7.5.

This section has highlighted the positive role of teacher modelling in cases where friendships are being built between Linking Teachers. However, this may have an adverse effect where there is a clear power imbalance between the

²⁰⁴ Discussed in Section 2.3.1.

teachers. Teachers A channelled the first dimension power which can be “interpreted normatively as domination” (Haugaard 2012: 35) and this dynamic was mirrored by his students (although ideas around space, the subject of Section 7.5, were suggested as interrelated influences). What is more, first dimension teacher power imbalances driven by gender are in danger of perpetuating, or modelling, third dimension power structures driven by an assumption that exclusive, marginalising forms of interfaith dialogue are the cultural norm.

7.4: Sharing space

Space, as a physical location, a social construction and a theoretical concept for discussion by students, features heavily in School Linking. A neutral venue is prescribed for the first Link Day. Link schools act as ‘hosts’ and ‘visitors’ for the second and third days, and the theme of the final Link Day²⁰⁵ was described by a member of F&BF’s schools team at the third CPD training day as “what spaces do we share and how does that impact on the way we behave?” (fieldnotes, WF CPD 3). At all levels, then, space is relational, since “[w]hile space is produced by social relations, space also produces social relations in a constantly ongoing process” (von Brömssen 2017: 15).²⁰⁶

This section’s findings relate to two aspects of space. First, where ‘linked’ schools differ vastly in size or resources, students from the school that is larger in either attribute can have power *over* the visiting students, when imbued with a sense of belonging driven by their role as ‘host’. Second, space can inhibit opportunities for mixing in two ways: a) physical constraints within a room can limit participation, and/or b) the control that teachers and students respectively

²⁰⁵ In which F&BF’s prescribed key question is ‘where do we live and how do we live together?’.

²⁰⁶ There is a major body of literature on the theoretical underpinnings to the concept of ‘space’ that could be explored in future in relation to my findings. Lefebvre (1991) posited theoretical foundations for the concept as a social construct that act as a basis for Knott’s (2005) spatial analysis of religion. Within religion and education, Rothgangel et al.’s (2017) edited volume explores different conceptual understandings of ‘location’, ‘space’ and ‘place’, as well as drawing upon the role of classroom practice and RE teachers in relation to space.

have over the seating can influence the extent to which students mix and take ownership of their decision to mix. However, the extent to which students mix is found to be a neutral finding, in that students' hesitancy may be attributed to other factors (such as a need for private space not "owned" by the teacher) which do not necessarily contribute to a negative outcome.

Research has been undertaken into how students navigate spaces within their own schools. Susie Weller's (2003, 2009) spatial analysis of secondary schools distinguishes between 'formal' spaces, such as classrooms or school buildings which are monitored by teachers, and 'informal' spaces, such as the playground, where monitoring is less frequent. She argues that the power imbalances in 'formal' spaces can manifest into poor relations and distrust between students and teachers (2009: 23), supported by Holloway and Valentine (2000), who argue that a sense of belonging within a school can be hindered by the presence of 'out of bounds' spaces, such as classrooms during break times. Weller further suggests that spaces can be "important signifiers [...] of status within the school" (2003: 161). Specific areas, such as sections of the playground may act as spaces of 'belonging' for groups of young people, or have competing ownership claims, aspects of the school of which visiting students are unaware.

Ipgrave (2009) explored between-school interaction, namely the "contested space of the online exchange" (2009: 214). In this interfaith 'email exchange' project, reviewed in Chapter 3, Ipgrave emphasised the importance of self-reflection that students are granted through a 'virtual' space between emails, before a student projects their message onto their partner's physical computer screen (an aspect of the 'communication' space). Ipgrave recognised implications for power dynamics; since the exchange was taking place in the classroom, students viewed the teacher as the "owner" of the space and teachers communicated that they struggled to empower the students to take ownership of their exchanges. In this case, the teacher's power is perceived by students as third dimensional, in that it is the norm for the classroom to be the teacher's domain.

But what about students taking part in School Linking who are not permitted time for self-reflection? My analysis indicates that when students visit

a Linking Class whose physical space is drastically 'different' to theirs (either in amount of space or resources), in which their Linking Class is also present, the lack of private time to react to the space may contribute to an imbalance of power in favour of the class with the visible 'power' (i.e. those with large spaces or lots of resources).

I observed this power imbalance in the relationship between Schools C and D. School C's physical footprint, as well as the number of resources, far outweighed School D's. The School D students expressed shock when entering School C:

The School D students seemed shocked at the sheer size of the school (the footprint of the entrance hall is probably around the same size of the School D plot). They were staring around at the impressive building and I don't think they noticed a group of parents staring at them from a seating area by reception as the hall was so busy. (Fieldnotes, Schools C and D Link Day 2)

I asked Teacher C what the students' reactions have been during previous years, to which he replied, "They are normally a bit in awe".

The morning session took place in the school hall. Despite Teacher C explicitly asking for participation from students from both schools, I observed hesitancy from School D students to contribute to oral presentations:

At times it was hard to hear the School D students – they were speaking very quietly. In all but two groups, students from school C exclusively spoke. (Fieldnotes, Schools C and D Link Day 2)

During lunch, the School D students "nervously queued for their food, while School C students generally misbehaved in the queue". What is more, year 11 students²⁰⁷ from School C came over and spoke to the School D students, laughing and joking amongst themselves. I noted that it was "quite intimidating",

²⁰⁷ Who were two years older than the School Linking students.

although not explicitly hostile. Furthermore, Teacher D kept telling one of his students to put his skullcap back on. At the time, I “wondered if it was to make himself less visible to other people in the school” (fieldnotes, Schools C and D Link Day 2). This last observation reflects a finding from a study undertaken as part of the *Young People’s Attitudes to Religious Diversity* (outlined in Chapter 2). Arweck’s (2017b) London-based multicultural community school research found that “in order to fit in, some young religious people tended to tone down their religious identity when away from home” (2017b: 146). This is something I noted during Schools C and D’s first Link Day. A School C student commented that he removes his school blazer outside of the school, “We face antisemitism. It doesn’t help that our school uniform makes us identifiable. Walking home, the other children shout anti-Semitic comments at me.”²⁰⁸ Arweck argues that instances like these indicate that religious identity is affirmed by those who share it: “likeness or sameness created spaces where this identity had a place and was validated” (Arweck 2017b: 146). The theme of similarity and difference is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

School C and D’s Link Day afternoon consisted of a tour of School C. We split into small groups and I joined three School D students who were led by two School C students. Throughout the tour, the School D students remained nervous, but were audibly amazed when they learnt of School C’s resources (a separate playground for year 7s, an AstroTurf area, fully-equipped kitchens for food technology and a ‘computer pod’ room where students can play video games). During the tour I observed instances where School C students appeared to claim ‘ownership’ of a space, in this case an unmonitored corridor during lesson time:

[T]he tour guides came across their friends and took a couple of minutes to mess around with them in the corridor, leaving School D students to talk amongst themselves. (Fieldnotes, Schools C and D Link Day 2)

²⁰⁸ Another quote that echoes findings from Parker-Jenkins and Glenn’s (2011) research about Muslim and Jewish schools. They found that “male pupils reported hiding the name of their school blazer when on public transport because they were afraid of bullying” (2011: 11).

Moreover, the 'exclusive' atmosphere cultivated during the tour resulted in a defensive exchange between the School D students and School C's librarian:

When we were in the library (the final stop on the tour), the librarian welcomed the visiting students and asked, "Is your school library as nice as this?" Two students shyly shook their heads, but one looked at her defiantly and said "Yes. It's only small but ours is better". (Fieldnotes, Schools C and D Link Day 2)

Not only was the power balance favouring the students from the large, well-resourced school, but it was compounded by their roles as 'hosts', a concept explored in Liljestrand's (2018) research into 'interreligious encounters' between members of religious communities in Stockholm.²⁰⁹ Liljestrand found that "relations between people from different cultures and religions can be portrayed according to the roles of hosts and guests" (2018: 42).²¹⁰ Specifically, places the groups visited "were characterized by the particular culture and life of the hosts" and "[a]ccording to the interviewees, those who belonged to the visited communities naturally had "elbow room". Those who did not belong, however, were "not free" (2018: 42). Similarly in School Linking, whilst traditionally one would expect a host to be subservient to their visitor, the portrayed status of hosting students imbued them with first dimension power over the visiting students.

F&BF appears to be aware of potential issues arising from the hosting-visiting relationship. In the second CPD training day in Waltham Forest, a member of F&BF's schools team distributed a resource pack with ideas for schools to create a welcoming environment to visitors. She stated, "For some of

²⁰⁹ In which he applies Dewey's conceptualisations of education and experience to interview analysis. For Dewey (1938, Dewey and Bentley 1949), the notion of 'environment' "is not only a physical place, but [...] constituted by both the material conditions and the inter-actors in a reciprocal relationship" (Liljestrand 2018: 40). It is this "reciprocal relationship" that causes changes to one's environment due to perceptions of, and engagement in, it. For Dewey 'educational experience' arises from, and are shaped by, such changes.

²¹⁰ Applying Dewey's (1938, Dewey and Bentley 1949) concepts to this context of hosting and visiting, the visiting place becomes a conduit for 'experience' and is thus interpreted as an 'environment' for interreligious education (Liljestrand 2018: 43)

your students, visiting another school will be a real eye-opener. [...] A lot of what we focus on with hosting is welcoming the students because some things might be unfamiliar.” Recommendations for planning school visits are also outlined by Jackson (2014a: 93)²¹¹, who advocates students use ethnographic methods to actively engage in visits, such as observation, interviews with staff members and document analysis of noticeboard material. He recognises a “limited amount” of prior research into the nature of school visits. My analysis suggests that any future investigation should consider the spatial aspects of school visits, and the power-balance implications these may have.

The second concern of this section addresses student ‘mixing’.²¹² Research reviewed in Chapter 3 (for example Gallagher, Smith and Montgomery 2003, Hughes et al. 2013, McGlynn et al. 2004, Schubotz and Robinson 2006) states an association between student mixing and positive relations or friendships between students. From this perspective, mixing is desirable. However, my analysis revealed two ways in which mixing can be inhibited in School Linking.

First, the physical constraints characteristic of small, or full, rooms naturally inhibits participants exploring, and participating in, the space. This constraint was first identified during the CPD training, in which teachers struggled to move around F&BF’s office where the training takes place:

We were in a small meeting room, with some teachers at desks and others on chairs and beanbags where they could find a space. Again, this environment was too tight for me to circulate the room, so I joined a group of three or four teachers at the back. (Fieldnotes, London CPD 1)

²¹¹ Reviewed in Chapter 2.

²¹² By student mixing, I am referring to the physical mixing of students within the physical space. Previous evaluations have considered mixing in different terms. For example, Raw’s (2006) evaluation of TLN considered mixing to be “the degree to which children express interest in finding or welcoming new friendships, now and in the future, with children who are different from themselves” (2006: 9). My analysis thus provides the first account of physical mixing of students involved in the programme.

At this point, one teacher arrived late and just had to sit where there was a space – this meant that she was unable to sit with her linking partner. (Fieldnotes, London CPD 2)

In my focus groups, teachers reflected on this issue in their neutral venue:

It was the logistics at lunchtime that were quite difficult for us because we didn't have that much space [...] they were in their two separate classes purely because it was easier to walk one class out and then the other. But of course that meant that they didn't sit together at lunchtime. (Focus group, female teacher, Roman Catholic-ethos school)

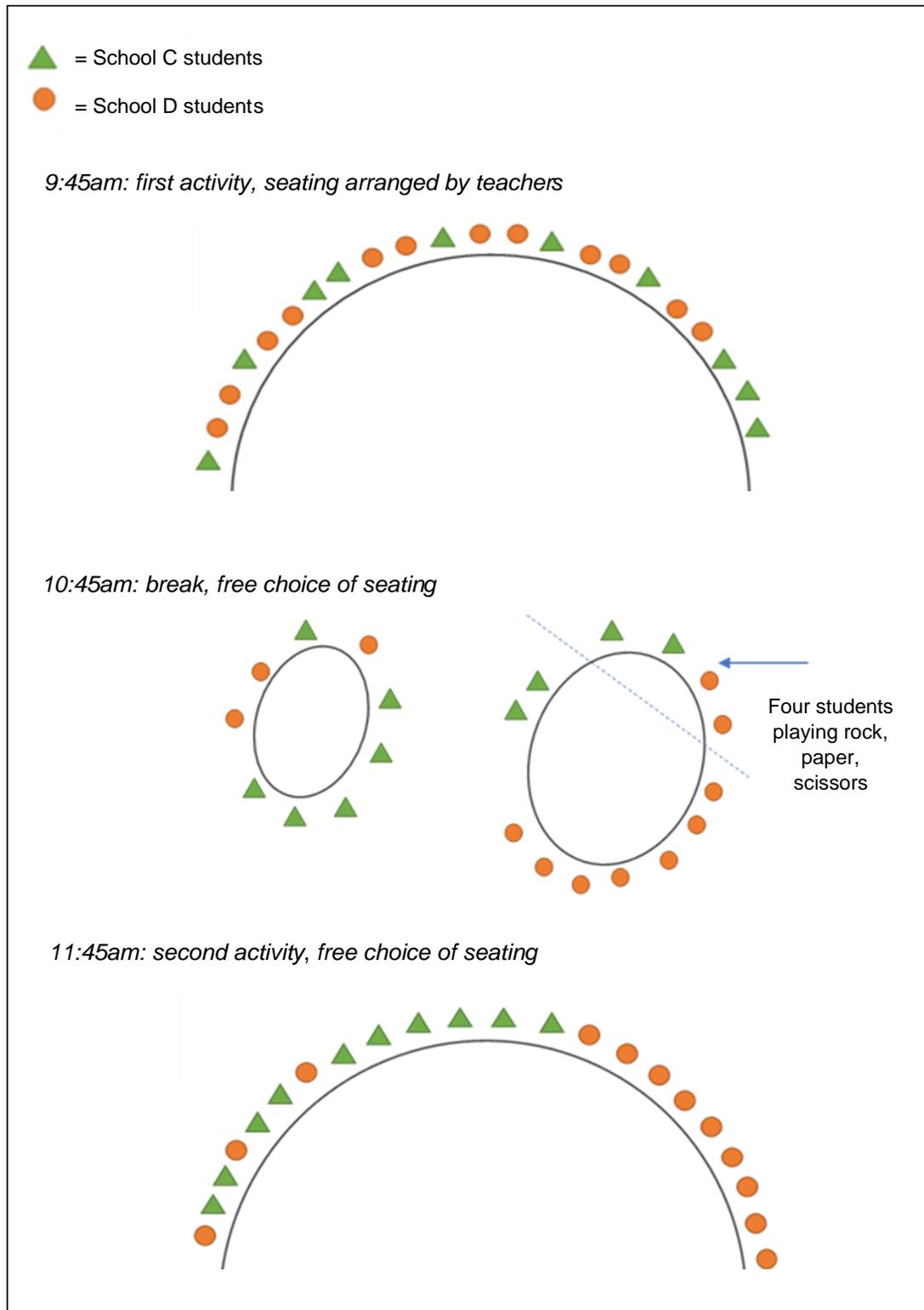
Second, the barrier to mixing can be exacerbated by the way in which the seating is managed. There is an apparent pattern of students staying within their own class groups; something identified by teachers:

Our main obstacle was getting them to interact more [...]. As soon as you let them out on a break, you know, whoosh, separation! They know who their friends are. (Focus group, male teacher, Muslim-ethos school)

A male teacher said, "one of the difficulties is the mixing of the students. They are in their comfort zone with classmates. So finding a different strategy to get them to mix up a bit more". (Fieldnotes, Waltham Forest CPD 2)

I observed this pattern in my own Link Day observation. Figure 7.1 illustrates the seating between students from Schools C and D during the morning of their second Link Day. The first illustration shows how Teacher C mixed the students at the start of the day, however during free time the chairs were pulled into two enclosed circles with only one student deciding to sit in between students from their Link School. The segregation remained when the teachers asked the students to reform the semi-circled seating.

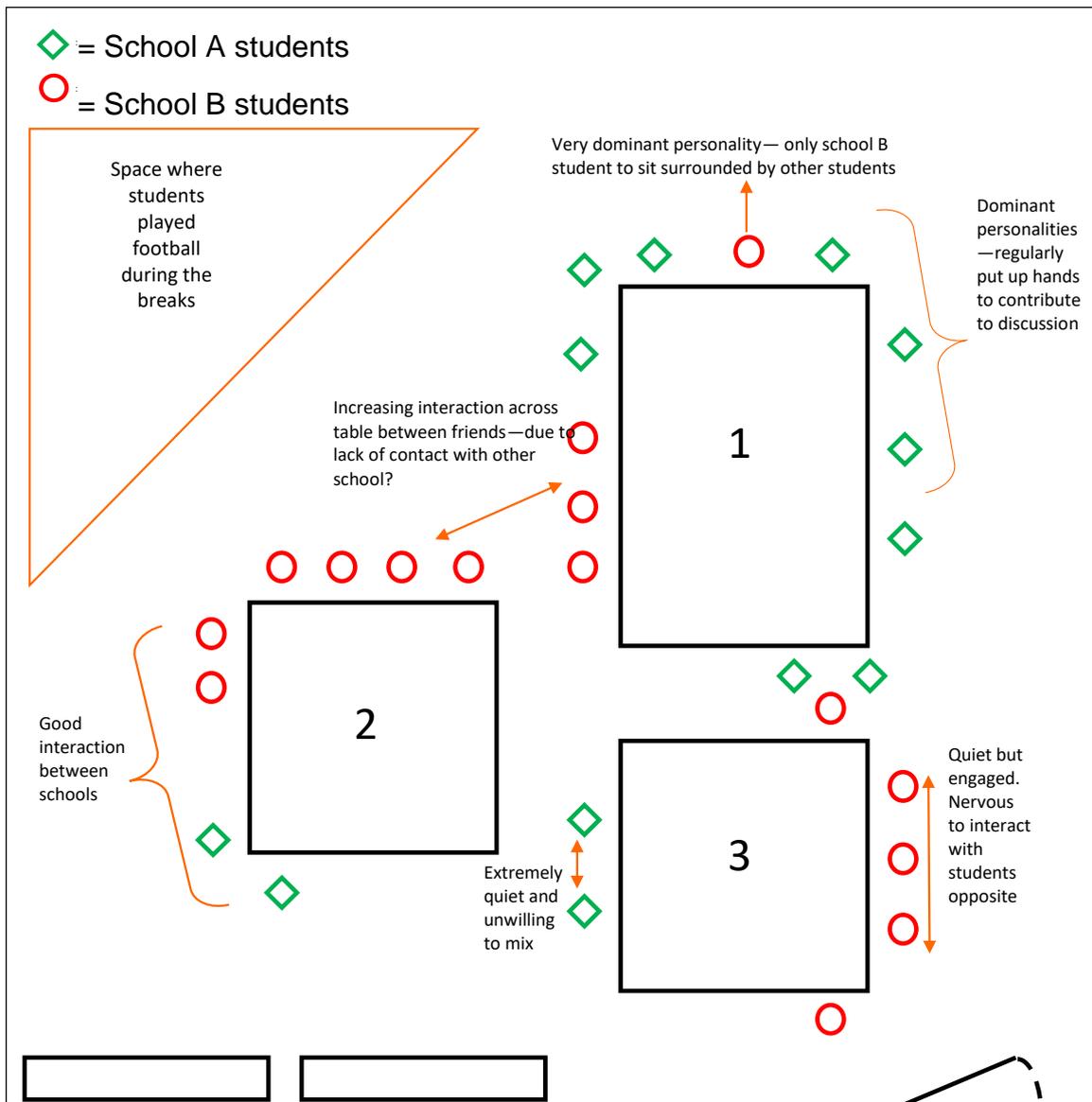
Figure 7.1: Seating arrangements during Schools C and D's first Link Day



I witnessed a similar trend with Schools A and B. Although Teacher A attempted to mix the class (according by height), the table plan for their first Link Day was

not mixed. Figure 7.2 shows my observed seating and interaction between the students. As in the previous figure, only one student was sitting between two Link Day students (in this case a dominant personality). The School B students sitting centrally in the image were talking across tables; to do so they turned their backs on the Link School students. The seating was not rearranged at any point during the day.

Figure 7.2: Seating arrangement during Link Day 1, Schools A and B



In their final Link Day, Teacher A told the students, "I'm deliberately not putting you in groups because I want to see how you work this out yourself". He

then left the room and I noted that “the groups dispersed and the School A students came together, abandoning the School B students”. For the final hour of their Link Day, the students were allowed free time in the school playground. The School B students congregated in a sheltered area at picnic tables while all but one School A student played with their own friends who were not part of School Linking. Raw’s (2006) evaluation of TLN identified potential tensions within this particular space, recommending:

[T]eachers and children across the school should engage in discussions about how to make linking visitors feel welcomed, and empathise with how they might feel in this different environment, especially in the playground. [...] Staff should discuss strategies for encouraging proactive interaction and engagement across cultural divides, especially when on duty during the all important lunchtime and playtime sessions (2006: 60).

However, I return to Arweck’s (2017b: 146) argument that “likeness or sameness” may construct shared spaces in which identity is mutually supported. In this way, it is *natural* for students within peer groups to stay together. Indeed, this aspect was identified by teachers in their focus group discussions:

It’s interesting, when they were directed to work with a partner, they did, but then quite often they’d retreat to their safety zone again, but I think that’s probably very natural isn’t it? (Focus group, female teacher, community school)

I think in some cases because you’re given a partner it wasn’t your choice. “You will work with this person and you will share ideas!” *laughter* It’s very different to you choosing to share. (Focus group, female teacher, community school)

Both Weller, S. (2003, 2009) and Ipgrave (2009), whose research opened this section, identified spaces over which teachers had control. Weller spoke of

'formal' spaces, monitored by teachers, in which students are distrustful of teacher regulation. Iprgrave recognised that spaces explored in her 'email exchange' project, by virtue of taking place within a classroom, were "owned" by the teachers (in spite of the teachers recognising this and desiring to empower their students). Applying these findings to my own analysis, the students' agency and their ability to mix *on their own terms* was undermined by the teachers' control of the space. What is more, Iprgrave's emphasis on private time and space for students to self-reflect during an (email) exchange also relates to my findings; whilst 'hosting' and 'visiting' roles can contribute to power imbalances between students, hesitancy to mix on a visible level during the visits may be a sign of the students' need for private space. As the previous chapter demonstrated, F&BF's prescription for reflection time to be built into a Link Day was not implemented by my focus school teachers. It therefore follows that a hesitancy to mix during School Linking is not necessarily a negative finding; it could be explained in light of other findings.

What is more, the extent to which a hesitancy to mix is a positive or negative outcome depends on the teachers' and students' perceptions of the aims of the programme. A teacher I spoke to during his first CPD day reflected on his students' position. In his past School Linking experience, his students would inevitably sit by themselves. But in his words:

By the end, they knew each other, they respected each other, but I don't have a success story where they became friends. [...] In the three years I've been doing this, I've never seen any negativity towards the other. Just indifference. I've never seen 'I don't like you'. (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 1)

This neutral position is evidenced in literature, with Jackson and McKenna (2017: 6) finding that "[p]upils were generally open towards peers of different religious backgrounds. At the same time they tended to socialize with peers from the same background as themselves." The aims of School Linking are explored

in the next chapter, in which this and other factors are investigated as measures of 'success'.

Lastly, as I demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 3, students within faith schools are not homogenous. Therefore, the School Linking experience may reinforce bonds between students within the same school by virtue of them comfortably sitting with each other (i.e. they are potentially exhibiting strengthened solidarity with each other in the presence of strangers). In this way, there may be underlying positive associations to the mixing described above.

In sum, this section has considered different aspects of 'space' in School Linking, with multiple findings. First, the hosting-visiting relationship between schools can result in first dimension power imbalances between students if the school physical spaces are radically different in terms of size or resources. Second, students' ability, or willingness, to mix with each other is dependent on the space in which they mix at a number of levels: both cramped space and the ways in which the teachers "own" the space can influence how students navigate the space themselves. Finally, the extent to which students mix is revealed to be a neutral finding; although research argues that it is desirable, it may be a response to the third dimension power of teachers "owning" of the classroom, or a manifestation of student response to the absence of private reflection time. In other words, it should not be assumed to be a 'negative' measure in terms of students' desire for between-school interaction.

7.5: Safe space

This final section moves beyond physical space to the concept of 'safe space', a prescribed element to all Link Days during the CPD training. During the first London CPD day, a member of F&BF's Schools Team described the six principles of their 'safe space' as follows:

'I' statements' are used to make sure you speak for yourself and not on someone else's behalf [...] 'dialogue not debate' emphasises that there is no right and wrong view. You don't have to agree, but recognise why [you

disagree] and appreciate differences [...] ‘step up, step down’ encourages dominant personalities to step back and quieter personalities to participate [...] ‘oops and ouch’ creates an environment where the participants can openly admit if something came out wrong and/or say if they are offended without any negative consequences [...] ‘active listening’ is where the person listening actively responds and shows understanding of what they hear [...] And ‘respect’. Creating a definition of respect asks what does it mean to different people? (Fieldnotes, London CPD 1)

In the CPD training, F&BF staff emphasised the importance of setting a safe space in the first Link Day and revisiting the concept at the start of all subsequent days. Safe space was successfully set in Schools C and D’s first Link Day. The teachers asked the students to suggest rules to put on a joint ‘contract’. The teachers incorporated students’ ideas whilst ensuring that F&BF’s key principles were covered. The students were engaged in the process and outwardly committed to the contract:

The teachers asked for verbal consent from the students that they agreed with the terms in their contract, to which the group replied with a loud “Yes!” One School C student added, “I have a final one! Follow the rules of the contract” and the other students clapped. They went up to the contract and signed it. (Fieldnotes, Schools C and D Link Day 1)

As Chapter 6 showed, my focus school teachers were inconsistent in establishing safe space (see Figure 6.1). This section, however, focuses on one aspect:²¹³ the empowerment of students to express themselves. Findings from the previous sections suggest that some students are hesitant to use ‘oops and ouch’ due to power imbalances between students, or negative reactions to the perception that safe space is “owned” by the teacher. However, some teachers view the ‘dialogue not debate’ principle as inconsistent with modern day

²¹³ Additionally, the principle of ‘I statements’ will be revisited in the next chapter, during the discussions around religious plurality.

challenges facing student engagement and expression. Rather, they desire their students to enter 'brave space' (Arao and Clemens 2013) in which they freely debate contentious issues.

First, teachers revealed in their focus groups and during conversations in CPD training that their students struggled with the principle of 'oops and ouch':

[O]ne male Muslim school teacher said that he had difficulties getting students to actually use oops and ouch. He explained that they want to be each other's friends, but they aren't confident to use oops and ouch. (Fieldnotes, Waltham Forest CPD 3)

Section 7.3 indicated that students' lack of self-confidence or inability to communicate can be associated with "hidden conflicts" of power imbalance (Knauth 2009, quoted in Jackson 2014a: 53) and as section 7.2 showed, students' communication skills can differ based on how they are selected for School Linking (for example, through written applications). Alternatively, if students' hesitancy to express themselves is a response to the teacher-controlled environment (discussed in section 7.3), there is a need to revisit how the safe space is created in relation to the how power is structured in and out of the safe space. As outlined above, students from Schools C and D contributed to the setting of their safe space ground rules. Their 'contract' was revisited at the start of their last Link Day, and I overheard the principle being used during an activity: "Oops! Sorry, sometimes I forget." Chapter 2 demonstrated that 'risk' is a controversial concept in safe space literature, however this positive example shows the benefits of a reduced-risk approach, "[t]o encourage students to take risks, the teacher must minimise risk" (Iversen 2019: 318).

The principle of 'dialogue not debate' is similarly concerned with the extent to which students take risks. Teachers' views on the 'dialogue not debate' principle differed. Some were clearly risk-averse, for example, not wanting students to be put in a position in which they realised that they were disadvantaged compared to others:

I sat with the community school and Muslim school linking teachers. [...] They would like to talk about homelessness, pollution and waste. There are also issues with poverty, with many students' families living in hostels. They said that although their students are aware of differences, they don't think they are aware of the theme of inequality underlying it. Because of this, the teachers don't want to "open a can of worms and upset the families". One said, "I don't want them to feel poor, I want them to feel normal" (Fieldnotes, London CPD 3)

These teachers are framing their Link Day classroom as a "risk-free zone", which has been advocated as a characteristic of safe space (Leganger-Krogstad 2003: 185). However, others embraced the 'risk' of safe space, questioning the effectiveness of 'dialogue not debate':

Teacher A wanted the students to take ownership in the debates: "I'm going to get in trouble for using the term 'debate'" (Fieldnotes, London CPD 2)

They are being too nice to each other! (Focus group, male teacher, Roman Catholic school).

I think in Link Day 2 we should do [...] more 'ouchy' questions I guess. I don't know, just so they don't feel like they can't ask something. (Focus group, female teacher, Roman Catholic school).

As Chapter 3 showed, there is certainly literature evidencing positive instances of conflict as an effective tool for dialogue in the UK and wider Europe (Kozyrev 2009, O'Grady 2013, Skeie 2009 and ter Avest et al. 2009). Indeed some Linking Teachers expressed a desire to move towards approaches which "allude to bravery, courage and controversy" (Flesner and Von der Lippe 2019: 284), such as the alternative frameworks including 'brave space' and 'communities' of disagreement' (see Section 2.3.2)

However, research in Chapter 3 emphasised that 'risky' forms of safe space must be moderated. There was general consensus among academics that suitably trained and prepared teachers are essential to the creation of a successful space in which conflict can be managed and transformed (Jackson 2014a: 56, Kozyrev 2009: 215, O'Grady 2013, Lockley Scott 2019 and ter Avest et al. 2009). Similarly, Section 7.2 shared some teachers' views that a complementary 'safe space' principle, 'step up, step down' can be used as a tool to manage first dimension power imbalances between students. Then again, using safe space principles as a disciplinary tool may emphasise the teacher's 'ownership' of the space to the extent that power imbalances are exacerbated rather than managed.

What is more, whilst F&BF trains its teachers in safe space principles during the CPD days, Section 6.2 evidenced that it is not always implemented, teachers do not all attend the CPD training and teachers are already overstretched. My analysis points to the requirement for Linking Teachers, as facilitators of safe space, to be made aware of the spatial and power-based influences to ensure that no students experience an imbalance of power due to any of the reasons explored in this chapter.

To summarise, teachers reported a hesitancy for students to invoke the 'oops and ouch' principle, suggesting a lack of self-confidence on the part of the student to speak out within the power dynamics of the student group. The criteria upon which students are selected could exacerbate these issues. If the hesitancy is a response to students' perceptions of safe space as a teacher-owned space, however, student engagement in, or 'ownership' of, the setting of the safe space (for example, Schools C and D's signed 'contract') may contribute to an inclusive atmosphere.

Despite students' hesitancy to express themselves, teachers exhibited a desire to move from a 'safe space' to a 'brave space' through their conversations about 'dialogue not debate'. Research outlined above and in Chapter 3 evidences how conflict can positively drive dialogue, however it needs to be managed before it is transformed; teachers require good facilitation skills in order to avoid the student perception that it is teacher 'owned' space.

Considered alongside each other, there is an inherent tension between teachers' perceptions of 'safe space' and students' feelings of empowerment. Barrett (2010) is critical of the ambiguous nature of safe space, highlighting that what teachers perceive to be 'safe' is not necessarily experienced as such by their students. This reinforces the chapter's message of the need to consider teacher-student relationships and shared understandings of the spaces in which School Linking takes place.

7.6: Conclusion

My findings in this chapter have contributed to the qualitative exploration of my second and third research questions, 'how does School Linking inform or inhibit peaceful relations at the interpersonal and institutional levels?'

Section 7.1 explored how students are selected to take part in School Linking. The three identified methods of written applications, parental consent and gender segregation are imbued with different dimensions of power. At an interpersonal level, parents may exhibit first dimension power by either refusing their child's attendance, or signing up their child without his or her active consent, thereby undermining positive parent-child relations. My finding that a student dropped out of the programme because he participated against his will, for example, will be revisited in Chapter 9 when I assert voluntary participation as a key driver in peaceful relations characterised by contact theory. At the institutional level, third dimension power can be channelled when selection decisions are based upon cultural norms; teachers may select academically brighter students to conform to neoliberal educational ideals, or segregate their students by gender out of respect to the cultural practices of a particular faith school. However, schools must similarly acknowledge the second dimension power of legal structures, by respecting parental right to withdraw their child on religious grounds and ensuring that students have access to equal opportunity regardless of gender.

Section 7.2 analysed the notion of power dynamics further. The finding that Teacher A exerted first dimension power over Teacher B, and that the power imbalance was mirrored in the student interactions, illustrates how the School Linking experience can inhibit peaceful relations at an interpersonal level. Moreover, the gendered relationship between Teachers A and B structured the School Linking encounter in such a way that it exacerbated a third dimension of power based on preconceived cultural norms about gender roles in interfaith dialogue.

Section 7.3 illustrated how the spaces which teachers and students share in School Linking are relational. First, 'hosting' and 'visiting' roles assigned to students are imbued with differing levels of power. In particular, where schools visibly differ in size or resources, the hosting students can exhibit first dimension power over the visitors at an interpersonal level.²¹⁴ Second, the mixing of students neither clearly informs nor inhibits peaceful relations. Rather, a hesitancy to mix can be explained by a perception of the teacher as the 'owner' of the space, or a lack of reflection time structured into the Link Day.

The final section illustrated that safe space in School Linking is not safe unless power relations enable feelings of safety. Teacher and student interpretations of safe space place different value on the role of 'risk'. However, a lack of shared understanding may inhibit the formation of peaceful relations at either a between-student, and/or a teacher-student level, thereby encouraging negative perceptions of the school as a site of safety.

²¹⁴ Currently, the schools' 'spaces' are not considered a variable in The Faith and Belief Forum's (F&BF's) 'linking' decisions (see Section 4.4.1).

CHAPTER 8

Qualitative findings and discussion part three: Difference, religious literacy and the aims of School Linking

8.1: Introduction

This chapter addresses three further themes arising from my data analysis. The first section explores the finding from Chapter 5's secondary data analysis that students tended to interpret the concept of 'difference' in negative terms. Primary data reveals that this negative finding may be explained by teachers' emphasis on similarity during Link Days. I argue that while there is literature which evidences similarity as a basis for positive relations (Arweck 2017b: 146; Jackson and McKenna 2017: 7; Kupersmidt, DeRosier and Patterson 1995; Madge, Hemming and Stenson 2014: 164), that teachers are side-lining the concept of difference in fact exacerbates rhetoric that denigrates difference.

Section 8.3 explores an apparent tension between teachers' efforts to develop their students' knowledge of their Link School students' religious beliefs and low levels of religious literacy identified in Chapter 5. I argue that question and answer sessions held during Link Days reinforce a form of religious illiteracy that understands religious plurality as finite, disregarding the complexity of 'personal worldviews' (discussed in Section 2.2.1). What is more, the four community schools taking part in School Linking are found to exhibit religious illiteracy, potentially explaining why the quantitative analysis revealed negative findings around community schools. This, I demonstrate, challenges literature citing community schools as the ideal sites for learning about religious diversity.

Lastly, Section 8.4 reveals that teachers hold different, and sometimes conflicting, views of the aims of School Linking. At a school-level, I recognise a

‘strategic ambiguity’²¹⁵ around the purpose and outcomes of the programme, which allows for general unity, but space for individual teachers to shape the programme in ways that meet their educational, political or social agendas. However, a lack of consensus on the aims of School Linking in terms of students’ personal development risks exacerbating issues around knowledge identified in Section 8.3, as well as students’ experiences of the programme conflicting with their expectations.

8.2: Problematising difference

Chapter 5’s quantitative analysis found that students consistently perceived the students from their Link School to be ‘different’ from them.²¹⁶ As students’ perception that the Link School students would be similar to them increased, so too did the perception that they would be able to talk to, and work with, the students as well as feel that the students would be interested in them. At the end of School Linking, students’ enjoyment of the programme was positively correlated with reporting that the Link School students were similar, and negatively correlated with stating that the Link School students were different to them. In other words, students who enjoyed the programme regarded their Link School students as similar to them, and vice versa. What is more, I suggested that F&BF’s survey design, by attributing a picture of a sad face with higher Likert scale scores for the statement, ‘the Link School students will be/were different to me’ reinforced the negative perception of difference.

The suggestion that students negatively interpret the concept of difference echoes previous research reviewed in Chapter 2 (Ipgrave 2003b: 163, 2017: 74). Similarly, in their evaluation of the Northern Ireland ‘Shared Education’ project

²¹⁵ Defined as arising from “the plurality of interests and meanings that multiple constituents attribute to any given goal” (Jarzabkowski, Sillince and Shaw 2010: 220)

²¹⁶ Students were asked to respond on a Likert scale (1= Strongly disagree – 5= Strongly agree) to the statement, “I think the students at my Link School will be different to me’. More than three times as many students scored a 4 or a 5 than a 1 or a 2 (417 students compared to 136). When students were asked the question again at the end of the programme, a similar ratio remained (145 students scored a 4 or a 5 and fifty-three students scored a 1 or a 2) and there were no changes in the mean or median score.

(outlined in Chapter 3), Loader and Hughes (2017b) interviewed students about their interpretations of difference²¹⁷ and found that they “spoke most frequently of feelings of awkwardness in relation to addressing difference, and preferred to avoid such subjects” (2017b: 125). When prompted further, students expressed the “desire to avoid giving offence” and stated that even acknowledging the existence of difference “could be construed as intimidating and provocative” (2017b: 125). Indeed, they found that both students *and* teachers were “nervous about discussing issues related to difference in mixed classes and prefer to avoid these topics or discuss only the least contentious” (2017a: 10). Other research claims that power dynamics affect the extent to which groups focus on commonalities. Saguy, Dovidio and Pratto (2008), for example, found that groups with perceived advantages wished to focus discussion on similarity, compared to disadvantaged groups’ members who challenged difference and inequality.

My research takes this one step further. The qualitative data reveal that teacher-led activities prioritised the identification of similarity between the students.²¹⁸ Firstly, in the CPD training, teachers shared ways in which their Link Day facilitation tended to focus on aspects of similarity, for example language:

[Teacher C said] “Judaism and Islam are so unbelievably similar”. He asked each speaker at the front of the room to say, ‘peace be with you’ in their respective languages [Hebrew and Arabic]. He then asked them to count from one to ten at the same time. The students listening were amazed at how similar they sounded, and they clapped. (Fieldnotes Schools C and D Link Day 1)

²¹⁷ Defined as encompassing “a broad range of community-related differences, including those concerning religious belief and practice, political views and cultural activities, as well as associated experiences, such as conflict and inequality” (Loader and Hughes 2017b: 125).

²¹⁸ Although it is a pattern amongst many teachers taking part in School Linking, I observed instances of some teachers celebrating difference. For example, Teacher A, in his final Link Day, explained to the students, “we have so much more in common to be celebrated. But more importantly, the differences that exist, and of course there are differences, are actually things to be celebrated. They are what builds us as a society and as a nation and as people.” (Fieldnotes, AB Link Day 3)

One female Jewish schoolteacher chipped in: “A couple years ago what we did, when we were teaching year five, we found words that were very similar in terms of sound and meaning in Hebrew and Arabic and we turned it into a game where children had to match the words together. That was a really good way of showing the similarities. It worked really well.” (Fieldnotes, London CPD 3)²¹⁹

Secondly, during my Link Day participant observation I found that the learning outcomes of some of the activities were based upon identifying similarities:

I want you to write down five things that every member of your group believes. You can interpret ‘belief’ in any way you want – an idea, a principle. But every member has to believe it. (Teacher A, Schools A and B Link Day 3)

[Teacher C] asked the groups to come up with their own flags [...] He emphasised that it should be about finding similarities, so the students will need to speak to each other. (Fieldnotes, Schools C and D Link Day 2)

Lastly, in the focus groups, teachers expressed that they emphasised similarity as a means of overcoming challenges or as a key learning point of School Linking:

Another thing I think [...] that we did to overcome barriers, was to focus a lot on similarities. So for example, there could be two different religions but

²¹⁹ Notably, Hebrew and Arabic are both minority languages within the UK. In this case, the speakers of these language could therefore feel a form of similarity which each other outside of the wider context of the English language, a suggestion made by Parker-Jenkins and Glenn (2011: 3): “While the Muslim and Jewish groups have different cultural and historic roots, they are similar in that they both are minorities seeking to sustain cultural heritage in the face of assimilationist trends”. In this way, the notion is similarity is situational. Minority-majority relationships in School Linking are discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.

they support the same team, and things like that. (Focus group, male teacher, Muslim-ethos school)

Yes, we've come to realise that there's not much that separates us or that makes us different. We're all really, really similar. I think that was a wake-up call for our students. (Focus group, female teacher, Muslim-ethos school)

But it's [about...] getting to know them and realising the many things they have in common, rather than the differences (Focus group, male teacher, Roman Catholic-ethos school)²²⁰

The qualitative data therefore show that the teachers are emphasising similarity as the basis upon which students can communicate, interact and build relationships. Literature indicates that this can be a positive finding in terms of forming friendships. The *Youth on Religion* research into young people's religious identity in England²²¹, for example, found that although young people appreciated having a range of friends from different backgrounds, "the more enduring friendships were between those with most in common" (Madge, Hemming and Stenson 2014: 164).²²² Similarly, in the US, Kupersmidt, DeRosier and Patterson (1995) tested the likelihood of students forming friendships across a number of variables including gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status and academic achievement. They found that the more similar the students are, the likelihood of them forming friendships increased. Jackson and McKenna (2017: 7) stated their

²²⁰ This quote in particular mirrors findings from previous evaluations. Kerr et al.'s (2011) of The Linking Network (TLN) presented the following quote as typical of the teachers' perceived aims: "I want them to learn there are more similarities between us than there are differences between the different people; that's the main aim" (2011: 38). Questions around the aims of School Linking will be revisited in section 8.4.

²²¹ Discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to personal worldviews.

²²² As an aside, the research also found that despite similarity being posited as the basis for sustainable friendships, participants stated that the similarity did not necessarily have to stem from faith background: "It was emphasised that people are not all the same just because they are Muslim or Christian, and some take their religion much more seriously than others. Mixed friendship groups provided the chance to discuss religion more broadly and learnt something different." (Madge, Hemming and Stenson 2014: 165). The importance of recognising plurality within religious belief is addressed in section 8.3 and the formation of friendships as an indicator of success in School Linking addressed in section 8.4.

REDCo²²³ project finding that “shared interests” were a precondition for what pupils saw as “peaceful coexistence”. Finally, Arweck (2017b) studied a multicultural community school in London and found that “likeness or sameness created spaces where this [religious] identity had a place and was validated” (2017b: 146).

That students identify with similarity is something that the School Linking teachers themselves identified in their focus group discussions:

I learnt that the children themselves focus on their similarities and not their differences. (Focus group, male teacher, Muslim-ethos school)

Teacher 1: But isn't it interesting that they need to think that they might be similar? I mean, I don't know, I would have thought that it might be quite interesting that somebody could be different from you, but maybe as children you feel a need to feel some similarity.

Teacher 2: But even as adults, though, you connect with people who you have similarities with [...] they can be very different to you but there needs to be something that you connect over. As children, it might be even more difficult to connect to somebody that you don't have any obvious links with. (Focus Group, females teachers, community schools)

Focusing on similarities, then, can be an integral aspect of forming positive relationships between students. In the same way, depicting similarity in positive terms does not have to mean that difference is seen as negative. However, I argue that some teachers stress the need to find similarities between students *at the detriment of recognising difference*. This undermines the success that the celebration of similarity achieves because it feeds into narratives in academic literature and public policy that problematise difference.

Chapter 3 opened with a discussion of the ‘community cohesion’ agenda. Defined as a “what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of

²²³ Outlined in Section 2.3.1.

people to get on well together” (DCLG 2008: 10), the agenda’s exploitation of ‘difference’ has been widely criticised. Alam and Husband (2012: 142) state that the *Cantle Report* (2001) “provided a potential repertoire of interventions that would reassert Britain’s tolerant credentials in seeking to accommodate difference (by eradicating it)”. Shannahan (2017: 410) argues that it fails to address the question, “why do we respond to difference in particular ways?” and critiques the report for its “demonising and homogenising of difference”. The *Cantle Report* did not escape criticism in Religious Education (RE) literature either. Igrave (2003b: 164) argues that “it is the very existence of difference that makes public debate on religious questions and the development of children’s religious literacy so important both in the interests of communal harmony and for the preparation of young people for ‘life as citizens in a plural society’”.

Chapter 3 situated the community cohesion agenda in relation to faith schooling in particular, which was depicted by *The Cantle Report* (2001), *Ousley Report* (2001) and *Casey Review* (2016) as a barrier to cohesion and social integration. In the chapter, I argued that the assumptions that faith schools are divisive are driven by language which present the schools, and the religious groups they represent, as overtly homogenous (Hemming 2011, Jackson 2003a, 2014a, Grace 2003, MacMullen 2007). Shannahan in particular echoes this in his critique of the community cohesion discourse more generally. He argues that the “narratives of difference reflect an excluding camp mentality, which frames identity around a binary understanding of cultural ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’” (Shannahan 2017: 414). Similarly, a report from the 2000 Commission on the Future of Multi-ethnic Britain’, chaired by Parekh, challenges the term ‘integration’, which “implies a one-way process in which ‘minorities’ are absorbed into the non-existent homogeneous cultural structure of the ‘majority’” (Parekh 2000).

The following section of this chapter will illustrate how teachers are to an extent echoing the discourse of homogeneity when they discuss difference in School Linking. To summarise this section, my qualitative data helps to illuminate Chapter 5’s quantitative findings that students appear to be interpreting difference as a negative concept. In spite of some teachers’ recognition that students tend

to avoid difference, Link Day activities and teachers' approaches to School Linking continue to emphasise similarity as a basis for positive relations. Although literature may posit similarity as a key factor in forming friendships, and it does not logically follow that difference will necessarily *inhibit* positive relations, there is a body of research indicating that difference is problematised within popular discourse around community cohesion (including faith schooling) and a continued prioritising of similarity risks feeding into such narratives.

8.3: Religious (il)literacy in School Linking

Research in Chapters 2 and 3 found that knowledge is a key outcome in studies of young people's attitudes to religious diversity. Arweck and Ipgrave (2017: 28) summarise a key finding from the qualitative strand of the *Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity* project as that young people's "arose from direct knowledge of practitioners of religion". What is more, Jackson (2014b: 134) states the REDCo project finding that "knowledge about each other's religions and worldviews" is a basic condition for what students perceived to be "peaceful co-existence".

My quantitative analysis in Chapter 5 appeared to support these findings. The student baseline and endpoint survey analysis indicated that the development of knowledge about the students with whom they were linked was a key outcome for students taking part in School Linking.²²⁴ High levels of knowledge about either a) the Link School students or b) the students in their own classes, were positively correlated with students' confidence in their ability to communicate and interact with the students from their Link School. However, further exploration of the student reflection forms (in which students were asked to write or draw what they had learnt during the Link Days) indicated that students

²²⁴ When presented with a Likert scale for the statement, 'I know a lot about the faiths and beliefs of my Link School', the proportion of students scoring a 1 decreased from 25% at baseline to 5% at endpoint. Equally, 13.9% of students scored a 5 at baseline, which rose to over half of students scoring a 4 or a 5 at endpoint. The median score increased from a 3 to a 4.

were demonstrating low levels of religious literacy²²⁵ (see Section 5.2.1). Moreover, analysis of teacher surveys revealed that they would like to increase their own knowledge or understanding of another faith through participation in School Linking, indicating potentially low levels of religious literacy at the teacher-level at the beginning of the programme.

This section explores the tension between the students' reported development of 'knowledge' during Link Days, and the challenges of apparent religious illiteracy. In this section I first argue that religious illiteracy might be exacerbated by an emphasis on question and (closed) answer sessions during Link Days (in order to demonstrate similarity – a problem in itself explored in the previous section). To facilitate discussion in a way that avoids stereotypes and surface-level learning, this approach requires levels of religious literacy which some teachers do not possess. Second, I explore academic frameworks for religious literacy which embrace religious plurality. Whilst some teachers embrace the language of plurality, the four community school teachers in particular appear to struggle. This finding is at odds with literature that frames the community school as an ideal space for inter- and intra-faith learning and it may provide explanation for of Chapter 5's negative quantitative findings about community schools.²²⁶

My qualitative data revealed a tendency for teachers to facilitate question and answer sessions in their Link Days. In focus groups, they shared the type of questions that were asked in the Link Day activities:

In the last link we hosted them and the girls prayed for us during lunch. [...] And then we said, "right girls do you have anything that you want to ask?". And it opened up a great dialogue, "why did you bow?", "why did you walk back?". (London Focus Group 2 Teacher A)

²²⁵ Defined in Chapter 2 as "an understanding of the grammars, rules, vocabularies and narratives underpinning religions and beliefs" (Dinham and Shaw 2017: 2). Alternative definitions are explored later in this section.

²²⁶ See Figure 5.20 for a summary of key secondary data analysis findings pertaining to community schools.

In our school, children asked a lot of questions to the Sikh students. Why the long hair? Why the turban? A lot of questions like that, which they've never had an answer to before. (Focus group, female teacher, Roman Catholic-ethos school)

[O]ur group had a question and answer session with each other [...] it was more the fundamentals of the faith that they asked about, not like, stereotypes. Core beliefs, and why certain practices are held. Like, why do people use rosary beads? Why do they wear the hijab? Why do they cover themselves? (Focus group, female teacher, Roman Catholic-ethos school)

The kinds of questions asked in the examples above were similar to those which students stated in their endpoint surveys analysed in Chapter 5. When the endpoint survey asked students to share what they had asked the students from their Link School, typical questions pertaining to religion included, "why do they wear those hat things?", "why do you cover up?", "why do girls wear hijabs?", "how do you pray?" and "why do you not cut your hair?".

I observed similar questions during Schools C and D's Link Days. Sessions were facilitated by the teachers during all three Link Days, and my observation enabled me to track the answers given. Examples included:

School C student: What is Islam's rule on homosexuality?

Teacher D: It is fundamentally wrong. But if someone chooses it, you respect their choice.

School C student: Why do you pray five times a day?

School D student: Our book says if someone prays five times a day then we can live sin-free.

School C student: Do you believe in Heaven and Hell?

Teacher D: There are some core beliefs that Muslims hold, one of which is a belief in Heaven and Hell.

School C student: What is Islam's opinion of the role of women?

School D student: They can do anything they want. There is no discrimination, as long as they follow Allah [Teacher D proceeded to clarify this response, explaining that women cannot lead male prayer. He also said that the perception that the woman stays at home while the husband works is generally correct]

Previous evaluations of TLN have argued that questions like these satisfy students' natural curiosity about each other (Raw 2006: 61). However, whilst the purpose of the questions is to develop knowledge of the Link School students' religious or non-religious beliefs, the responses risk aligning with "formulaic, or potentially inadequate, answers", an issue identified as key to religious illiteracy in schools by Conroy (2015: 179) and exemplify a reductionist approach to learning. Nesbitt (2004: 21) explains this tendency:

[There is] a tendency to explain some behaviour in terms of a community's culture or religion, without considering the possible interplay of other factors, or that the same decisive influences may be at work in society as a whole. For example, Sikhs are sometimes stereotyped as being marked by the 'five Ks', and Muslims girls as wearing a headscarf.

This tendency is visible in the content of the student reflection forms analysed in Chapter 5, when students reported learning such things as, "Muslims pray on a mat in a temple", "Atheists don't believe in anything", "Christians pray to a picture most nights" and "Hindus eat only veg".

Conroy further argues that "instances of teachers having limited understanding of the subtleties of religious practice and their connectedness to the interstices of religious belief and doctrine" (2015: 179) are intricately tied with problems with the school religious studies curriculum. Conroy's position, as explained by Dinham and Francis (2015b), is that the teaching and assessment of RE "trivialises and makes irrelevant religious histories and thought [...] reducing complex issues [...] to simplistic pre-coached answers" (2015b: 21).

Chapter 6 stated that some teachers' motivation for taking part in School Linking stems from RE requirements and there were instances in my own data of teachers tying the learning in School Linking to RE examinations. Following a question and answer session at a local mosque during Schools A and B's second Link Day, Teacher A announced, "everything we've covered here will be part of your GCSEs in six months' time" (fieldnotes, Schools A and B Link Day 2). In this respect, teachers' emphasis on question and answer sessions reveals a form of religious literacy implicitly tied to a type of knowledge associated with RE teaching and examination.

In Chapter 2 I highlighted the pedagogical challenges of teaching a plurality of religious and non-religious worldviews (in particular highlighting the challenge of communicating the concept of 'personal worldviews'). Wright's religious literacy approach (1993, 1998, 2000), reviewed in the chapter, puts knowledge of truth claims at the centre of his framework which assumes "distinctive identities" of "specific spiritual traditions" (Wright 2000: 175). However, this position is at odds with others' interpretations. Conroy (2015: 168-169) defines religious literacy as:

...an acquaintance with, and understanding of, the nature of religious language, religious concepts and practices, and some grasp of the complexities, contradictions and challenges of at least one religious tradition. Perhaps more than any of these, religious literacy is an engagement with religious language and its import [...which...] embodies the capacity to locate particular ideas within their historical, ethical, epistemological and social context.

Similarly, Dinham and Francis (2015b: 11) emphasise the understanding of context as something which "precedes knowledge about specific religions and beliefs themselves, which can only effectively follow on from intelligent, thoughtful, informed understanding of how the conversation is framed". Moreover, Nesbitt (2004) takes an ethnographic approach to religious literacy, which she defines as being "conversant with the processes that produce what we

call religion and culture and having a sense of their dynamics” (2004: 4). These interpretations recognise the nature of religious plurality and worldviews explored earlier in the thesis. So, in School Linking, it appears that teachers have not taken on the now increasingly popular broader understandings of religious literacy as plurality and diversity.

I observed some instances in the Link Days where teachers recognised religious plurality in their speech. Teacher A, in the assembly at the end of School Linking in which he encouraged other students in the school to apply, explained, “even though we are a Christian school linking with a Muslim school, you don’t have to be Christian or Muslim to go on the Link Day. You don’t even have to be religious at all” (Fieldnotes, School A assembly), illustrating the existence of students from multiple religious backgrounds within one faith school.²²⁷ What is more, during Schools C and D’s second Link Day, Teacher C explained the pluralist nature of his Jewish-ethos school:

Most people when they think of a Jewish person they think of a big black hat and a beard but what you notice with students from [School C] is that we belong to a pluralist school [...] There are different types of Jews, but in pluralism we say if you go to a synagogue where men and women sit together and women pray, then that’s fine. If you go to a synagogue where men and women sit separately and only men are allowed to pray, then that’s fine. If you’re a Jew but you eat bacon, that’s fine. If you are a Jew and an atheist, then that’s fine. If you are a Jew and you are extremely religious and want to pray three times a day, then that’s fine. So pluralism is about accepting all the different types of a specific religion. (Fieldnotes, Schools C and D Link Day 2)

Teacher C explicitly stated that there is not necessarily a link between a particular religion and perceived practices or preferences, and when he asked his own students what it means to them to go to a pluralist school, one replied, “it means

²²⁷ Highlighted in Section 2.2.1.

we get to see a lot of different perspectives on our own religion”, echoing the sentiment.

Moreover, in the second London CPD day, a female Jewish-ethos teacher reflected on this dimension of the school:

She reflected on this issue at length. She explained that the school rules regarding food are very strict, although many of her students “only eat Kosher food at school, then have a MacDonald’s on the way home”. She went to a Jewish school, and described it as “actively promoting the Jewish faith”. However, although the school teaching remains strict, her students embrace other faiths / cultures / popular culture. For example, last year they celebrated Hanukkah at the school, even though she knew that many of her students had a Christmas tree up at home. (Fieldnotes, London CPD 2)

Lastly, in a focus group discussion, a teacher suggested exploring religious plurality in more detail:

And that’s the thing that you don’t really think about. When you think about Jews, people assume they’re all going to be the same, that all Christians are going to be the same, but even amongst themselves they are different. Maybe that’s something that you can share with them as well. (Focus group, female teacher, Roman Catholic-ethos school)

Intimately related to this is the complexity of ways in which young people’s religious learning is shaped by factors outside of school. McKenna, Ipgrave and Jackson (2008: 21) summarise this relationship:

[W]ithin any classroom (including those where all pupils are of indigenous white ethnic origin, or where all are of Muslim background), children will come from a variety of home circumstances and experiences, and will have assimilated a variety of viewpoints, beliefs and values.

Indeed, the focus groups revealed that some students' views are informed first and foremost by their parents and other adult figures:

At primary [...] if an adult tells them they believe that as well. It could be a parent or someone in the family or at the place of worship. (Focus group, female teacher, Sikh-ethos school)

I worked in a church school and I did have some individuals whose attitude towards Jews was informed by their parents attitude [...] I've had occasions in my school where a child has said something that they've obviously brought in from home and we've been able to address it and change the child's view. (Focus group, female teacher, Jewish-ethos school)

Sometimes you hear comments that students make, and you know it's coming from the parents. [...] they might say something like, "oh those Muslims, they do this that and the other", and you can tell that they can't have thought of that themselves, because they're too little. (Focus group, female teacher, community school)

This finding is echoed in previous research, which argues that students' attitudes to diversity are informed by parents or home life before learning in school (Arweck and Ipgrave 2017: 24, Ipgrave 2012a, Flint 2009: 170, Jackson and McKenna 2017: 6, Madge, Hemming and Stenson 2014: 72, 138-139). These examples illustrate how students' religious literacy is not solely informed by their teachers' position. Nevertheless, it remains the case that some teachers are religiously illiterate in terms of Conroy's (2005), Dinham and Francis' (2015a) and Nesbitt's (2004) interpretations of literacy outlined above.

The previous section criticised the community cohesion agenda for problematising difference, arguing that it is exacerbated by language which presents religions as homogenous communities. This in turn echoes Baumann's

'dominant discourse',²²⁸ outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 in the context of debates surrounding the secularisation of RE. Such discourse conflicts with the definitions of religious literacy explored above, and what is more undermines F&BF's safe space principle of 'I statements'.²²⁹ One focus group discussion revealed a community school teacher in particular as exhibiting this form of religious illiteracy:

I feel like we have nothing to bring to the table regarding faith because we're not a faith school. So we're going to them next and we could be watching their prayers, learning more about the religion. They are going to give [...] the religious side. (Focus Group, female teacher, community school)

Teacher A: My knowledge of Judaism isn't, I wouldn't say, amazing [...] And I'm guessing, every Jewish school has slightly different ways...

Teacher B: Well that's like with Muslims too! Every Muslim school, they have different ways as well.

Teacher A: Okay, I didn't know that either. (Focus group, female teachers, community school and Muslim-ethos schools)

The same teacher continued to share her view on the low levels of religious literacy amongst her own students:

[B]efore we planned the Link Day, we did a brainstorm about what they know about Judaism. They knew nothing, you know? And we've taught Judaism, so they should have an idea, but they didn't even understand that it was the Jewish religion. [...] We don't even have a comparison. The children at my school, some of the children may not even have seen a

²²⁸ Defined by Jackson (2003a: 72-73) as speech which "reifies cultures, seeing 'communities' as defined by ethnic and religious identity", often used by the media and politicians".

²²⁹ Explained by a F&BF staff member during the second CPD training: "[The staff member] emphasised that teachers shouldn't say to their students, for example, "you're here to meet the Muslim students" or "you're here to meet the Jewish students" rather, "you're here to meet individuals" and lots of things inform who we are as individuals".

Christian prayer. Some of them are non-faith [...] they haven't even got that to compare with another faith. (Focus Group, female teacher, community school)

Sometimes it's easier for children to relate to another faith, even if it's a different faith. How do you have that dialogue with someone who doesn't believe at all? (Community school teacher, London CPD 1)

The teacher's representation of religious and non-religious belief as homogeneous exemplifies her religious illiteracy. In Dinham and Francis' (2015a: 259-60) words:

Non-religious identities are just as complex, and assumptions that all non- or a religious people conform to a standardised form of atheism is as misleading and damaging as assumptions about Islam or Christianity that ignore centuries of debate, contest and conflict between differing understandings.

My finding of religious illiteracy within the community school presents a challenge to literature which presents community schools as sites for learning about religious plurality by virtue of their diversity. Chapter 2 outlined Arweck's (2017b, 2017c) studies of multicultural community schools in London and Wales, in which she stated that community schools offer increased opportunity to learn about diversity and the development of positive attitudes to those with religious and non-religious beliefs. Similarly, Jackson (2003a: 79), Burtonwood (2006: 74), MacMullen (2007: 32) and Madge, Hemming and Stenson (2014: 170) all describe community schools as institutions that are best placed to provide the context or opportunity for dialogue between students of different worldviews. However, as I demonstrated in Chapter 7, there is potential for the teachers' assumptions that their students are religiously illiterate to be reflected in their students' own perceptions of the programme. If this is the case, it may explain

findings pertaining to the previous year's community schools in Chapter 5's quantitative analysis.

To summarise, this section has shed light on findings in Chapter 5's quantitative analysis that suggest low levels of religious literacy in School Linking at both the student and teacher-level. First, the factual knowledge that students reported learning in their student reflection forms is found to be encouraged through question and answer sessions. This activity lends itself to a framework of religious literacy that academics (Conroy 2015, Dinham and Francis 2015a) argue cultivates a type of knowledge appropriate for over-simplified teaching and examination, but which does not sufficiently capture the *context* which informs religious and non-religious worldviews. Second, when alternative frameworks which see religious literacy as a recognition of religious plurality and diversity are put forward, illiteracy is specifically identified among community school teachers. Their expressions of religious and non-religious worldviews as reified or homogeneous undermine the community school as a place for learning about religious plurality by virtue of its inherent diversity. Ultimately, this section has shown that if knowledge is an aim of the programme (as suggested by previous literature, see introduction to this section), the type of knowledge transferred during much of School Linking may not tally with students' own experiences of religion in their lives more widely.

8.4: School Linking: Aims and outcomes

The previous two sections dealt with the concepts of difference and religious literacy, two themes that emerged from the quantitative analysis in Chapter 5. Whilst my qualitative findings have sought to clarify issues around the concepts, I continue to question the extent to which students are developing meaningful knowledge about their Link Day students. The previous section argued that if knowledge is an aim of School Linking, the issues tackled in this chapter undermine a successful outcome. This section, however, will illustrate a single key finding: that there is little consensus among the School Linking teachers of

the aim(s) of the programme. Recognising that Chapter 5's quantitative analysis of student baseline and endpoint surveys identified that expectations of School Linking do not necessarily tally with outcomes, this section addresses the teachers' perceived aims revealed through the qualitative data, including friendship and the development of 'intercultural competence', defined in Chapter 2 as "[A] combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes which enables learners to: understand and respect people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself; respond appropriately, effectively and respectfully when interacting and communicating with such people [and]; establish positive and constructive relationships with such people" (Jackson 2014a: 34). However, that teachers disagree about the programme aims contradicts previous research which emphasises the importance of *shared understanding* between Link Teachers to ensure that their students' expectations are realistic.

The formation of friendships²³⁰ is perceived as a key outcome in comparable programmes. Raw's 2006 evaluation of TLN, for example, listed an "openness to mixed friendship circle[s]" as an indicator of impact at the level of "deeper, transferable attitude change" (2006: 9). Similarly, Loader and Hughes' (2017b) evaluation of the Northern Ireland Shared Education programme outlined that "the development of positive relationship – ideally friendships [...] will promote more favourable intergroup attitudes" (2017b: 122). What is more, Chapter 5's quantitative analysis identified that primary school students in particular viewed the formation of friendships as their personal aim of School Linking. Section 8.2 outlined teachers' focus on emphasising similarity between students, a finding that aligns with previous literature tying similarity to friendship. Moreover, in their focus groups, teachers echoed the importance of forming friendships in School Linking:

They came into it thinking, 'great! We can make new friends and I can learn about these girls from the Muslim school! (London FG4: C)

²³⁰ The nature of 'friendship' is discussed in more detail in the following Chapter, when I identify that in a framework of contact theory, School Linking more accurately develops 'acquaintances'.

Teacher 1: But a lot of them have actually made friendships, haven't they? A lot of ours were actually crying in the last visit weren't they?

Teacher 2: Yeah [...] Only from seeing each other three times! They're best friends at the end of it. (Focus group, female teachers, Sikh-ethos and Roman Catholic-ethos schools)

There appears to be limitations, however, to the extent to which friendships are formed in such a way that they are sustainable. First, some students are disappointed that new groups are introduced each year, inhibiting this. At the end of Schools C and D's first Link Day, I had the following conversation with a School C student:

Student: I'm cross.

Me: Why?

Student: I thought it would be bigger. We didn't even get to go in the main bit [of the museum]. I preferred last year.

Me: Oh, you went last year? What did you prefer, the museum or last year's trip to the football ground?

Student: Football ground. And I don't even like football. [Another student] and I are the only two who were on it last year and he feels the same way.

Me: You linked with [School D] last year, right?

Student: Yeah, but a different class. We're cross about that, too.

Me: Ah. Were you looking forward to seeing the guys from last year?

Student: Yeah. I wish we'd kept in touch. We didn't get their numbers and we don't see them.

This notion is reflected in Raw's TLN study, where she stated that students expressed "disappointment that it was not the intention of their teachers to propose that they continue to be involved in the project, because the following year it would be the turn of another class" (2006: 23).

What is more, my focus school Teachers A and B conveyed to me that their students would like to stay in touch, either through a fourth Link Day or by

continuing the following year. This enthusiasm echoed the quantitative analysis of Chapter 5, in which a significant proportion of the 32% of students requesting improvements in the programme structure wished for more than three Link Days. However, the students appeared to rely on sustaining friendships by continuing the programme; they were unlikely to meet independently of School Linking:

When one girl asked whether they could continue to link the following year, Teacher A replied, “If it’s feasible and you want to meet again, that’s something we can think about”. Turning to me, he then added quietly, “it’s not like that question is asked every year! But they won’t just meet up in the park, they’ll expect us to arrange another meet”. He shook his head to indicate that it never happens. (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B, Link Day 3)

Remembering that a student asked for a fourth link at the beginning of the day, I asked Teacher B if the relationships formed during the Link Days have ever developed long-term. She thought for a moment before replying, “They probably won’t meet up again”. (Fieldnotes, Schools A and B, Link Day 3)

Again, this mirrors other evaluations of TLN. Raw reflected on the extent to which school-age students can control aspects of their lives outside of school. Citing barriers such as family plans, family attitudes and access to transport, she concluded that “[t]hose who were daunted by the prospect of taking responsibility for sustaining their friendships independently were probably realistic” (2006: 23). Loader and Hughes’ (2017b: 124) found similar limitations to the ‘Shared Education’ programme, where students were “unlikely to meet locally as a result of residential segregation, poor public transport, and the limited provision of ‘shared’ venues and activities beyond the school”. Kerr et al. (2011: 60) found that students stated a preference for linking with a geographically close school “so that friendships and the link could be more easily maintained”. The question of friendship was directly addressed by a F&BF staff member during the second Waltham Forest CPD day. She explained that the students “don’t need to come

away with a best friend – it’s more about having a conversation” (Fieldnotes, Waltham Forest CPD 2). The role that School Linking might play in forming ‘acquaintances’ is discussed in Chapter 9.

The teachers also discussed in their focus groups the extent to which they felt that knowledge, skills and attitudes had developed throughout School Linking. These are the key principles underlying ‘intercultural competence’ (originally stated by the Council of Europe (2014) and developed by Jackson (2014a) in relation to different pedagogical approaches to teaching intercultural education) and were used to guide discussion in the focus groups in order to generate data relevant to F&BF’s change in organisational identity that took place during the course of this research.²³¹ Analysing the results from this aspect of the data reveals that although teachers generally agreed on the categorisations of ‘skills’ and ‘attitudes’ as they appear in School Linking, their perceptions of the classification and role of ‘knowledge’ as an aim of the programme, as was the case in Section 8.3, proved to be contentious.

The teachers’ responses to the survey and focus group questions about the classification of ‘skills’ and ‘attitudes’ were largely comparable. Interpersonal communication skills were typically posed as aims in the open-ended survey teachers completed at the start of the programme, alongside confidence and teamwork. These responses were echoed when they discussed the impact seen in their focus groups towards the end of School Linking:

With my girls it’s communication. And even from the first to the second link day, and confidence comes into it, I think they’re more confident with

²³¹ As a reminder, the organisation was originally known as Three Faiths Forum, an explicitly interfaith organisation with the ‘Faith School Linking Programme’. The change of name to the Faith and Belief Forum represented a shift in the language used to describe the newly named ‘School Linking Programme’ (see Section 1.3). Namely, F&BF’s public facing literature (including the website and annual reports) increasingly spoke of the role of culture and intercultural dialogue in the programme. Whilst School Linking is defined as “interfaith encounters” for the purposes of the research design (an operationalisation which is reflected upon in the conclusions of Chapter 10), I acknowledged the shift in organisational identity by reviewing literature around intercultural education in Chapter 2, and structuring the primary data collection, outlined in Chapter 4, around the categories of knowledge, skills and attitudes, the concepts that make up ‘intercultural competence’.

speaking to each other but also articulating their own ideas. (Focus group, female teacher, Muslim-ethos school)

They worked on their teamwork skills. (Focus group, female teacher, community school)

They learnt, whether it was through an icebreaker or an actual activity, that they had to work as a team in order to complete a challenge. We built that into some of the activities we did with them and yeah, working together, it doesn't matter, even if you're from a different faith you can still work together collaboratively in order to achieve an aim. (Focus group, female teacher, Roman Catholic-ethos school)

I think they've also developed leadership skills. Some of the activities need a leader. (Focus group, male teacher, Muslim-ethos school)

When it came to attitudes, typical responses that teachers stated as aims in the survey included tolerance, empathy and respect. Once again, the focus group discussions largely aligned with this:

I think they learnt to respect each other. (Focus group, female teacher, Sikh-ethos school)

So tolerance is an attitude this develops. Just tolerance and understanding. (Focus group, female teacher, Roman Catholic-ethos school)

I think tolerance, to have some respect. (Focus group, female teacher, Muslim-ethos school)

However, two focus groups critiqued the popular survey answer of 'tolerance':

Teacher 1: I'm not sure about this word tolerance. I'm not keen on it.

Teacher 2: I think more acceptance than tolerance.

Teacher 1: I think when you tolerate, you have negative connotation. You're just doing it for the sake of [it]. Acceptance definitely a better word. (Focus group, female teachers, Roman Catholic-ethos schools)

Teacher 1: We are really trying to not use the word tolerance. We are really trying to move away from it.

Teacher 2: Yeah because you shouldn't just tolerate somebody.

Teacher 1: Yeah it's not about tolerating, it's about understanding.

(Focus group, male and female teacher, Jewish-ethos and Roman Catholic-ethos schools)

Such critiques are aligned with literature that argues that the explicit advocacy of tolerance in a classroom is unhelpful (Bowie 2017²³², Jackson and McKenna 2017: 6²³³, Welply 2018²³⁴).

With the exception of this one instance of critical analysis from the teachers, the role and classification of skills and attitudes were largely agreed upon by the teachers. The category of knowledge, however, was controversial. First, when it came to the teachers' classification of knowledge in School Linking, there were instances of teachers interpreting knowledge as the formulaic, over-simplified type described by Conroy (2015) in Section 8.3 in relation to teaching and examination criteria. For example, in the open-ended survey, one teacher described their expectations of the development of knowledge as, "children to LEARN facts about other cultures". Others tied it to the school curriculum, such as "students use the knowledge in RE [and] Citizenship lessons".

²³² Bowie's (2017) critique of government policy surrounding tolerance in schools argues that interpretations of the terms conflict between teachers and school leaders, in some instances exacerbating unequal power dynamics or polarising school communities.

²³³ Jackson and McKenna (2017) state a finding from the REDCo project that the attitudes expressed by the students were tolerant "at an abstract rather than practical level" and "was not always replicated in their daily life-worlds". (2017: 6)

²³⁴ Welply's (2018) research into an East of England primary school found that students "appeared to negotiate the school discourse of tolerance at a superficial level, without understanding its deeper meaning" which in turn led to the reinforcement of segregation between religious students. (2018: 384)

Second, in terms of knowledge as an aim of School Linking, teachers' views directly conflicted. Some teachers assumed or perceived knowledge to be the complete, or partial aim of the programme:

And this one, 'developing knowledge of other faiths'. That's the whole purpose isn't it? (Focus group, female teacher, Jewish-ethos school)

I think it's definitely part of it. It has to be. Without knowledge you don't have understanding. You need knowledge to move forward. (Focus group, female teacher, Roman Catholic-ethos school)

Knowledge is key and with the correct knowledge and understanding students can confidently challenge negative attitude. (Anonymous survey response)

Others held the opposing view, that knowledge is either irrelevant or a secondary aim of School Linking:

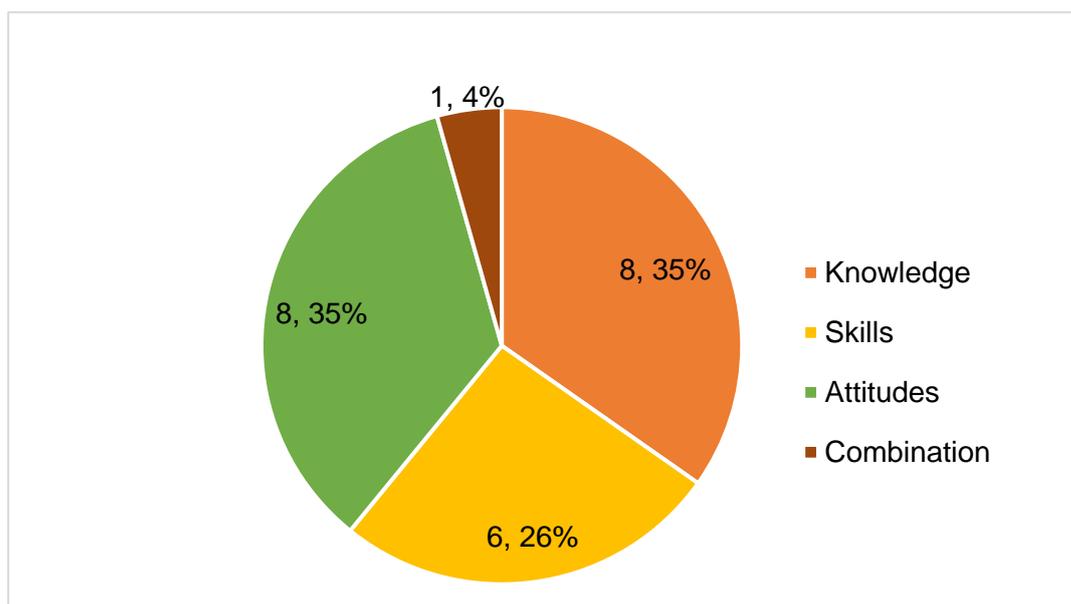
I'm not sure if I agree with the statement that knowledge should be the aim of the programme at all. It's about identity, it's about getting to know people, it's about building relationships more than gaining knowledge. Hopefully they will learn a few facts about the cultures, but I don't think that's necessarily the aim. It's interfaith. That's the difference. (Focus group, male teacher, Jewish-ethos school)

To me, it's not important to know facts about religion. For me, it's more important to meet people, and listen to them. (WF FG1 Teacher C)

When I came into this programme I thought knowledge was the aim of programme, and I don't think I fully understood that part of it [...] But over time, I've gotten to know it, and realised, yeah, it's not the be all and end all. (Focus group, male teacher, Roman Catholic-ethos school)

This disagreement over the aims of School Linking continued when I asked teachers at the end of the focus groups to anonymously state on a post-it note which category they see as their priority to develop in the final Link Day. As Figure 8.1 shows, the teachers were almost equally split between the categories of knowledge, skills and attitudes, openly illustrating the extent to which teachers are either unclear on, or disagree about, the aims of School Linking.

Figure 8.1: The categories of intercultural competence that teachers would like to develop further in their final Link Day



Finally, whilst all three components coexist in the development of intercultural competence (Council of Europe 2014), the fact that there is disagreement amongst teachers on the roles of knowledge, skills and attitudes within School Linking suggests that well-rounded intercultural competence may not be developed. Compounded by some teachers' desire for students to form sustainable friendships, the extent to which teachers understand, or are sure of, the aims of School Linking is unclear.

Previous studies of TLN pinpoint this lack of clarity about aims as problematic. Kerr et al. (2011: 42) emphasised that "one of the most important things to make the link work was a clear sense of direction and a realistic

assessment of what the work would involve. It was also important that the two linked schools had similar aims and hopes for the work". What is more, Raw (2006: 60) found that "teachers varied in the depth of their understanding of the aims of the project, which led to unclear objectives for activities". The unsureness found amongst the teachers, then, may contribute to the findings in Chapter 5's quantitative analysis that indicate that students' expectations and experiences of School Linking may not tally.

Then again, it could be argued that F&BF is exhibiting a 'strategic ambiguity', a term originally developed by Eisenberg (1984) to describe "those instances where individuals use ambiguity purposefully to accomplish their goals" (1984: 230). Channelling a strategic ambiguity through the communication of organisational goals can, in principle, construct a level of understanding upon which all participants can agree, but equally allow for multiple interpretations to coexist. This space enables participants to interpret the goals in order to align with the interests of their own stakeholders (Eisenberg 1984, Sillince, Jarzabkowski and Shaw 2012) and is argued to be a "discursive resource" for both management and participants by Jarzabkowski, Sillince and Shaw (2010: 221) in their case study of strategic ambiguity in a UK business school.

Chapter 6 revealed motivations for schools and teachers to take part in School Linking that teachers did not share in their surveys analysed in Chapter 5, including meeting Ofsted requirements through the duty to promote community cohesion and supporting the RE curriculum. F&BF itself hints at this interpretation in its description of School Linking on its website, when it states that "The programme helps the schools with their SMSC [spiritual, moral, social and cultural development], and British Values provision" (Faith and Belief Forum 2020b), both of which are school obligations inspected by Ofsted. By F&BF alluding to a possible interpretation, but keeping the explicit goals of the programme largely ambiguous, Chapter 6 illustrated that teachers' interpretations of the programme can satisfy multiple aspects of social and political agendas. What is more, strategic ambiguity has benefits at an organisational level, since it "facilitates organizational change by enabling shifting interpretations of organizational goals" (Davenport and Leitch 2005: 1606, Eisenberg and Goodall

1997, Eisenberg and Witten 1987). In this way strategic ambiguity can be used by F&BF to develop its own position over time, for example, in response to policy change.

However, whilst school-wide strategic ambiguity is recognised and possibly intentionally utilised by F&BF, it is less clear how useful ambiguity is when teachers interpret the goals of School Linking at an interpersonal level on behalf of their students. Jarzabkowski, Sillince and Shaw (2010: 221) recognised that multiple goals can “generate conflicting or competing priorities for those involved”, and as this chapter has illustrated, placing different levels of importance on the development of students’ intercultural competencies (in particular the development of knowledge), can inadvertently develop issues such as religious illiteracy. Therefore, whilst School Linking retains a strategic ambiguity around school and teacher motivation, a lack of teacher consensus around student-level development may contribute to instances where Link Days had a lack of direction or no clear objective.

In sum, this section has explored the perceived aims of School Linking. Some teachers’ desired outcome of sustainable friendships was found to be largely impractical, however the teachers’ reported evidence of the development of skills and attitudes generally aligned with their expectations of School Linking at the start of the programme. The development of knowledge as a practical aim of the programme provoked controversy, however. Some teachers defined the concept in terms of factual knowledge for use in lessons (found in section 8.3 as a type of surface-level knowledge which potentially exacerbates religious illiteracy), and there were conflicting opinions about the extent to which it is, or should be, the aim of School Linking. Finally, there was little consensus between teachers on their desired aims of the programme in general. Whilst at an organisational and institutional level, F&BF could be seen to be utilising ‘strategic ambiguity’ for teachers (and F&BF itself) to evidence the meeting of school-level agendas, previous evaluations of TLN have identified a disagreement on aims as problematic. At an interpersonal level, the lack of teacher consensus on the aims of School Linking for students’ development may explain why Chapter 5’s quantitative analysis identified instances of students’ expectations not being met.

8.5: Conclusion

This chapter has clarified two outstanding issues of Chapter 5's quantitative analysis and has questioned the clarity of the aims of School Linking. In terms of answering my third and fourth research questions of how School Linking informs or inhibits peaceful relations at the interpersonal and institutional levels, each section has contributed to both of these discussions.

The first section argued that students' apparent negative perceptions of difference reported in Chapter 5 may originate from, or be exacerbated by, teachers' focus on similarity during the Link Days. Qualitative data revealed that some teachers side-lined the concept of difference which, at an interpersonal level, may have unintentionally fostered students' negative interpretations of those who are different to them. What is more, the section reflected on literature from Chapter 3 which drew upon community cohesion rhetoric that presented faith schools as divisive. At an institutional level, the teachers' emphasis on the positive connotations of similarity risk feeding into this rhetoric that denigrates the concept of difference.

The second section continued to explore literature from Chapter 3 in relation to religious illiteracy in schools, another issue first identified in Chapter 5. The qualitative data uncovered a tendency for teachers to hold question and answer sessions during Link Days that, at an interpersonal level, reinforces through conversation a type of religious illiteracy that disregards the complexity of religious plurality. Moreover, that community school teachers in particular were found to exhibit religious illiteracy has implications at an institutional level. First, the finding undermines arguments that community schools are ideal sites for peaceful relations by virtue of their diversity, and second, helps to explain negative findings pertaining to community schools in Chapter 5.

The final section explored the implications of teachers' different perceptions of the aims of School Linking. I argued that, at an institutional level, the presence of a strategic ambiguity around programme goals enables teachers to share general understanding but interpret the goals in such a way that they satisfy school agenda. At an interpersonal level, however, a lack of consensus

around the role of students' intercultural competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) risks Link Days being undertaken without clear objectives for the activities. Similarly, teachers' disagreement about the development of knowledge as a practical aim of School Linking in particular risks exacerbating issues identified in the second section of the chapter. In this way, strategic ambiguity of goals can be viewed as "a resource or a problem" for the organisation (Jarzabkowski, Sillince and Shaw 2010: 219), depending on the level of peaceful relations that is being considered.

CHAPTER 9

A contextualised theory of ‘peaceful relations’

9.1: Introduction

The four previous chapters outlined a number of ways in which School Linking informs or inhibits ‘peaceful relations’ at interpersonal and institutional levels. I now draw on contact theory to address my final research question, ‘how can School Linking influence academic understandings of peaceful relations?’ My choice of contact theory was defended in Chapter 4, where I also established my methodological position of inductively uncovering my findings in such a way that theory can be reflectively assessed (see Section 4.3).

I begin with an overview of the development of the ‘intergroup contact’ model of contact theory. The model’s foundations in Allport’s (1954) contact hypothesis are outlined, research developing additional elements of the theory (including forms of contact and mediating processes) is explored and critiques of the theory are established. Literature from Chapter 2 is also revisited, grounding the principles of contact theory in research around community cohesion, faith schooling and interfaith programmes.

In Section 9.3, I reflect upon my findings in Chapters 5 to 8 and apply them to the framework of Allport’s (1954) four optimal conditions of equal status, common goals, cooperation and institutional support. In doing so, I construct a ‘recipe for success’ for contact through School Linking. The section also identifies the issue of student selection (see Section 7.2) as a key driving force behind instances of negative contact²³⁵ in School Linking, highlighting the need for further research in this area.

Recognising that contact research has developed since Allport’s (1954) assertion of optimal conditions, Section 9.4 reflects further upon my findings to provide theoretical insight into three implications of contact theory as it relates to

²³⁵ Where contact is found to increase prejudiced attitudes.

peaceful relations in School Linking.²³⁶ First, whilst the contact taking place during School Linking does not facilitate the 'type' of cross-group friendships that research frames as the ideal outcome, its role in creating opportunities to build 'acquaintances' should not be underestimated and can provide additional insight into the relationship between acquaintance building and contact effect.

Second, my research findings on similarity, difference and religious illiteracy in School Linking corroborate Pettigrew and Tropp's (2008) meta-analysis illustrating the weak role of knowledge as a mediator of contact effects. The Linking Teachers' tendency to frame the contact encounter in terms of a discussion of similarity echoes early theorists' contact interventions. I recommend a shift towards the more effective contact mediators of reduced intergroup anxiety and increased empathy for School Linking.

Third, I question the appropriateness of the 'intergroup contact' model of contact theory (Hewstone and Brown 1986) as the theoretical foundation for School Linking. The model's focus on the *generalisation* of positive attitudes requires a level of ingroup and outgroup salience characterised by 'typicality' or 'representativeness', which are at risk of exacerbating Chapter 8's negative findings regarding religious illiteracy and the homogenisation of difference. An alternative model of contact, the 'deategorization model' (Brewer and Miller 1984, 1988) is proposed as an alternative framework for contact that recognises and embraces religious and cultural plurality.

Section 9.4's theoretical insights ground Section 9.3's optimal framework for contact within deeper aspects of theory, and as such, the value of this chapter is twofold: not only are my findings applied to a pre-existing theoretical framework, but key themes of the theory are reassessed in light of my own research. Together they provide a contextualised theory of 'peaceful relations' in School Linking characterised by contact, and form a basis upon which the Faith and Belief Forum (F&BF) can accurately measure and communicate the impact of their work in schools.

²³⁶ When outlining my methodology in Chapter 3, I recognised the limitations of applying a well-established theory to primary data from an unrepresentative sample but nevertheless, my findings provide original insight that contributes to a context-specific framework of peaceful relations and shares original ideas upon which future research in this area can build.

9.2: Contact theory: An overview

The theoretical model of 'intergroup contact'²³⁷ (from now on 'contact theory') (developed by Hewstone and Brown 1986 and revisited by Brown and Hewstone 2005, Pettigrew 1998) has its origins in Allport's (1954) 'contact hypothesis', which proposed that interaction between groups can decrease prejudiced attitudes. Allport proposed four conditions which, he argued, make contact more likely to reduce prejudice. First, there should be equal status between the individuals, or the groups between which contact takes place. Second, the individuals or groups should share common goal(s) during the contact. Third, contact should be structured to enable cooperation or collaboration between the individuals or groups. Lastly, the contact should be validated through social or institutional support.

During the decades since the hypothesis was first articulated, a body of research has tested the hypothesis to determine the role and effectiveness of contact, resulting in "an integrated and influential theory" (Hewstone and Swart 2011: 374). There is substantial empirical support for the basic premise that contact reduces prejudice, exemplified by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006)'s meta-analysis of all intergroup contact theory research of the twentieth century that could be located, including published and unpublished studies. In total, 515 studies were analysed, covering more than 250,000 participants from thirty-eight nations. The analysis found that 94% of studies reported a negative relationship between contact and prejudice (a mean correlation of $-.21$). In other words, the analysis provided overwhelming support that greater contact is associated with reduced prejudice. Pettigrew and Tropp also found that studies in which the four optimal conditions for contact described above were met had a greater effect on reducing prejudice than those in which the conditions were absent. This suggested that the conditions "facilitated, but were not essential to" (Pettigrew et

²³⁷ Intergroup contact is just one model of contact theory with its origins in Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis. The hypothesis has been interpreted and developed into alternative models, such as Brewer and Miller's 'decategorization' model (Brewer and Miller 1984, 1988, Miller 2002) and Gaertner and Dovidio's 'common in-group identity' model (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000, Gaertner et al. 1989). I revisit alternative models of contact theory in Section 9.4.3.

al. 2011: 275) the reduced prejudiced attitudes. The ways in which peaceful relations in School Linking can be maximising by meeting the conditions is the subject of the following section.

Contact has been positively associated with trust towards the 'outgroup' (Tam et al. 2009), forgiveness (Hewstone et al. 2006, Tam et al. 2007), strength of attitudes (Christ et al. 2010, Vonofakou, Hewstone and Voci 2007), and reduced feelings of threat (Blascovich et al. 2001). A decrease in prejudice has also been found to extend, or generalise, "beyond the original contact setting or the particular out-group exemplar(s) encountered" (Hewstone and Swart 2011: 376), an aspect of the theory that will be critically discussed in Section 9.4.3. Al Ramiah and Hewstone (2013) warn that "it is difficult to draw too fine a line between conflict reduction, resolution and prevention" (Al Ramiah and Hewstone 2013: 537). However, they argue that contact theory can also be applied to "contexts of peace" (2013: 537) as a form of conflict prevention, citing research that explores Hindu-Muslim relations in India (Varshney 2002), Israeli and Palestinian relations (Kelman 2008) and integrated and segregated housing in the USA (Deutsch and Collins 1951) to support their argument.

Contact theory has developed to "take many forms" (Al Ramiah and Hewstone 2013: 528), with the most common assessing 'direct', or face-to-face contact. This type of contact is found in School Linking and is the main subject of this chapter. However I recognise a growing body of literature exploring alternative, 'indirect' forms of contact. Wright et al. (1997) theorised 'extended' contact, in which an individual's knowledge that another member of their ingroup has a relationship with an outgroup member, can in itself improve their attitude towards the outgroup. While Wright et al.'s study focuses on the group member's relationship with the outgroup member in terms of friendship, research testing extended contact has found it to be effective though knowledge of other relationships, such as neighbours or work colleagues (Tausch et al. 2011), and effective in school settings (Cameron and Rutland 2006, Cameron et al. 2006). The contact hypothesis has also been extended to cover 'imagined contact' (Crisp and Turner 2009, Turner, Crisp and Lambert 2007), in which "simply imagining contact with out-group members could improve inter-group attitudes" (Hewstone and Swart

2011: 377). This form of contact has been found to lead to reduced prejudice towards stigmatised groups including gay men (Turner, Crisp and Lambert 2007) and British Muslims (Husnu and Crisp 2010). Finally, the term 'vicarious' contact has been used to describe "instances in which intergroup contact is observed via some forms of media" (Hewstone and Swart 2011: 377f), for example when contact is positively portrayed in television shows, or when direct contact is not possible or desirable (Schiappa, Gregg and Hewes 2005).

The overview above has summarised research that is largely concerned with the 'where' and the 'when' of contact. In Brown and Hewstone's words, such studies answer the question "[f]or whom and under what conditions does contact bring about reductions in prejudice?" (2005: 284). Recent years, however, have seen an increase in research concerned with the 'how' and 'why' of contact. This research considers the *processes* underlying the attitudinal changes though the analysis mediating factors (sometimes referred to as 'mechanisms', for example, in Hughes et al. 2012). Although the effects of contact are argued to be a result of simple exposure and familiarity (Bornstein 1989), quantitative research has uncovered a variety of 'cognitive' and 'affective' mediating variables. Pettigrew and Tropp's (2008) meta-analysis of mediating factors found weak support for the cognitive mediator of knowledge (first posited by Allport (1954) and explored in more detail in Section 9.4.2). In contrast, the affective mediators of intergroup anxiety and empathy were found to be the most significant in the contact process.

Intergroup anxiety, first hypothesised by Stephan and Stephan (1985), is defined as "the feelings of discomfort and nervousness that arise in intergroup encounters" (Hughes et al. 2012: 531). Although anxiety has been found to contribute to the avoidance of contact altogether (Mendoza-Denton et al. 2002), when contact takes place, numerous studies have shown that this negative affect is reduced (Islam and Hewstone 1993, Voci and Hewstone 2003, see Brown and Hewstone 2005: 285-291 for a review). Contact has also been found to "induce positive affective processes" (Hewstone and Swart 2011: 376) such as empathy. Hughes et al. (2013) distinguish between first, emphatic concern, which "involves emotions such as sympathy and compassion" and "produce[s] altruistic motivation" and second, perspective taking, "the process of seeing the world

through the eyes of others” (2013: 762). These components have been found to have a positive influence on contact (Batson et al. 1997, Galinsky and Moskowitz 2000, see Batson and Ahmad 2009 for a review). Both mediators (increased empathy and reduced anxiety) are associated with cross-group friendships, argued to be a particularly effective vehicle for contact and (in the following subsection) to be a major component of contact research within schools.

As the number of studies of contact theory has grown over almost 70 years, so too has a body of research critiquing aspects of the approach. Firstly, Hewstone and Swart (2011) recognise that much of the existing research is cross-sectional, rather than longitudinal,²³⁸ and tends to measure *opportunity* for contact with various strengths of results. They suggest that further research be undertaken on the sustainability of contact effects and the “factors [that] moderate the link between opportunities, and actual contact” (2011: 378). For Hewstone and Swart, “experiments remain the best method for testing causal hypotheses, and should be at the forefront of future research” (2011: 378), an attitude reflected by Pettigrew et al. (2011) who argue that quantitative studies are “to be preferred, as they provide a means for examining replicable patterns of effect across the full accumulation of relevant studies” (2011: 274). However, Hewstone and Swart further argue that research should extend beyond the measuring of attitudes to explore the effect of contact on behaviour, a view echoed by Baumeister, Vohs and Funder (2007) and Al Ramiah and Hewstone (2013), who identify an overreliance in the discipline of social psychology on “self-report measures” (2013: 529) and a lack of “evaluations of real-world contact interventions” (2013: 529). It appears unknown how such quantitative experiments might sufficiently measure the impact of contact of behaviour change.

Secondly, there is a growing body of research into the nature of ‘negative contact’, where “intergroup contact relate[s] to greater prejudice” (Pettigrew 2008: 190). Pettigrew and Tropp’s (2006) meta-analysis of contact studies found that a small minority of research resulted in a positive correlation between contact and prejudice (i.e. an increase in contact is associated with an increase in prejudice), suggesting further investigation be undertaken to explore these outliers. In recent

²³⁸ I term my own research ‘longitudinal’ in Section 4.3.

years, research has begun to shed light on the nature of negative contact, suggesting that typical instances involve participants whose increased prejudiced attitudes were cultivated through a perception of threat (Raw 2009: 6, Stephan, Ybarra and Morrison 2009) or who entered into the contact situation involuntarily (Pettigrew and Tropp 2011), an instance I witnessed in School Linking (see Section 9.3.3). What is more, several studies have established relationships between negative contact and greater stereotyping (Corenblum and Stephan 2001, Stephan et al. 2000, Stephan et al. 2002) or group salience (Paolini, Harwood and Rubin 2010), or alternatively have found that stereotypes remain unaffected by positive contact (Aberson and Gaffney 2009). Recently, the ‘positive-negative asymmetry effect’ (Barlow et al. 2012) has developed out of research which demonstrates that “negative contact relates more strongly to increased prejudice than positive contact relates to reduced prejudice” (Aberson 2015: 744). Lastly, ongoing effects of negative contact have also been identified; Gómez, Tropp, and Fernández (2011) found an association between negative contact and the expectation that future contact will be negative.

In light of this overview I now turn to some of the literature with foundations in contact, previously reviewed in Chapter 3, in order to contextualise the remainder of this chapter within literature relevant to my research: community cohesion, faith schooling and interfaith encounters.

9.2.1: Contact in the literature: community cohesion, faith schooling and interfaith encounters

Literature on ‘community cohesion’ (Home Office 2001, Ouseley 2001), which I discussed in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.2.1 for a critical review), explicitly referred to a lack of interfaith or intercultural contact as a contributing factor to social divisions. Summed up by the 2001 *Cantle Report*:

[D]isturbances occurred in areas which had become fractured on racial, generational, cultural and religious lines and where there was little

dialogue, or much contact, between the various groups across those social divides. (Home Office 2001: 8)

The literature in this area further argued that faith schooling perpetuated (and continues to perpetuate) such divisions (Bell 2005, Home Office 2001, Cattle 2016, Casey 2016, Ouseley 2001). In Breen's (2009: 104) words, "According to the contact hypothesis, faith schools, by necessarily dividing children by religion, are inclined to be disconnected from ethnic and religious diversity within their wider social contexts". Although these community cohesion reports have been widely critiqued for disregarding the potential religious plurality within faith schools (see Section 3.2.1), I outlined a number of studies from Northern Ireland that legitimised the argument that faith schooling is divisive by virtue of its embedded physical or geographic segregation.²³⁹ The research compared religiously-segregated and religiously-integrated schools and found that students from integrated schools had a greater understanding of the 'other' group's religion and national identity (Hayes et al. 2007, Stringer et al. 2000), weaker group bias or stereotyping (Hughes 2011) or, more commonly, greater numbers of cross-group friendships (Gallagher, Smith and Montgomery 2003, McGlynn 2001, McGlynn et al. 2004, Schubotz and Robinson 2006).

Hughes et al.'s (2013) statistical analysis of survey data from 3,500 students at inter-denominational and separate denominational schools in Northern Ireland indicates that the findings related to friendship might be potentially explained by students from integrated schools reporting a higher quantity and quality of intergroup contact.²⁴⁰ Stringer et al. (2009) echo this finding, suggesting that the *frequency* of contact is significant:

²³⁹ There is further international research with foundations in contact theory that supports the view that minority group students in integrated schools have less prejudiced views of the majority outgroup (for example, in a Dutch context see Verkuyten and Thijs 2010). Moreover, recent England-based research, such as Hewstone et al. (2018) and findings from the *Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity* (Arweck 2017c: 122) and the REDCo project (Jackson and McKenna 2017: 6) supports the findings from the Northern Irish literature,

²⁴⁰ Although they clarify that, overall, intergroup contact resulted in positive attitudes towards the 'outgroup', irrespective of the school 'type'. It is not the type of school that is important in promoting positive attitudes, but the "mix of the student body" (2013: 777).

The results suggest that it is the number of contacts/friends rather than the quality of a specific friendship that leads to attitude moderation. This makes intuitive sense in that one friend from the other group can be viewed as 'special' therefore not requiring any shift in attitudes towards the group as a whole. (2009: 251)

This evidence aligns with the view, stated in the previous sub-section, that cross-group friendships are the ideal relationship for fostering effective intergroup contact. Indeed, Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) meta-analysis of contact studies found that when contact involved cross-group or out-group friendships, its negative relationship with prejudiced attitudes was more significant (Brown and Hewstone 2005: 259). Studies outside of a school context support this finding (Davies et al., 2011, Hewstone et al. 2006, Turner, Hewstone and Voci, 2007). Pettigrew (2008) argued that the positive effects of friendship are so strong that it should be included as a fifth optimal condition for contact alongside Allport's (1954) original four. For Pettigrew et al. (2011), this is because friendship invokes the other four conditions of equal status, cooperation, common goals and institutional support (a statement critiqued in Section 9.4.1):

Friendship invokes many of the optimal conditions for positive contact effects: it typically involved cooperation and common goals as well as repeated equal-status contact over an extended period and across varied settings. (2011: 275-6)

Friendship as an ideal form of contact was similarly alluded to in Chapter 3's review of literature on interfaith programmes. Established in Northern Ireland in 2007, 'Shared Education' creates partnerships between segregated and integrated schools so that students can take part in joint curriculum-based classes as often as once per week, sometimes for over a year (Loader 2016). Research has been undertaken into the impact of Shared Education through the lens of contact theory, resulting in general support that the programme "improve[s] intergroup attitudes mainly by increasing the number of outgroup

friends and reducing intergroup anxiety” (Hughes et al. 2012: 535). Both quantitative (Hughes et al. 2012) and qualitative (McClure Watters 2014) research supports this view,²⁴¹ suggesting that in some cases friendships formed during Shared Education extended outside of school through social media (Duffy and Gallagher 2015). Others assert that the positive outcomes are a result of the long-term, frequent contact inherent to the programme (Flint 2008). In Hughes and Loader’s (2015: 12) words, “the nature of the intervention facilitates *sustained contact* that allows participants to develop the type of friendship relationship associated with reduced anxiety, prejudice reduction, trust-building and perspective-taking”.

Shared Education’s longitudinal nature is unusual; other initiatives have “limited impact primarily because of their short-term one-off nature” (Blaylock and Hughes 2013: 478). In the Northern Irish context outside of Shared Education, it is estimated that 60% of schools take part in cross-community initiatives (O’Connor et al. 2002), however the contact experienced is often ‘one-off’ or sporadic (O’Connor et al. 2003). School ‘twinning’ or linking programmes in England²⁴² are also criticised for this reason, despite their origins in the community cohesion agenda as a direct response to Cattle’s call for greater dialogue through contact (Home Office 2001). Bruegel’s (2006) examination of two twinned primary schools in the North of England (part of a larger study of patterns of friendships in schools) concluded that “day-to-day contact between children has far more chance of breaking down barriers between communities, than school twinning” (2006: 2). This echoes the Runnymede Trust’s (2008: 5) warning that “[w]hile efforts at twinning between schools are welcome, they are unlikely to lead to the kind of meaningful contact over a longer period that is required to break down barriers”. Indeed, the criticism has also been levelled at The Linking Network (TLN). In Loader’s (2016) words, Kerr et al.’s (2011) TLN evaluation finding that some schools met just twice in one academic year, “may

²⁴¹ Most, but not all, evidence is in support of this finding. Loader and Hughes (2017b) critique the nature of the friendships developed during Shared Education. Their arguments will be revisited in Section 9.4.1 of this chapter.

²⁴² Introduced in Section 3.3.1.

give cause for scepticism about the scheme's potential to foster durable relationships and change attitudes".

Nevertheless, F&BF's School Linking programme retains its theoretical underpinnings in contact theory. In 2017, members of TLN, including former F&BF staff members, wrote in support of TLN's contribution to "an integral part of a wider strategic plan to strengthen community cohesion" (British Academy 2017: 43). They alluded to contact as the theory underpinning the programme (however without providing detail):

Much work has confirmed the importance of contact in reducing prejudice. Research states that if key factors are in place then, the process moves 'Us vs. Them' to a more inclusive 'We.' The Linking journey is designed so that, through a linking year, pupils (and staff) move from being two separate classes, from two schools, to being a linking pair. (British Academy 2017: 45)

In contrast to the large body of research that applies contact theory to educational initiatives in Northern Ireland, few studies other than those mentioned above have evaluated the effectiveness of the work of TLN and F&BF's School Linking in England through the theoretical lens of contact.

Raw's (2006) mixed methods evaluation of TLN (then called the 'Schools Linking Network') measured the impact of contact on students' "responses to direct experience" and their "deeper, transferable attitude change" (2006: 4) through a series of indicators under the umbrella terms of "openness to mixing", "increased teamwork" and "increased awareness of/embracing of differences and diversity" (2006: 8). One of the most dramatic impacts, according to Raw, was students' "readiness to broaden contacts/consolidate friendships beyond their own cultural community" (2006: 51), once again validating the view that friendship is an optimal form of contact and echoing the research findings supporting

integrated and Shared Education in Northern Ireland. Raw stated that, on average, each student made 2.6 new cross-cultural friendships²⁴³, defined as:

...a healthy interpersonal connection with a named child in the link class, established through the linking project and sustained by choice. Such friendships are characterised by a mixture of such sentiments as curiosity, excitement, happiness, respect, loyalty, kindness and care, displayed in the way in which children describe their friends and their shared experiences. (2009: 9)

This definition contrasts with the view of Stringer et al. (2009) described above, who argue that it is the quantity rather than the quality of friendship that is a marker of effective contact. Again, the nature and role of friendship will be critically re-examined in light of my research findings in section 9.4.1.

Shannahan's more recent (2018) evaluation of TLN also drew upon quotes by students who reported making friends through the programme, however this was not measured as an explicit indicator of successful contact. Rather, Shannahan focused on how different forms of contact are present during the linking process, included 'imagined contact' through the preparatory work that takes place before the linking exchange, 'vicarious contact' that is implied by a piloted 'parents linking' programme and 'digital linking' consisting of an online space in which linking teachers and facilitators can share learning through videos and other resources (2018: 12-13)²⁴⁴. Shannahan also outlined Allport's (1954) conditions for optimal contact, arguing that it is of "paramount importance that local linking facilitators ensure, as far as they are able, that the Senior Leadership Teams and teachers in both schools commit to the four key contact conditions [...] and build them into the planning and practice of the linking relationship"

²⁴³ At the start of the programme, 11% of students reported having between one and two cross-cultural friendships and 4% reported having between two and three. No student reported having more than three cross-cultural friendships. At the end of the programme, 38% of students reporting having two or three cross-cultural friendships, 16% four or five and 10% more than five (Raw 2006: 54-55).

²⁴⁴ None of which, with the possible exception of imagined contact, were observed as present in my research.

(2018: 13). This echoes TLN's own reflections of contact theory in *School Linking* (British Academy 2017), in which they give examples of how the four conditions can be met.

None of the literature above, however, has applied research findings directly to Allport's (1954) four conditions to provide a contextualised vision of optimal contact during the respective encounter. The next section of this chapter does this in the context of School Linking by mapping the findings from Chapters 5-8 onto the framework of Allport's conditions.

The purpose of this section has been to provide an overview of the theoretical framework of intergroup contact and position the theory within literature on community cohesion, faith schooling and interfaith initiatives previously described in Chapter 3. In Section 9.4, I reassess two specific aspects of the theory outlined above. First, I explore the role of knowledge as a mediator for contact in a school environment and second, I critique the implications of applying contact theory's 'secondary transfer effect' (i.e. the process by which positive attitudes are generalised) to School Linking.

This section also explored literature discussed in Chapter 3, which provided overwhelming support for the view that cross-group friendship is the form in which contact is most effective, warranting further investigation in Section 9.4.2, in which I explore the nature of 'friendship' within School Linking. What is more, much of the research in this sub-section has reviewed the impact of intergroup contact in terms of its "quantity and quality" (Al Ramiah and Hewstone 2013: 527-528), rather than considering the ways in which Allport's (1954) four optimal contact conditions are framed. In the following section I thus reflect on the findings of my research in relation to the optimal conditions, thereby mapping an original, contextualised, 'recipe for success' for School Linking.

9.3: Contextualising the conditions: A recommended framework for optimal contact in School Linking

In this section, I reflect on my research findings in Chapters 5 to 8, mapping them onto the conditions of equal status, common goals, cooperation and institutional support, in order to provide a contextualised, evidence-based framework for optimal contact in School Linking. I then address the role of negative contact in School Linking and its origins in the student selection process.

9.3.1: Equal status in School Linking

Much of the research on equal status in contact theory refers to the dynamics between stated 'majority' and 'minority' groups. With regard to School Linking, my research findings in Chapter 7 explored various aspects of power dynamics, driven by a) F&BF's 'linking' rationale, b) the selection of students taking part in School Linking, c) relations between linked teachers (including with regard to gender), d) parallels between teacher and student power dynamics, e) the schools' hosting and visiting roles and f) schools' differing sizes and resources. As such, the status of 'majority' or 'minority' can be assigned by virtue of students' school, class teacher or academic profile (in the case of student selection, where I found an emphasis on selecting 'gifted' students).²⁴⁵ This section cannot address all interpretations of majority and minority group status in School Linking. Rather, I assess my findings in relation to two key theoretical arguments: perceived or experienced differences between students in minority and majority groups, and the application of minority and majority group membership to teacher roles.

First, social-psychological research has indicated that instances of contact can be perceived differently by majority and minority groups, with members of

²⁴⁵ Other variables considered in Chapter 5, for example age, ethnic diversity and socio-economic deprivation were not found to have statistically significant associations with teacher or students' reported perceptions and experiences of School Linking.

disadvantaged groups in particular anticipating discrimination or prejudice towards them from members of the more dominant group (Hewstone and Swart 2011, Shelton 2003, Tropp 2006) or experiencing weaker positive effects from cross-group friendships (Feddes, Noack and Rutland, 2009). Indeed, Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) meta-analysis of contact studies found that minority group members experience weaker changes in attitude as a result of contact than majority group members. The perceptions and experiences can be validated during the contact when aspects of inequality are experienced or perceived:

Intergroup contact can [...] operate to heighten a minority's sense of group relative deprivation. This sense that your ingroup is being unjustly deprived occurs when contact provides the opportunity for minorities to learn what the majority possesses that is denied them. (Pettigrew et al. 2011: 278)

I witnessed relative deprivation during participant observation of school visits, in which material advantage and disadvantage were most visible. Section 7.4 described the observed hostility from School D students during the visit to School C, which is larger and vastly more equipped than School D. During the school tour, a School C staff member asked a question to School D students that required them to directly compare their school libraries. The dominant status of School D students was further exacerbated by their designated roles as 'hosts'. If schools with very different financial resources are linked, preparatory work with both students and staff prior to school visits is therefore essential to pre-empt, and mitigate against, the risks associated with unequal status.

Researchers (Hallinan and Smith 1985, Stephan and Stephan 2001) have suggested that perceived threat by minority groups can be lessened by ensuring a "balanced [...] ratio of majority to minority group members so as to maximize opportunities for intergroup contact for both groups" (Al Ramiah and Hewstone 2013: 531). This highlights my argument Section 6.2 that tools used during School Linking, such as the 'buddying system' can be useful in managing equal group sizes. I found that the teachers' use of the buddying system is inconsistent, resulting in students joining the programme mid-way through. For some, such as

Teacher B, this is a result of a capacity or logistical issue regarding transport. Teachers and F&BF staff should therefore address such concerns at the CPD training prior to the first Link Day taking place.

Furthermore, equal status could be established prior to the contact taking place through careful consideration of school demographic variables when F&BF 'links' schools. Chapter 5 explored the rationale behind F&BF's linking decisions, revealing a tendency to identify 'difference' at the level of school faith ethos only (i.e. the other variables of which F&BF were aware, for example student age, were paired 'like for like' across the linked schools). Alongside the variable of school size or capacity identified in my primary data analysis, I found that some of the additional socio-economic variables I added to my secondary data analysis influenced students' reported experiences of School Linking. In particular, whether a Linking Class represented a school with above or below levels of academic performance significantly altered their reported experiences, and in some cases, classes with dramatically unequal levels of academic performance were linked together, resulting in negative findings.²⁴⁶ Greater consideration should therefore be given to these factors and the associated assumptions regarding prejudice, bias or threat that could enable or hinder equal status between the Link School students.

Education research on contact in schools also illustrates the significance of the role of the teacher in minority-majority group relations. Thijs and Verkuyten's (2012) study of ethnic minority group students with an ethnic majority group teacher²⁴⁷ examined whether "minority children's perception of the relationship with their majority teacher is related to their attitude toward the majority out-group" (2012: 260). A body of literature opposing the view that the teacher-student relationship is inherently unequal already exists (Pianta, Hamre and Stuhlman 2003, Thijs et al. 2011), and Thijs and Verkuyten (2012) found that "[m]inority students reporting a closer and warmer relationship with their majority teacher were less biased and more positive about the out-group" (2012: 266).

²⁴⁶ See Section 5.4 for a summary of findings.

²⁴⁷ Thijs and Verkuyten's (2012) Netherlands-based research measured the outgroup attitudes of 174 minority group (Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch) 9-13 year-old students who had a majority group (native Dutch) teacher.

Their finding has implications for the relationship between the Linking Teachers and the classes from their linked schools. My findings in Section 7.3 illustrated Teacher A's dominant role in the classroom, both in terms of representing a majority faith (a Church of England-ethos school linked with a Muslim-ethos school) and being the only male in the room. Greater focus on the quality of contact between a majority group *teacher* and minority group *students* (in this case Teacher A and students from School B) could address this problem. This finding is particularly relevant to faith schools on the programme, since Elashi, Mills and Grant's (2010) research into Muslim students' attitudes towards their teachers found a tendency for students to favour Muslim teachers over non-Muslim teachers.

Moreover, my findings in Section 7.3 suggest that relations between the linked teachers can be mirrored in their class's interactions. Where teachers represent a minority-majority relationship (for example, in terms of faith or gender), steps should be taken to ensure that elements of prejudice, discrimination or threat are not present. Linking Teachers modelling the friendships they developed during their CPD training to their students should be encouraged.

Lastly, the findings explored in this section concerned majority and minority relations framed in terms of school size and capacity, class size, academic performance and teacher status. My research did not uncover significant findings explicitly framed in terms of differences in faith school ethos. However, it is worth briefly touching upon its usefulness for further investigation. When it comes to social change and readdressing historical injustices, contact theory research (Al Ramaiah and Hewstone 2013, Mallett et al. 2008 and Saguy et al. 2009) suggests that contact between majority and minority groups can raise majority group members' "awareness of historical injustices and present-day inequalities [... and so] prevent intergroup contact from becoming a tool of status maintenance" (Al Ramiah and Hewstone 2013: 538). In the 2016-17 academic year, where faith schools were linked together, 15 links were made up of majority

and minority groups²⁴⁸ and eight links were made up of minority groups only²⁴⁹. Research (Dixon et al. 2010) suggests that these eight links have potential to explore social change through shared experience. In Pettigrew et al.'s (2011: 278) words:

Contact between minorities can help unite them so that they can mount a stronger protest with an improved chance for success.

However, the one instance in which this dynamic was noted in my participant observation highlighted a desire from a Linking Teacher to address the inequalities inherent in a minority-majority relationship:

[Teacher C told me] "To be honest I'm over Jewish and Muslim linking". He emphasised how the interfaith activities are generally successful because the two traditions have much in common, but he would personally prefer either a link with another world religion, or a Christian link. [He said] "Both Jewish and Muslim people are in minorities. We take Christianity for granted because we live in a Christian country".

The associated minority or majority status of the schools' faith-ethos, therefore, demand further consideration when F&BF 'links' schools in the future.

9.3.2: Common goals and cooperation in School Linking

These two conditions are interrelated so are considered together. Contact theory research states that first, contact is "goal-oriented" (Pettigrew 1998: 66), or based around common goals, and second, the goals are achieved through intergroup cooperation, defined as "an interdependent effort without intergroup competition"

²⁴⁸ Twelve Christian-ethos/ Jewish-ethos links, two Christian-ethos/Jewish-ethos links and one Christian-ethos/Sikh-ethos link.

²⁴⁹ Six Muslim-ethos/Jewish-ethos links, one Sikh-ethos/Jewish-ethos link and one Hindu-ethos/Jewish-ethos link.

(Pettigrew 1998: 67). Johnson, Johnson and Maruyama (1983) and Johnson and Johnson (1975, 1980) developed the notion that integration can be promoted in the classroom through teachers structuring “goal interdependence” in order to “influence the pattern of interaction between majority and minority students and the interpersonal attraction that develops between them” (Johnson, Johnson and Maruyama 1983: 7). In other words, teachers structure students’ individual goals so that the classroom activity is dependent upon them working together. This notion is based on Deutsch’s (1949, 1962) formalised theory of a network of individuals’ interrelated ‘tension systems’, through which he established three goal ‘structures’. The ‘cooperative structure’ envisions the positive interdependence of common goals and cooperation advocated in contact theory:

A cooperative social situation is one in which the goals of the separate individuals are so linked that there is a positive correlation among their goal attainments. Under purely cooperative conditions, an individual can attain his or her goal if and only if the other participants can attain their goals. Thus, a person seeks an outcome that is beneficial to all those with whom he or she is cooperatively linked. (Johnson, Johnson and Maruyama 1983: 7)

This section applies my research findings to two key themes: the ways in which classroom activities foster cooperation, and the importance of an absence of competition. First, Deutsch’s cooperative structure was advanced by Aronson (Aronson and Patnoe 1997, Aronson et al. 1978,) in their ‘jigsaw classroom’ technique, in which a classroom activity with a clear end goal is broken down into smaller, interdependent tasks which are assigned to individual students within a ‘jigsaw group’. The delegated tasks, completed correctly, contribute towards the end goal. The jigsaw technique has been found to facilitate the two optimal conditions of common goals and cooperation in a number of studies globally including Australia (Walker and Crogan 1997), Germany (Hubert and Eppler 1990) and Japan (Araragi 1983). The jigsaw technique could in theory

complement School Linking's activities, which, Section 5.2.1 showed, were reported to be the 'most favourite' part of the Link Days.

At the level of student cooperation, Section 6.2 described my participant observation of an activity neither prescribed in F&BF's CPD training nor found in their teacher activity packs. The activity, led by Teacher A, lacked the 'jigsaw classroom' element of positive correlation between individual students' goals. Rather, order collapsed within the student groups and as the cooperation weakened, the separate groups displayed deceitful behaviour by 'cheating' in the activity, for example, by stealing items from other groups' desks. The finding is developed in Chapter 7 to attribute the teacher's choice of activity, in part, to his attitude as an 'experienced'²⁵⁰ teacher in School Linking. Experienced teachers generally shared a desire to follow an unstructured approach to the programme, and for some this appeared to be driven by an overconfidence and subsequent lack of engagement in the CPD training. For other experienced teachers, their desire for an unstructured approach to School Linking was vocalised as a preference for more free time for the students. Whilst this aligns with students' reported enjoyment of free time in Chapter 5's secondary data analysis (see Section 5.2.1, the free time I observed in my participant observation was characterised by either a lack of contact between the student groups, or a competitive sports activity (to be discussed below), the latter illustrating experienced teachers' tendency not to set F&BF's 'safe space' rules during the Link Days.²⁵¹ It is necessary, then, for a balance to be struck between enabling teachers to utilise their own activities during the Link Days, and ensuring that the prescribed elements of the School Linking structure are reinforced during the experienced teachers' CPD training.

Cooperation at a teacher level was also explored in my primary data analysis. In Chapter 6 it became clear that an absence of shared goals or cooperation between teachers can be generated from, or exacerbated by, a lack of attendance at the CPD training. Since the training allows time for teachers to

²⁵⁰ See Glossary. The teacher in question had been part of School Linking for seven year when the participant observation was undertaken.

²⁵¹ This echoes a finding from Loader and Hughes' (2017b) Shared Education evaluation, in which they found that "The quality and quantity of contact was [...] more substantial where teachers were proactive in facilitating interaction, especially in the early stages" (2017b: 124)

plan the Link Days, in some cases, the administrative responsibility for the Link Days can be shouldered by one teacher (see, for example, Teacher C's comments about Teacher D's attitude to planning in Section 6.3). Then again, when teachers attend the CPD training, there is a responsibility on the part of F&BF to clearly communicate the goal(s) of School Linking in order for the teachers to agree upon their own strategy for their Link Days. Whilst Section 8.4 explored the notion of 'strategic ambiguity' (that F&BF communicates the aims of School Linking at an institutional level in a deliberate vague fashion to achieve general unity but allow schools to satisfy their agendas), it is necessary that the CPD training allows for teachers to agree on common goals for their students' development at an interpersonal level moving forward.

The second key theme of these two optimal conditions for contact is an absence of competition. Johnson, Johnson and Maruyama (1983: 7) outline Deutsch's 'competitive social structure' as one in which:

[T]he goals of the separate participants are so linked that there is a negative correlation among their goal attainments. An individual can attain his or her goal if and only if the other participants cannot attain their goals. Thus a person seeks an outcome that is personally beneficial but is detrimental to the others with whom he or she is competitively linked.

Wilder and Shapiro (1989) tested the competitive structure's impact on anxiety and found that even the *expectation* of a competitive encounter with the outgroup can generate anxiety to the extent that previous positive perceptions of individual outgroup members are weakened, replaced with a negative perception of the outgroup in general. Their finding stands even when outgroup members display positive behaviour; the impact of this behaviour is weakened by the ingroup members' anxiety.

I witnessed instances of competition in both of the links I observed. Chapter 7 described how the use of competitive sports in Schools A and B's Link Days either a) negatively affected self-esteem among School B students (the minority group, in which students reflected on their sporting ability following a

football activity between ingroup school teams) or inhibited contact between the groups (for example, school groups segregated for separate ingroup activities – football for School A students – during their break time). Schools C and D, however, positively managed a competitive encounter in their first Link Day. Section 7.3 describes how Teacher C facilitated a donut eating competition, in which school groups were asked to cheer for the outgroup member. The outcome of the competition was announced a draw and established a cooperative atmosphere between students.

It appears, then, that competition can be managed effectively. However, the contact theory research suggests that teachers should be hesitant to incorporate competition into Link Days or give the impression that competitive activities will be included. I observed F&BF warning against competition during the CPD days, and staff should be encouraged to explain the potential negative consequences in more detail to teachers in future training.

9.3.3: Institutional support in School Linking

Allport's (1954) final optimal condition is that contact should be "sanctioned by institutional supports", such as "local atmosphere [...] of the sort that leads to the perception of [...] common humanity between members of the two groups" (Allport 1954: 281). Pettigrew's (1998) development of the contact hypothesis validated the condition, finding that "[w]ith explicit social sanction, intergroup contact is more readily accepted and has more positive effects" (Pettigrew 1998: 67). Indeed, studies into religious institutions (Parker 1968), the military (Landis et al. 1984) and prisons (Hodson 2010) have stressed the role of institutional support in successful contact.

In education, Turner et al. (2008: 851) argue (in relation to extended contact), that "the classroom provides the perfect opportunity to bring together members of two different ethnic groups under optimal conditions of cooperation and institutional support". In the classroom, teachers are perceived as

representing the institution, and as such have responsibilities to ensure they facilitate a supportive atmosphere.

In the context of School Linking, I investigate in Section 7.5 to what extent a supportive atmosphere is fostered through the implementation of 'safe space' principles. The chapter explores how the safe space can be perceived by students as teacher 'owned'. It also highlighted a discrepancy between the teachers' and students' perceptions of the purpose of safe space (students at times struggled to communicate in safe space for fear that they may offend, however teachers expressed a desire to move into 'brave space' (Arao and Clemens 2013) in which debate and the addressing of contentious issues is positively encouraged). Addressing both findings in the CPD training might enable a shared understanding of safe space to be established.

A further level of institutional support is required in School Linking: support for Linking Teachers by Senior Leadership and the wider school community. Shannahan (2018), F&BF and TLN staff members highlight the kind of support that Senior Leadership can provide:

There needs to be positive institutional support from school leadership in practical ways such as space being made available to welcome visiting pupils – in practice this may mean the Linking Classes get the school hall for the day. Equally this support means teachers being given time to plan well. (British Academy 2017: 45)

My findings support this notion. Section 6.4 described how practical support from Senior Leadership can ease Linking Teachers' many administrative burdens associated with School Linking. Moreover, previous research into similar programmes (Shared Education in Northern Ireland) has identified that institutional support is more likely if the programme offers "education outcomes prized by schools" (Blaylock and Hughes 2013: 484). Section 6.4 outlined the many and varied motivations for schools to take part in School Linking and I recognise a strategic ambiguity of goals in Section 8.4. F&BF would do well to

continue communicating the benefits of School Linking in satisfying different agendas to encourage support from senior leadership.

Moreover, contact theory research illustrates that visible institutional support (in this context from Senior Leadership and the wider school community) can have the additional effect of creating “a new social climate in which more tolerant norms can emerge” (Liebkind and McAlister 1998: 766). Research has illustrated that creating norms opposing discrimination, for example, can reduce ingroup bias (Jetten, Spears and Manstead, 1996). Section 6.4 described how such norms can be cultivated through the sharing and normalisation of School Linking within and beyond the school, for example through noticeboard displays and school newsletter articles. School A’s additional assembly in which the Headteacher endorsed the programme and students spoke of their experiences proved significant in normalising the programme.

Lastly, findings in Chapters 5, 7 and 8 relate to the role of parents in School Linking. Whilst Chapter 8 explored how parents are found in School Linking and wider literature to inform students’ attitudes to outgroups, Chapter 5 and 7 highlighted the practical issues around lack of parental involvement or support for the programme. Furthermore, I experienced a lack of involvement from parents in my research (see Section 5.2.2). The ways in which parents constitute or shape ‘institutional support’ in contact situations in schools deserves further consideration in future research.

9.3.4: Negative contact and selection bias

Section 9.2 outlined a criticism levelled at contact theory, that instances of ‘negative’ contact can result in increased prejudice towards the outgroup. In my research, I witnessed very few instances of negative contact. Indeed, an ongoing theme throughout Chapters 6-8 is the recognition that the *absence* of ‘positive’ contact does not strictly necessitate a negative finding.²⁵² Nevertheless, the very

²⁵² For example, Section 7.4 outlined a finding that students were hesitant to physically mix during School Linking, which literature on interfaith programmes and community cohesion argues is an indicator of social division. However, when combined with the chapter’s findings on power

few instances of explicit negativity identified in my findings align with the agreement within contact theory literature (for example Pettigrew and Tropp 2011), summarised by Pettigrew et al. (2011: 277), that “the effects of negative intergroup contact are moderated by whether the participant has entered the contact freely”.

Section 7.2 provided the example of a student opting out of School Linking after his first Link Day. His parents had signed him up to the programme without his awareness so his participation was involuntary.²⁵³ Section 9.2 outlines the potential negative impact of this case on the perceptions of the student in question, however it is not clear how F&BF can avoid future instances without resulting in ‘selection bias’, the phenomenon that participants are pre-disposed to unprejudiced attitudes: “[p]rejudiced people avoid contact with the objects of their prejudice, and the unprejudiced may seek such contact” (Pettigrew 2008: 188).

Selection bias is to an extent already evident in School Linking, depending on the method of student selection taking place. Some of the teachers’ methods for selecting students favoured students with less prejudiced attitudes by virtue of the students themselves having to ‘opt in’ through written applications, which in turn raises the issue of School Linking participation being driven by cultural and neoliberal norms of prioritising ‘gifted’ students (see Section 7.2).²⁵⁴ However, in cases where groups of students automatically take part in School Linking unless their parent ‘opts out’, selection bias may still exist in another form, such as gender segregation. What is more, in Chapter 3 Burtonwood (2006) identified what he termed ‘moderate’ faith schools, in which school culture and

dynamics, students’ hesitancy to mix can be explained by a) feeling uncomfortable or unsure of their actions in what they perceive to be a teacher ‘owned’ space or b) their need for personal space to reflect – an element of School Linking prescribed by F&BF and identified as significant in other interfaith literature (Ipgrave 2003a). Neither of these potential explanations are indicative of negativity towards the outgroup.

²⁵³ And, as Section 7.3 illustrated, parental consent is intimately tied with power dynamics.

²⁵⁴ In these cases, the impact of School Linking can be questioned in terms of causality. A large body of research has been undertaken to discern the extent to which selection bias affects causality between contact and prejudice: “Did the contact cause the reduced prejudice, did the more tolerant seek the contact, or both?” (Pettigrew et al. 2011: 272). There is ongoing disagreement about whether the causal link from contact to prejudice is stronger (Butler and Wilson 1978, Irish 1952, Pettigrew 1997, Pettigrew and Tropp 2006, Wilson 1996) or whether the causal paths between contact and prejudice are of equal strength (Binder et al. 2009, Sidanius et al. 2008).

ethos is predisposed to develop less prejudiced attitudes among its students. I argue that by virtue of opting in to School Linking, the schools on the programme are of the 'moderate' type: a selection bias in itself. Taken together, the question is raised of how F&BF can navigate the political educational arena to ensure that it reaches participants who are most in need.

Research into Shared Education in Northern Ireland identifies selection bias as an ongoing issue. Blaylock and Hughes (2013) recognise that "not all schools and not all children will enter the programme with the same set of beliefs, attitudes, and experiences [...] some individuals and groups are more open to contact than others" (2013: 483). Researchers have suggested embedding similar programmes into the National Curriculum (Shannahan 2018), however the warnings associated with involuntary participation described in Section 9.2 must be considered when "forcibly" (Bruegel 2006: 6) putting children into contact situations.

In sum, this section has reflected on my research findings in Chapters 5-8 in order to maximise School Linking's potential to foster 'peaceful relations' as theorised through Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis. This section also sought to clarify the extent to which negative contact was found in my research, thereby identifying the ongoing issue of student selection as integral to potential negative experiences of contact during the programme. The overview of contact theory described in Section 9.2, however, emphasised that the conditions were found to facilitate, but not be essential for, reducing prejudice (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). Rather, contact theory has developed in recent years to encompass additional aspects, including mediating factors, the importance of friendship, and the ability to generalise contact effects. I thus turn to the final section of this chapter, in which insights from my research findings are used to reassess these three aspects of contact theory.

9.4: Contact theory: A reassessment

The development of a contextualised framework of ‘peaceful relations’ grounded in contact theory needs to recognise the critiques of this theoretical approach if it is to support School Linking in an effective manner. Whilst the previous section explored how contact theory can work alongside my findings to form a ‘recipe for success’ for contact, this section asserts the value of my findings in the reassessment of three theoretical principles: the role of friendship as an ideal outcome of contact, the role of knowledge as a mediating factor of contact, and the assumption that positive contact effects developed between the students in School Linking can be generalised to other members of the outgroup.

9.4.1: Friendships or acquaintances? The ‘ideal’ form of peaceful relations in School Linking

Based upon the assumption that friendship comprises Allport’s (1954) four optimal conditions, the contact theory research summarised in Section 9.2 generally argued that cross-group friendships exemplify the ideal form of contact. Indeed, the studies that advocated integrated schooling in Northern Ireland and Shared Education, as well as Raw’s (2006) evaluation of TLN’s linking programme, identified the formation of friendships as an indicator of successful contact.

The research tended to focus on the quantity of cross-group friends made and/or the quality of the relationship. The latter is often measured in quantitative studies through indicators such as ‘closeness’ or ‘cooperativeness’ (such as Brown et al.’s 2007 longitudinal study of contact in a British secondary school) or in qualitative studies as a concept defined along similar terms, such as Raw’s (2006) definition of friendship as “characterised by a mixture of such sentiments as curiosity, excitement, happiness, respect, loyalty, kindness and care” (2006: 9). Operationalising and instrumentalising ‘friendship’ at the start of a study, however, can exclude critical exploration into the lived nature of friendships, or

possible alternative and changing forms that friendship can take, during the research.

Chapters 5 and 8 explored the concept of friendship in School Linking. My secondary data analysis in Chapter 5 found that primary school students in particular reported 'making friends' as a key aim of School Linking and, after the programme had taken place, were more likely to state that friendships had been made than secondary school students (see Section 5.2.1). This is despite friendship not being explicitly mentioned in F&BF's evaluation material. My focus groups indicated that teachers desire that their students will make friends, which may contribute to why students use language around friendship (see Section 8.4). The participant observation data, however, was collected from secondary school students and the analysis indicated that the type of friendships built between students during the Link Days were not necessarily sustainable or intimate enough to warrant the term 'friendship' as conceptualised in other research.

A small amount of research into Shared Education in Northern Ireland reflects my own findings and challenges the general support for the claim that the programme established cross-group friendships through the contact encounter. Loader and Hughes (2017b), for example, identified a strikingly similar pattern to my own research between students' perceptions of friendship and researcher observation:

While pupils commonly identified 'meeting new people' or 'making new friends' as benefits of shared education, it was apparent that most had not formed the type of relationship that might constitute 'friendship' [...] In comparison, by far the most common relationship was what might be termed 'acquaintanceship' [...] while some pupils participated in social conversations within their classes and attended occasional activities at one another's schools, other pupils' interactions had focused primarily on schoolwork and their acquaintanceship was at a relatively early stage. In all cases, however, the relationships were casual and were confined to the classroom. (2017b: 123)

Loader and Hughes studied the effects of extended contact, in which there is a higher frequency of contact encounters, and therefore greater opportunity to develop cross-group friendship. Given the limited opportunity for contact in School Linking (which itself raises the question of whether the contact would be more effective were School Linking to last more than one academic year), the term 'acquaintance' even more appropriately describes the relationships that I observed.

Nevertheless, despite research indicating that friendships are "more strongly associated with positive intergroup attitudes than [...] general acquaintances" (Davies et al. 2011: 333, Pettigrew 1997), there is evidence to suggest that building acquaintances, even if short-lived, remains to an extent an effective means of reducing prejudice. Thijs and Verkuyten (2012) argue that this is because there are still situations in which a relationship with an acquaintance meets the optimal conditions of common goals, cooperation and equal status. What is more, studies use the terms 'acquaintance' and 'friend' interchangeably (Pettigrew and Tropp 2011, Schaeffer 2013). Others suggest that 'acquaintance potential' is a basic condition for friendship (Feddes, Noack and Rutland 2009) and Davies et al. (2011) make the important point that a comparison of international research on contact and friendship (for example in meta-analyses) may be skewed by different cultural understandings of the term 'friend':

[W]ithin the United States, the word friend is often used to identify a wide range of relationships, including anything from casual acquaintances to extremely intimate relationships [...] Perhaps people in Europe generally reserve the term for more intimate relationships, yet comparative studies across national contexts would be needed to examine this issue more directly. (2011: 343)

The extent to which positive outgroup attitudes are being attributed to the development of a 'friendship' or an 'acquaintance' is thus unclear in much of the contact theory literature, and so the potential contact effects of forming acquaintances should not be understated. Moving forward, F&BF may want to

consider exploring School Linking's outcomes in terms of acquaintances in order to validate their impact within a framework of peaceful relations characterised by contact theory, and at the same time contribute to a small but significant area of work.

9.4.2: To what extent can knowledge mediate peaceful relations?

Section 9.2 outlined that, since being advocated by Allport (1954), recent research has found that knowledge "is of minor importance" (Pettigrew 2008: 189) as a mediator of contact.²⁵⁵ This section applies my findings in Chapter 8 to assertions about the role of knowledge in Pettigrew and Tropp's (2008) quantitative meta-analysis of contact mediators. In so doing, my theoretical insights contribute to the stated need for a "tighter focus on what kinds of knowledge [...] have an impact on views of the out-group" (Brown and Hewstone 2005: 284).

Pettigrew and Tropp's (2008) meta-analysis included eleven studies that tested knowledge of the outgroup as a mediating variable for contact, covering 17 samples and a total of 2,534 participants. Knowledge was found to mediate the effects of contact, but the results were significantly weaker than those for the alternative mediating variables of intergroup anxiety and empathy. In Pettigrew and Tropp's (2008: 927) words: "simply knowing more about the outgroup typically does not have a major effect on reducing prejudice". Additionally, participants' levels of knowledge were found to negatively correlate with their anxiety levels, but had no relationship with levels of empathy (2008: 927).

Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) restated the idea of early social psychologists that there is a causal path from contact, to facilitated learning and prejudice reduction. Reflecting on original intergroup contact encounters, specifically, the Human Relations Movement's annual 'Brotherhood Dinners' (Pettigrew 2004), Pettigrew and Tropp stated that the "explicit idea was that this kind of interaction

²⁵⁵ For an outlier study that argues for 'learning about the outgroup' as a significant mediator of contact, see Eller and Abrams (2004).

would allow the different groups to learn about each other and see how similar they really were” (2008: 923). Sections 8.2 and 8.3 described how Linking Teachers shared in their focus groups that they had an almost identical tendency to structure their Link Day activities around learning about similarity in the form of question and answer sessions. What is more, Pettigrew and Tropp (2008: 923) stated that the focus on similarity in early contact interactions was “virtually denying actual group differences”. My research clearly supports this claim. First, although Chapter 8 cited literature which evidenced similarity as a basis for positive relations, the fact teachers were side-lining the concept of difference in favour of identifying similarities between students unintentionally aligned the teachers with rhetoric in academic and policy literature that homogenises the concept of difference. This also undermines recent contact theory research which is developing an “awareness of group differences” (Brown and Hewstone 2005, Wolsko et al. 2000).

Al Ramiah and Hewstone (2013: 533), in their discussion of Pettigrew and Tropp’s meta-analysis, echoed the sentiments above in that learning “general knowledge” can “mask deeper group differences, in terms of values and historical experiences”. In Section 8.3, my observations of knowledge-based activities (such as question and answer sessions) uncovered levels of religious illiteracy among students and teachers (something that was already suggested in my secondary data analysis of Chapter 5) with origins in oversimplified, general factual knowledge associated with curriculum teaching and examination. Such knowledge reifies religious groups and disregards the complexity of religious and cultural plurality.

My findings thus provide theoretical insights that significantly correspond to research critiquing knowledge as a mediating factor of the contact effect: Linking Teachers are structuring their Link Days activities in a manner which reflects earlier, ineffective frameworks of contact. Moving forward, a framework of peaceful relations for School Linking that is characterised by contact theory can mitigate the risks associated with a knowledge-based approach by shifting its focus to the factors found to positively mediate contact effects: reducing intergroup anxiety and increasing empathy (Pettigrew and Tropp 2008). This

could be a focus of Link Day activities as well as a measure in the evaluation documents. The latter will also ensure that the impact on peaceful relations can be communicated in such a way that its groundings in contact theory are clear.

9.4.3: Group salience as a barrier to peaceful relations in School Linking

A key feature of the contact theory model discussed in this chapter ('intergroup contact theory') is the claim that the reduction of prejudice towards an outgroup member can be generalised to the outgroup as a whole. Known as the 'secondary transfer effect', this form of generalisation occurs in instances when "contact with a primary outgroup reduces prejudice toward secondary groups that are not directly involved in the contact" (Tausch et al. 2010: 282). In other words, there is evidence to suggest that a more positive attitude can be generalised to new outgroup members who were not part of the original contact (Pettigrew 1997, 2009). Other studies have shown that the effect can transfer across contact settings. For example, a reduction in prejudiced attitudes in a work context can transfer to a more positive attitude towards the outgroup in the wider neighbourhood (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). Tausch et al (2010) developed the idea further, firstly arguing that the secondary transfer effect can occur over a long period of time, and secondly evidencing that it takes place when controlling for the inevitability that participants may respond in such a way that they deem to be socially desirable. In this section, however, I question the usefulness of a model of contact with inherent assumptions of generalisability for School Linking, which my research has shown, can be instrumental in exploring notions of religious and cultural plurality.

The intergroup contact model's generalisation principle makes it appealing for researchers who wish to demonstrate the impact of a contact intervention in the broadest possible terms, and this model was commonly drawn upon in the research outlined in Section 9.2.1, which addressed issues around community cohesion, faith schooling and interfaith initiatives through the lens of contact theory. Stringer et al.'s (2009) research into integrated schooling in Northern

Ireland, however, addressed the requirement for ‘group salience’ to be present within the contact encounter in order for students’ attitudes to generalise beyond individual members of the outgroup to the outgroup as a whole.²⁵⁶ Group salience is generally structured within a contact encounter so that contact takes place between individuals who are most representative of the outgroup (Al Ramiah and Hewstone 2013: 529). In other words, “contact with members of an outgroup can improve intergroup attitudes, but especially if those people can be seen as representative of their group” (Brown et al. 2007: 692).²⁵⁷

The necessity of group salience for attitude generalisation poses a problem for contact research in schools since, as sections 9.2.1 and 9.4.1 showed, contact is often measured through friendships. Stringer et al. (2009: 251) argue that friendship quality is usually measured by the “interpersonal aspects of relationships, which may increase liking for the individual but fail to generalize to other group members”. In my research, however, in which friendships were not found to be an indicator of contact effect, the requirement for group salience is problematic for three reasons. First, encouraging the notion of ‘typicality’ within the outgroup risks exacerbating the negative finding in Chapter 8 that Linking Teachers fail to recognise religious plurality within the classroom; by expressing religious and non-religious worldviews as homogenous communities, teachers were found to reinforce rhetoric around community cohesion and faith schooling which problematises the concept of ‘difference’ (see Section 8.2). Second, I found that community school teachers were most predisposed to express such language. This is a concern, since Stringer et al. (2009) found that, in Northern Ireland, religiously-integrated schools tended “to play down group membership”, more than faith schools. Lastly, emphasising typicality within group membership risks exacerbating religious illiteracy in School Linking (see Section 8.3), where

²⁵⁶ ‘Group salience’ is operationalised as, “[group membership] awareness, perceived group differences, perceived typicality of out-group members or any combinations of these” (Graf and Paolini 2017: 101). Research indicates that the most reliable indicators of group salience in intergroup contact are awareness of one’s own membership (Paolini, Harwood and Rubin 2010) and the perceived typicality of the outgroup member (Brown et al. 2001, Brown, Vivian and Hewstone 1999, Voci and Hewstone 2003, Wilder 1984).

²⁵⁷ The notion of typicality stems from intergroup contact theory’s relationship with social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 2004), the basic premise of which states that the mere practice of categorising individuals into groups leads individuals to inherently prefer their ingroup.

teachers were found to encourage the learning of stereotypical information around religious and non-religious worldviews. This final point has been recognised by other researchers, particularly when combined with instances of negative contact (Islam and Hewstone 1993, Paolini, Harwood and Rubin 2010).

I argue that there is an alternative model of contact theory that does not encounter these issues. Brewer and Miller's (1984, 1988, Miller 2002) 'deategorization model' diverges from the intergroup contact model in that contact encounters are to be "structured so as to reduce the salience of available social categories and increase the likelihood of a more 'interpersonal' mode of thinking and behaving" (Brown and Hewstone 2005: 262). The underlying process of the model is twofold: the breaking down of perceptions of homogeneity within groups and the exchanging of personalised information. The goal of the model is to dissect the social categorisation of individuals inherent to social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 2004). The individual and interpersonal nature of the 'deategorization model' does not preclude generalisation, however. In Brewer and Miller's own words, a personalised approach to contact is:

...more likely to generalize to new situations because extended and frequent utilization of alternative information featured in interactions undermines the availability and usefulness of category identity as a basis for future interactions with the same or different individuals (Brewer and Miller 1984: 288–289).²⁵⁸

Alongside the model's avoidance of the problems associated with group salience, I see four additional benefits of 'deategorization' as a foundation for contact in School Linking. First, the approach is more accessible for community school teachers, who, my research found, were predisposed to view religious and non-religious beliefs as overtly homogenous when using language of in- and outgroups. Second, the model offers opportunities for School Linking to explore intra-faith encounters in which two faith schools of the same religion (but

²⁵⁸ The model recognises, however, that complete 'deategorization' will result in the abolishment of any and all group identities. This was addressed in early versions of the model (Brewer 1988).

potentially different denominations) are linked to explore religious and cultural plurality *within* faiths.²⁵⁹ Third, the model encourages students and teachers to learn more about their own faiths and beliefs²⁶⁰, and those of students in their own class (Chapters 5 and 8 recognised that, despite the students taking part in School Linking potentially representing various faiths, there is a tendency during the Link Days to present the Linking classes as in- and outgroups in and of themselves).²⁶¹ Lastly, this model of contact positions School Linking at the forefront of current literature around religion and education. Chapter 2 opened with the RE Commission's (2017) recommendation that Religious Education (RE) in England and Wales be renamed 'Religion and Worldviews'. The chapter was sceptical of how, in practice, RE can expand to cover the teaching of 'personalised worldviews' (of which there is no shared understanding). The conceptualisation of School Linking as a process underpinned by the 'deategorization model' of contact, however, may be best placed to meet the complexities of this discursive shift.

Further research has been undertaken to attempt to synthesise multiple models of contact. In Brown and Hewstone's (2005) reassessment of their original (Hewstone and Brown 1986) intergroup contact model, for example, they cite recent findings regarding the power of friendship as a predictor of positive outgroup attitude as "entirely consistent with Brewer and Miller's contention that contact should be organized to maximize personalized interactions" (2005: 326). What is more, Pettigrew (1998) proposed a longitudinal framework of contact intervention that moves from the 'deategorization model' (in early stages of contact), to the intergroup contact model (where group saliency is explored), to the 'common in-group identity model' (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000, not explored in this chapter). Neither attempt at integrative models of contact

²⁵⁹ In Parker-Jenkins and Glenn's (2011: 8) words, "The "Other" in this case may be within as well as beyond a religious tradition". Alternatively Raw (2006: 63) argues that culturally-mixed schools should link "to celebrate the range of cultures each brings together as a school community". This could apply to a School Linking context by linking two community schools.

²⁶⁰ Self-reflection at a teacher level could generate a long-term impact from the programme, should it influence their teaching practices.

²⁶¹ Indeed, Like Stringer et al. (2009: 252), I too observed "group membership being [...] brought to the fore in out of school encounters", as school visits were characterised by the interplay between a number of minority and majority group memberships spanning personal faith, school faith ethos and gender (see Section 9.3.1).

appear appropriate as the theoretical underpinnings of 'peaceful relations' in School Linking, however, since Section 9.4.1 illustrated a lack of friendships built through the programme, and any longitudinal approach requires a form of extended contact which is not available to School Linking in its current form of three Link Days per year.

The decision as to whether School Linking adopts the 'decategorization model' of contact theory lies with F&BF. Whilst the benefits of the model are clearly outlined above, if the organisation's vision of 'peaceful relations' is one in which positive attitudes extend beyond the linking classroom to other outgroup members (for example, to maintain TLN's status as "an integral part of a wider strategic plan to strengthen community cohesion" (British Academy 2017: 43), then a certain amount of group salience must arguably be structured into the contact encounter. Nevertheless, every model of contact has implications and the issue deserves further attention.

9.5: Conclusion

This chapter has explored my third research question, 'how can School Linking influence academic understandings of peaceful relations?' Chapter 4 outlined how my research methodology allowed me to collect and analyse data in such a way that the concept of 'peaceful relations' could be reassessed through a number of different theoretical lenses. I chose contact theory as the theoretical lens in this thesis since it grounds the work of School Linking within literature reviewed around community cohesion in Chapter 3, and alongside other comparable programmes evaluated through contact.

Following an introduction to contact theory and review of literature which explored the theory in relation to community cohesion, interfaith programmes and faith schooling, the chapter served two purposes. I reflected upon my findings in Chapters 5 to 8 within the framework of Allport's (1954) four optimal conditions of equal status, common goals, cooperation and institutional support. This 'recipe for successful contact' for School Linking is the first of its kind, and has enabled

me to establish a set of recommendations for optimal contact in School Linking. Moreover, despite my data revealing very few instances of 'negative contact',²⁶² I identified issues around student selection (see Section 7.2) as a key driver, highlighting this finding as particularly significant should School Linking be explicitly underpinned by contact theory in the future.

What is more, I reassessed key principles of contact theory within the context of my case study. First, despite research explored in this chapter framing 'friendship' characterised by Allport's (1954) optimal conditions as the ideal outcome of contact, I argued that the role of 'acquaintances' should not be underestimated; School Linking could be a vehicle for insight into the relationship between acquaintance building and reduced prejudice through contact.

Second, Chapter 8's finding that School Linking develops a surface-level knowledge (which may contribute to religious illiteracy and drive negative perceptions of difference) provided a context-specific illustration of Pettigrew and Tropp's (2008) claim that knowledge is a weak mediator of contact effects. Thus, I argued for a shift towards the more effective mediating factors of reduced intergroup anxiety and increased empathy as the focus of School Linking moving forward.

Third, I questioned the effectiveness of the 'intergroup contact' model of contact theory (Hewstone and Brown 1986) as School Linking's theoretical underpinnings, since the model's reliance on in- and outgroup members being 'representative' of the group at large risk exacerbating Chapter 8's negative findings regarding religious illiteracy and the homogenisation of difference. I argued for the 'deategorization model' of contact (Brewer and Miller 1984, 1988) as School Linking's theoretical framework. This model would encourage School Linking's participants to recognise religious and cultural plurality, assist F&BF in recruiting more community schools, allow F&BF to engage in current discussions of worldviews in RE, and uncover a space for School Linking to explore intra-faith links with schools of the same faith ethos.

In sum, by mapping my findings onto Allport's (1954) framework for optimal contact and reassessing key principles of the intergroup contact model, I

²⁶² Where contact is found to increase prejudiced attitudes.

have provided a contextualised theory of 'peaceful relations' in School Linking characterised by contact, through which the Faith and Belief Forum (F&BF) can effectively develop and communicate the complexity underlying School Linking.

CHAPTER 10

Conclusions

10.1: Introduction

Chapter 1 asserted my research objective: to provide an original account of the relationships between ‘interfaith encounters’ and ‘peaceful relations’ in schools, through a case study of the Faith and Belief Forum’s (F&BF’s) School Linking programme. The purpose of this chapter is to summarise how this objective was met, and articulate the original value of my research at the academic, and practitioner level, as well as its usefulness in future research.

I first summarise my findings and briefly outline how they have contributed to themes in the literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 5’s quantitative findings provided contextual information about The Faith and Belief Forum’s (F&BF) existing evaluation material and stated relationships between participants’ perceptions and demographic variables. Conversely, Chapters 6 to 8’s qualitative findings generated a snapshot of the questions, dynamics and puzzles that characterise the complexity of the ways in which School Linking develops peaceful relations that cannot be otherwise easily described.²⁶³

My inductive process of uncovering findings was integral to the generation of a context-specific theory of ‘peaceful relations’ in Chapter 9. In this chapter’s second section I restate my research’s academic contribution: a reassessment of contact theory which inherently questions an entire framework of relationship building. By reassessing the theory in light of my own research, I have developed a context-affirming account of how contact theory can be articulated in a way that is responsive to the complexity of School Linking as a case study.

I reflect on my methodological position in the third section of this chapter. I revisit the unique evaluative aspect of my research and outlined how it enables

²⁶³ The generalisability of these findings in relation to my multiple data collection tools is discussed in Section 4.5.1.

me to make an original contribution beyond academia to assist F&BF in the future design and evaluation of School Linking.

The chapter closes with further exploration into a future research agenda. My methodological stance allowed me to collect and analyse data inductively, outside of any given theoretical framework, so I can retrospectively consider my findings through a number of alternative theoretical lens. Hypothetically, the opportunities are endless, however I demonstrate two points. First, my findings can make an original contribution to our understanding of the relationship between School Linking and a framework for peaceful relations characterised by citizenship education. Second, an exploration of the theoretical underpinnings of peace education can reveal additional case studies in the UK to which my findings can be compared, and provide opportunities for shared learning around evaluative methodologies.

10.2: Summary of findings

Chapter 5 addressed my first research question, ‘what impact can be captured by F&BF’s evaluation data?’ through the quantitative analysis of secondary data (1,488 student and teacher surveys completed during the 2016-17 School Linking academic year). I recognised key limitations driven by issues of survey formatting and circulation.²⁶⁴ Nevertheless, at a descriptive level, the findings were very positive. Almost three quarters of both primary and secondary school students felt positive about the prospect of School Linking, and the proportion increased after the programme had taken place. Significantly, students reported a drastic increase in the knowledge of the faith and beliefs of their Link School at the end of the programme. More than three quarters of students reported enjoying School Linking. Teachers reported an increased confidence in running interfaith activities and an increased understanding of the faith and beliefs of the Link Schools. When teacher and student reporting was compared,

²⁶⁴ See Section 5.3.

however, at times teachers misinterpreted their students' perceptions of the programme.

My analysis revealed the variables of student age, teacher 'experience' and school faith ethos as most significant, disputing, or contributing, to academic literature (see Section 5.4 for a summary). What is more, I researched additional school-level data which F&BF did not hold and identified levels of academic performance as a weaker, though potentially significant, variable to be considered when F&BF 'links' schools. Two key themes emerged from my analysis: low levels of religious literacy at student and teacher levels, and ambiguity around student interpretation of the concept of 'difference'. Ultimately, the secondary data alone, although useful in establishing relationships between demographic variables and reported perceptions, was unable to capture the complexities of the processes underlying how peaceful relations are formed through participants' experiences of School Linking.

Chapters 6 to 8 explored my second and third research questions, 'How does School Linking inform or inhibit 'peaceful relations' at interpersonal and institutional levels?' The chapters presented findings from my qualitative analysis of primary data that I collected through participant observation and teacher focus groups (framed around the results of an open-ended survey I conducted at the start of the School Linking year).

Chapter 6 presented findings relating to teacher approaches towards School Linking. At an interpersonal level, a lack of communication between, or disruptive behaviour among, Link School students appeared to be driven by experienced teachers' overconfidence in their unstructured approach to School Linking. Furthermore, students were seen to exhibit introverted behaviour due to logistical challenges (for example, the 'buddying' tool precluding some students from attending all Link Days). Interpersonal relations between teachers were found to be generally strong, although where communication was observed as breaking down, this resulted in student activities not being effectively managed. My findings around teacher challenges corroborated previous evaluations of The Linking Network explored in Chapter 3, however the negative outcomes associated with unstructured approaches to School Linking questioned the

positive portrayal of experienced teachers found in previous evaluations. By exploring the Linking Teachers' roles in their respective schools, I provided an additional evidence base for RE literature (discussed in Chapter 2) that asserted a need to train both specialist and non-specialist teachers in religious topics.

At an institutional level, Linking Teachers were found to appreciate support from school leadership, however some felt an additional responsibility for communicating their participation in School Linking with the wider school community. What is more, despite external pressures on schools (for example Ofsted and the community cohesion agenda) exacerbating challenges faced by Linking Teachers (for example, time management), participation in School Linking was found to offer an opportunity for the schools to meet these demands.

Chapter 7 explored my qualitative findings in relation to selection of students, interpretations of space, and power dynamics. First, I found that methods of selecting students for School Linking channelled different 'dimensions' of power (Haugaard 2012). Some had implications at an interpersonal level (for example tension between parental consent and student agency), and others at an institutional level (for example, selecting 'gifted' students through written applications to adhere to neoliberal educational ideals, segregating students by gender out of respect to faith schools' cultural practices, or adhering to legal frameworks with regard to equal opportunity or parental rights).

Second, I found that power dynamics between teachers could be mirrored in their students' interactions. Where teacher power dynamics were gendered, the teachers' interactions could perpetuate preconceived cultural norms about unequal gender roles in interfaith dialogue, relating my findings to a new body of literature not reviewed in Chapters 2 or 3.

Third, I identified that the spaces which teachers and students share in School Linking were relational. The 'hosting' and 'visiting' student roles were imbued with different levels of power; where the host school was greater in size or resources, the hosting students exhibited power *over* the visitors. I further identified that an observed hesitancy for students to mix within the physical spaces could be explained by factors relating to perceptions of power. A lack of

mixing was therefore not necessarily negative. Rather, it offered an alternative perspective to research reviewed in Chapter 3 which associated student mixing with positive interpersonal relations (Bruegel 2006, Gallagher, Smith and Montgomery 2003, Hughes et al. 2013, McGlynn et al. 2004, Schubotz and Robinson 2006).

Lastly, my findings relating to 'safe space' built upon a number of safe space models discussed in Chapter 2. In relation to School Linking, I found that teachers and students placed different value on the role of 'risk' in their safe space; this lack of shared understanding endangered the formation of peaceful relations at a between-student, or teacher-student level.

Chapter 8, my final findings chapter, was concerned with two themes identified in Chapter 5 – religious illiteracy and interpretations of 'difference' – as well as the aims of School Linking. First, I found that students' apparent negative interpretations of difference at interpersonal levels may be unintentionally exacerbated by teachers, who in their Link Day activities prioritised the identification and celebration of similarity over the recognition and appreciation of difference. While a focus on similarity in and of itself was not a negative finding, the lack of reference to difference unintentionally aligned itself with rhetoric in academic literature and policy documents on community or social cohesion (reviewed in Section 3.2.1) that homogenise difference and see it as a negative concept.

Second, I explored findings relating to religious illiteracy in schools. I identified that Link Day question and answer sessions reinforced a form of religious illiteracy among students that disregarded the complexity of religious plurality emphasised in literature relating to 'personal worldviews' in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.2.1), and aligned with literature that presented faith communities, and faith schooling as homogenous in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.3.2). At an institutional level, the four community school teachers in particular were found to exhibit religious illiteracy, undermining arguments in literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3 that community schools are ideal sites for peaceful relations by virtue of their diversity (see Section 3.3.2).

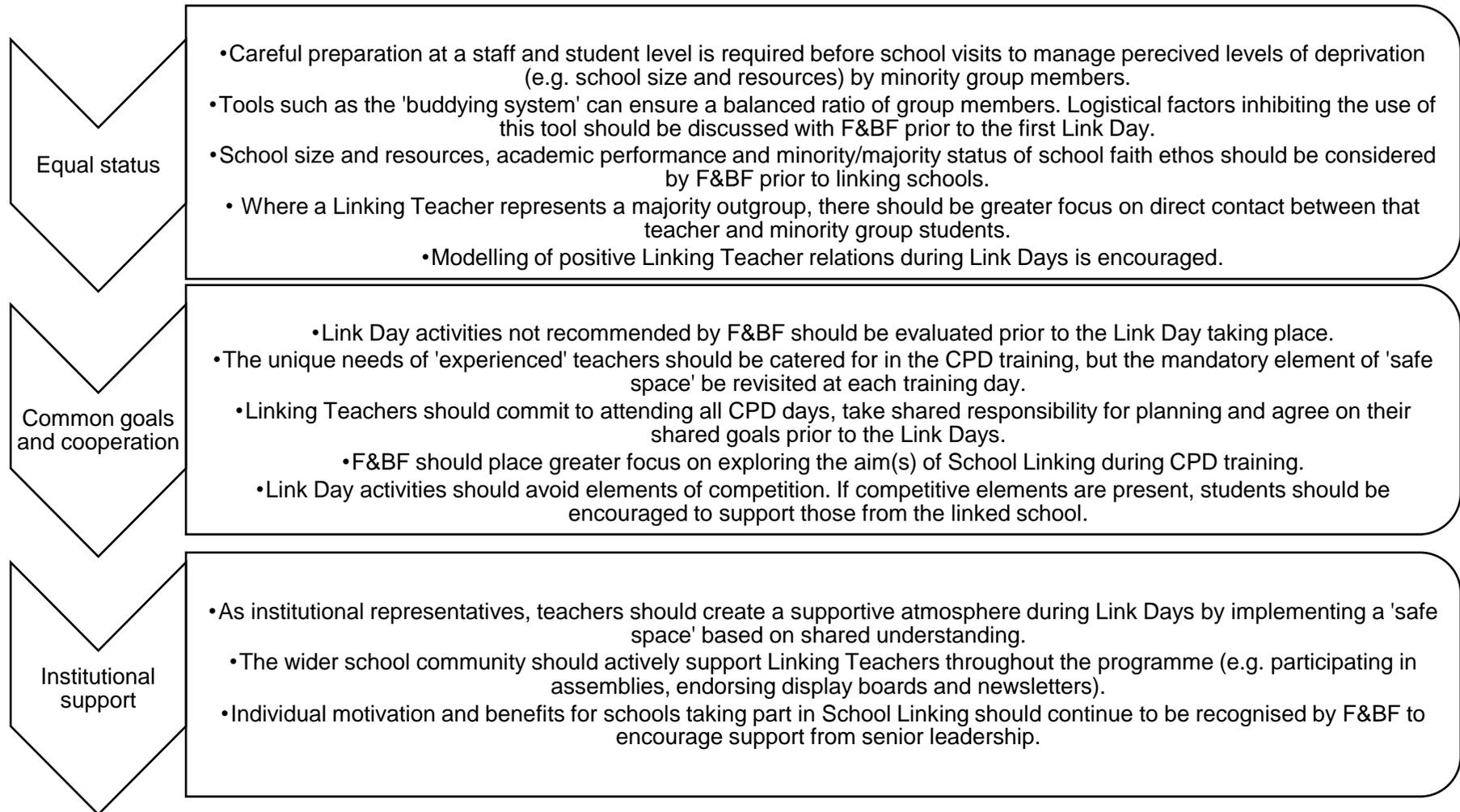
Lastly, I explored teachers' perceptions of the aims of School Linking. At an institutional level, the presence of a strategic ambiguity around programme goals was identified; this enabled teachers to largely agree on general goals, but interpret them in such a way that they satisfy school agendas identified in Chapter 6. At an interpersonal level, teachers were found to be at risk of undertaking Link Days without clear objectives, stemming from a lack of consensus around the role of School Linking in developing students' intercultural competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes). Moreover, disagreement about the development of knowledge as a practical aim of School Linking in particular, risked exacerbating the issues of religious illiteracy identified above.

10.3: Theoretical contribution

As described above and in Chapter 4, my methodological approach to data collection and analysis enabled me to reassess academic theory in light of my findings. By adopting a "double reflexive" (Knauth and Vieregge 2019) position in relation to knowledge generation, but a pragmatic outlook towards the context within which my case study operates (see Section 4.2), Chapter 9's theory reassessment reflected my specific researcher-participant relationship and generated a unique theoretical framework with practical relevance to F&BF.

By its nature, a reassessment of contact theory questions an entire approach towards relationship building. I took an original perspective by challenging literature reviewed in Chapter 3 which positions contact theory at an adult-level; in this case the contact is among young people, facilitated by adults. My contribution was twofold. First, I generated a ground-breaking 'recipe for successful contact' in School Linking that aligned with Allport's (1954) optimal conditions for contact. Figure 10.1 summarises this as a set of recommendations arising from the discussions in Chapter 9, which state the ways in which School Linking can satisfy the conditions, thereby maximising opportunities for prejudice reduction amongst its participants.

Figure 10.1: A contextualised framework for School Linking to meet Allport's (1954) optimal conditions of contact



Notably, I uncovered very few instances of ‘negative contact’.²⁶⁵ However, when an explicit instance was observed, it took place during an involuntary contact encounter. As Section 7.2 discussed, the scenario was intimately related to the underlying issue of selection bias in School Linking. That School Linking students and schools are (largely) predisposed to less prejudiced attitudes raises the question of how F&BF can negotiate the political and social aspects of education agendas to ensure that the programme reaches those who need it most in the future.

My second original contribution to theory was to reassess key principles of the intergroup contact model in order to aid understanding and articulation of how School Linking can foster a context-specific form of peaceful relations characterised by contact. First, I argued that School Linking could provide theoretical insight into the role of ‘acquaintance’ building (rather than ‘friendship’ building) through contact. Second, my findings illustrated in this context why knowledge has been proven to be an ineffective mediator of contact by social-psychologists. I proposed that School Linking could alternatively seek to develop reduced intergroup anxiety and increased empathy as factors to mediate their contact encounters. Third, I demonstrated how the adoption of the ‘deategorization model’ of contact (Brewer and Miller 1984, 1988, Miller 2002) as School Linking’s theoretical framework moving forward opens up multiple ways in which the programme can engage in current discourse around the role of worldviews in religion and education (as reviewed in Chapter 2) and embrace the religious and cultural plurality evident in both faith and community schools (an aspect of schooling often disregarded in community cohesion literature, Chapter 3 argues) through exploring the potential for intra-faith links between schools with the same faith ethos or religious character.

In sum, my theoretical contribution has met my research objective of providing an original account of the relationships between ‘interfaith encounters’ and ‘peaceful relations’ in schools through a case study of the Faith and Belief Forum’s (F&BF’s) School Linking programme. Specifically, I have generated an

²⁶⁵ Where contact is found to increase prejudiced attitudes.

original and contextualised account of ‘peaceful relations’ in School Linking through the lens of contact theory.

10:4: Methodological reflections and the future of School Linking: Towards a ‘grounded theory of change’

Chapter 4 outlined how my research was conducted from a unique methodological position. I defended a mixed methods, case study research design. However, I took an original stance to the evaluative aspect of my research by adopting a critical approach to assumption-driven models of evaluation commonly used by practitioners (see Section 4.3.1). As these reflections illustrate, my approach allowed me to develop a complex understanding of School Linking through multiple perspectives that may otherwise have been ignored.

First, I acknowledged the difficulties of attributing observed outcomes to the programme aims and activities. However, by remaining open to recognising the points at which the attribution of outcomes are potentially disrupted, F&BF can, moving forward, identify to what extent perceived or reported changes can be traced back to their interventions. For example, Chapter 6 illustrated that some teachers did not attend F&BF’s CPD training and/or implemented F&BF’s activities incorrectly. This raises the question of to what extent those teachers’ (and their students’) reported experiences of School Linking can be attributed to F&BF. It also raises the issue of how much control of the Link Days F&BF can, and should, have. The question of attribution arose within my own data analysis. To an extent I had to question the accuracy of my teacher focus group discussions, since Chapter 5’s quantitative findings indicated that some teachers are misinterpreting, or misreporting, their students’ experiences. However, ethical constraints limited my access to direct student experiences.

Second, my methodological approach challenged the inherent hypothesis-testing nature of ‘theory of change’, in which the concepts involved are operationalised by a series of indicators and subsequently measured. By employing an inductive reasoning approach to my data analysis I uncovered

findings that may not have been otherwise posited as an ‘indicators’ of peaceful relations (for example, findings relating to power dynamics in Chapter 7). Moving forward, although School Linking was termed ‘interfaith encounters’ in my research questions, throughout the research process I reflected on the nature of School Linking in developing intercultural competence (see Section 8.4) and explored its potential to develop intra-faith partnerships (see Section 9.4.3). Chapters 1 and 4 recognised the changing nature of how F&BF presents its organisational identity; this research provides an opportunity for F&BF to further explore and clarify its value and purpose.

Third, and related to the aspect above, I was open to alternative explanations of change. Notably, I did not assume negative outcomes where there was an absence of explicitly positive contact. For example, Chapter 7’s findings relating to students’ hesitancy to mix during Link Days were not assumed to be negative, as previous research would suggest. Rather, they could be explained in relation to power dynamics; an explanation that would have otherwise been missed. Such instances stopped me from misrepresenting or oversimplifying the complexity of processes underlying School Linking.

Lastly, throughout my research, I reflected on the context within which my case study was operating. Recognising that context-driven research has implications for the generalisability of my findings (addressed in Section 4.5.1), a focus on participants’ actions and outcomes allowed me to generate and reassess theory in Chapter 9 in such a way that it had a pragmatic relevance to my case study.

Moving forward, I intend to complete the practice-theory-practice cycle of my double reflexive methodology (Knauth and Vieregge 2019), and adopt a ‘reflective practitioner’ position (Lederach, Neufeldt and Culberston 2007: 45, see Section 4.3.1) by running a consultation process with F&BF (scheduled for summer 2020), during which we will discuss the outcomes of my research at three levels. First, the programme design will be reviewed in relation to my recommendation to consider additional variables (for example, school size and resources) when schools are ‘linked’ (and ‘difference’ established) at the start of the programme. Second, we will reflect on the findings of Chapters 5-8, as well

as Chapter 9's theory implications, to enable F&BF to generate 'grounded theories of change'. By this, I mean that F&BF staff can put aside assumptions and articulate some of the complex processes underlying the relationships between their work and peaceful relations through a framework grounded in a contextualised academic theory. Lastly, we will consider how F&BF's evaluation material can be adapted to accurately capture their grounded theories of change in order to effectively communicate the impact of School Linking to their stakeholders.

10.5: Future research agenda

The previous two sections have outlined my research's original contribution through complementary academic and practical perspectives. By virtue of ensuring that I understood my case study in its complexity, my research was interdisciplinary; I drew upon literature and research from education, the sociology of religion and social psychology. Additionally, when I designed the research, I analysed my data inductively, outside of an assumed theoretical framework, so that my findings could be reflectively applied to this context through a number of different academic understandings of 'peaceful relations' in the future. Specifically, Chapter 4 described how my ordering and coding of primary data under the categories of 'knowledge, skills and attitudes' (for the purpose of recognising the role of intercultural competence in my research) would aid me in applying the data to citizenship education and peace education.

First, non-statutory guidance classifies the goal of citizenship education as pupils gaining "the knowledge, skills and understanding necessary to become informed, active, responsible global citizens" (DfEE 2000a). Citizenship education was introduced into the England and Wales national curriculum in 2002 as a subject for 11-16 year-olds (Ipgrave 2003b: 149) and meeting the citizenship education agenda was referenced in Chapter 6 as a motivating factor for schools to participate in School Linking.

Literature explored in this thesis, however, disagrees on the complementarity of the citizenship agenda and faith schooling. Whilst some support faith schooling as a vehicle for citizenship (Barker and Anderson 2005, McGettrick 2005), others suggest that there is an inherent and irreconcilable contradiction between a school's faith 'ethos' and the citizenship agenda (Halstead and McLaughlin 2005, King 2010). MacMullen (2007: 30) highlights a lack of empirical work aimed to "quantify or otherwise measure and compare the extent to which a school's religious affiliation affects the experience of students [...] and seek to correlate these measures with assessments of the quality of the citizens emerging from such schools". MacMullen argues for a quantitative approach to the research, although recognises that finding "satisfactory quantitative measures of the independent, and especially the dependent, variables" is a "formidable task" (2007: 30). Whilst my own research is critical of adopting a purely quantitative methodology, future research could isolate findings pertaining to faith schools and subsequently map them against a framework of the 'knowledge, skills and understanding' that underpins a theoretical understanding of citizenship education to aid academic understanding in this area.

Similarly, the theoretical underpinnings of peace education have been defined as "the process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behaviour changes that will enable children, youth and adults to [...] create the conditions conducive to peace" (Fountain 1999: 1), a definition based upon theorists who originally developed a 'knowledge, skills and attitudes' approach to the topic (Hicks 1985, Galtung and Ikeda 1995, Reardon 1988). Generally regarded as a framework for developing peaceful relations in violent conflict, there are an increasing number of peace education initiatives taking place in schools in England (Skentelbery 2019, Smith 2018) which could, following further theoretical research, act as potential comparable case studies to School Linking. Additionally, there is a small body of literature within peace education that assumes a similar methodological position to my own research in critiquing the usefulness of a theory of change model to understand impact (for

example, Ashton 2007). In this respect, there is an opportunity to explore shared learning from a methodological perspective.

10.6: Conclusion

The four sections of this chapter have summarised how I have designed and carried out my research in order to make an original contribution to knowledge. First, a multitude of findings generated from my quantitative and qualitative analysis have furthered understanding of a number of academic themes in religious and intercultural education, literature around community cohesion and the role of faith schooling, and previous studies of organisational and research-driven interfaith initiatives. Second, through reassessing the theoretical underpinnings to contact theory, I have developed a context-specific, reflective and original account of 'peaceful relations' as developed through School Linking. Third, revisiting my approach to research design has illustrated how the evaluative aspect of my case study research has enabled me to make a practical, meaningful and sustainable contribution to the design and evaluation of F&BF moving forward. Lastly, I purposefully designed my research to encourage future study; my data were collected to aid understanding of my research's contribution to citizenship and peace education, but my inductive approach to analysis allows me to adopt and reassess numerous academic understandings to peaceful relations moving forward.

This thesis opened with a quote taken from a year 9 student before his first Link Day. He said, "I'm sure we can ask them questions. They're probably just like us!". Accompanying students on their School Linking journey was a privilege; my research addressed the complexity of how he, and others in School Linking, built peaceful relations, but it afforded me opportunities to ask my own questions about attitudes to diversity, dimensions of power, school cultures, the ways in which religious and non-religious issues are presented to students, and how religion can be taught sensitively and inclusively. This research, therefore, is applicable beyond this case study. Schools, religious organisations and interfaith

or intercultural organisations such as F&BF are grappling with how to foster constructive dialogue and peaceful relations in contexts where misunderstanding and conflict are also present, both in and beyond the educational realm. These issues are complex, and understanding the complexity of this case study may provide insights into other contexts.

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APPENDIX 1

The Faith and Belief Forum evaluation documents

2016-2017

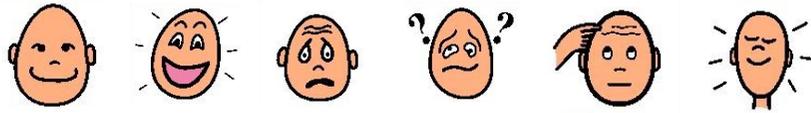
Item 1: 3FF Primary School Linking Baseline 2016/17

3FF Primary School Linking Baseline 2016/17

Name: _____
 Your School: _____
 Year: _____ Class: _____
 Link School: _____

Question 1

You will be meeting and working with new people. How do you feel about this?
 Please choose one face and write a word underneath to describe how you feel.



Why do you feel this way?

Question 2

Please circle a number 1-5 by these statements to show how much you agree with them.

The children from the Link School will be interested in me and will want to know more about me

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

I will feel able to work with the children from the Link School

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

I will feel able to talk to the children from the Link School

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Question 3

Please circle a number 1-5 by these statements to show how much you agree with them.

I know a lot about the faith and beliefs of my Link School

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

I think the students at my Link School will be similar to me

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

I know a lot about the faiths and beliefs of people in my class

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

I think the students at my Link School will be different to me

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Question 4

What do you want to share about yourself with the children from your Link School?



1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____



Question 5

What questions do you want to ask the children from the Link School?

1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____

Item 2: 3FF Primary School Linking Endpoint 2016/17

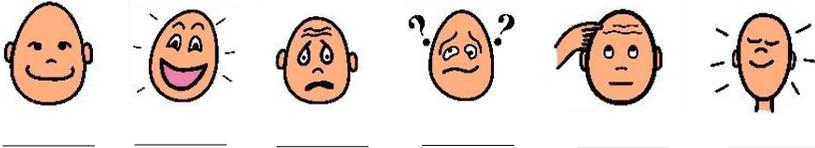
3FF Primary School Linking Endpoint 2016/17

Name: _____
 Your School: _____
 Year: _____ Class: _____
 Link School: _____

Question 1

You have met and worked with new people. How did this make you feel?

Please choose one face and write a word underneath to describe how you feel.



Why did you feel this way?

Question 2

Please circle a number 1-5 by these statements to show how much you agree with them.

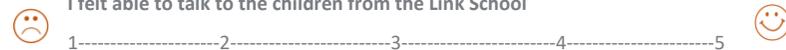
The children from the Link School were interested in me and wanted to know more about me



I felt able to work with the children from the Link School



I felt able to talk to the children from the Link School



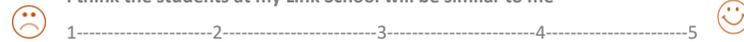
Question 3

Please circle a number 1-5 by these statements to show how much you agree with them.

I know a lot about the faith and beliefs of my Link School



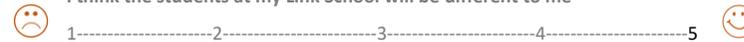
I think the students at my Link School will be similar to me



I know a lot about the faiths and beliefs of people in my class



I think the students at my Link School will be different to me



Question 4

What did you *share* about yourself with the children from your Link School?

Question 5

What questions did you *ask* the children from the Link School?

Question 6

How much did you enjoy School Linking? Please circle a number 1-5



Question 7

What was your favourite part of School Linking?

Question 8

Is there anything 3FF could do to make School Linking better?

Thank you for telling us about your School Linking experience!

Item 3: 3FF Secondary School Linking Baseline 2016/17

3FF Secondary School Linking Baseline – 2016/17

First name: _____ Surname: _____
Your School: _____
Year: _____ Class: _____
Link School: _____

Question 1

You will be meeting and working with new people. How do you feel about this and why?

Question 2

Please circle a number 1-5 by these statements to show how much you agree with them

The children from the Link School will be interested in me and will want to know more about me

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

I will feel able to work with the children from the Link School

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

I will feel able to talk to the children from the Link School

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

Question 3

Please circle a number 1-5 by these statements to show how much you agree with them

I know a lot about the faith and beliefs of my Link School

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

I think the students at my Link School will be similar to me

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

I know a lot about the faiths and beliefs of people in my class

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

I think the students at my Link School will be different to me

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

Question 4

What are you looking forward to *sharing* about yourself with the students from your Link School, and why?

Question 5

What are you interested in *asking* the students from the Link School, and why?

Item 4: 3FF Secondary School Linking Endpoint 2016/17

3FF Secondary School Linking Endpoint - 2015/16

First name: _____ Surname: _____
 Your School: _____
 Year: _____ Class: _____
 Link School: _____

Question 1

You have met and worked with new people. How did this make you feel and why?

Question 2

Please circle a number 1-5 by these statements to show how much you agree with them

The children from the Link School were interested in me wanted to know more about me

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

I felt able to work with the children from the Link School

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

I felt able to talk to the children from the Link School

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

Question 3

Please circle a number 1-5 by these statements to show how much you agree with them

I know a lot about the faith and beliefs of my Link School

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

I think the students at my Link School will be similar to me

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

I know a lot about the faiths and beliefs of people in my class

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

I think the students at my Link School will be different to me

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

Can you tell us more about any *similarities* you found?

Can you tell us more about any *differences* you found?

Question 4

What did you *share* about yourself with the students from your Link School, and why?

Question 5

What did you *ask* the students from the Link School, and why?

Question 6

How much did you enjoy School Linking? Please circle a number 1-5

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

Question 7

What was your favourite part of School Linking, and why?

Question 8

Is there anything 3FF could do to improve School Linking?

Thank you for telling us about your School Linking experience!

Item 5: 3FF Teacher School Linking Baseline 2016/17

3FF Teacher School Linking Baseline – 2016/17

Contact Information:

Name: _____ School: _____
 Year group: _____ Link School: _____
 Contact number _____
 Email _____

Question 1 – My students

Please circle a number 1-5 by these statements to show how much you agree with them

My students have opportunities to interact with others of different faiths and beliefs

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

My students are confident interacting with others of different faiths and beliefs

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

My students have a strong understanding of their own faiths and beliefs

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

My students have an understanding of the faiths and beliefs of the students at the Link school

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

Question 2 – Me

Please circle a number 1-5 by these statements to show how much you agree with them

I have a strong understanding of the faith and beliefs of my Link School

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

I have been involved in interfaith work before

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

I am confident running interfaith activities

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

I am looking forward to being part of the School Linking Programme

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

Question 3

What do you hope your students will get out of being involved in School Linking?

What do you personally hope to get out of being involved in the programme?

Question 4 – My School

What do you hope being involved in Linking will bring to the whole school?

Do you anticipate any challenges in involving the rest of the school, and how could 3FF support you to overcome these?

Item 6: 3FF Teacher School Linking Endpoint 2016/17

3FF Teacher School Linking Endpoint – 2016/17

First name: _____ Surname: _____
Your School: _____
Year group: _____ Link School: _____

Following School Linking...

Question 1 – My students

Please circle a number 1-5 by these statements to show how much you agree with them

My students are more confident interacting with others of different faiths and beliefs

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

Any comments

My students have a stronger understanding of their own faiths and beliefs

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

Any comments

My students have a better understanding of the faiths and beliefs of the students at the Link school

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

Any comments

Question 2 – Me

Please circle a number 1-5 by these statements to show how much you agree with them

I have a stronger understanding of the faith and beliefs of my Link School

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

Any comments

I am more confident running interfaith activities

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

Any comments

I developed a good relationship with my Link School teacher

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

Any comments

I enjoyed participating in School Linking with my class

 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 

Any comments

Question 3

What did your students will get out of being involved in School Linking?

What did you personally get out of being involved in the programme?

Question 4 – My School

What impact did being involved in Linking have on the wider school?

Were there any challenges in involving the rest of the school, and how could this be improved next year?

Question 5 – 3FF

Did you get the support you needed from 3FF?

Do you have any suggestions for changes to the programme for next year?

Key information for next year

Who will be responsible for the Link next year?

Which year group will Link next year? _____

If not you, what are the contact details for the new Link teacher?

Teacher name _____

Preferred email _____

Contact number _____

Item 7: 3FF Linking CPD Teacher Evaluation Form 2016/17

Core Linking CPD 06/10/16 – Teacher Evaluation

Name (optional): _____ School (optional): _____

Training Aims					
<i>Please tick as appropriate...</i>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partly Agree, Partly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Following today...					
I have a good understanding of 3FF's core linking programme					
I have a good understanding of the essential elements of a 3FF Link Day					
I have started building a relationship with my link partner, and have a good understanding of their context					
I have the skills and confidence to deliver a sensitive and meaningful Link Day I					
I have sufficient age-appropriate resources and activities to deliver Link Day I					
I have now planned Link Day I					
Further comments:					

Logistics					
<i>Please tick as appropriate...</i>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partly Agree, Partly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The venue was accessible and in a good location					
I enjoyed the lunch / refreshments and my dietary requirements were met					
The timings of the day were appropriate					
Further comments:					

PTO

Overall	Yes	Partially	No
Did you enjoy today's training?			
Do you think today's training equips you to deliver an interesting and meaningful Link Day 1?			
Further comments:			
If you have attended a previous CPD for Linking Teachers at 3FF			
How do you feel your experience at CPD is impacted by the division of the programme into two strands, core and alumni?			

Thank you for your feedback!

Item 8: 3FF Student Reflection Card 2016/17

Student Reflection Cards for Link Days

Name _____	School _____	Date _____
<p>Did you enjoy Linking today?</p> <p>Circle a number</p> <p> 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 </p>	<p>What was your favourite part of today?</p> <p>Write or draw</p>	
<p>What did you learn about the faith or belief of someone else?</p> <p>Write or draw</p>	<p>What do you think your Link School learned about you?</p> <p>Write or draw</p>	

Item 9: Teacher CPD evaluation form responses

	Statement	% of teachers that responded	% of respondents that agreed with the statement
Training aims	I have a good understanding of 3FF's core/alumni Linking programme	100	99.2
	I have a good understanding of the essential elements of a 3FF Link Day	72	100
	I have started building a relationship with my link partner, and have a good understanding of their context ('new' teachers only)	52	90.3
	I have started exploring Linking in a wider context, and have new ideas about taking Linking further ('experienced' teachers only)	18	86.4
	It has been helpful thinking about Linking through a leadership lens, and I would like to further develop my role as Linking Champion ('experienced' teachers only)	18	95.5
	I have the skills and confidence to design and deliver a sensitive and meaningful next Link Day	99	94.1
	I have sufficient age-appropriate resources and activities to deliver the next Link Day	98	94.9
	I have now planned the next Link Day	89	86.0
	Logistics	The venue was accessible and in a good location	99
I enjoyed the lunch / refreshments and my dietary requirements were met		100%	90.8
The timings of the day were appropriate		100	93.3
Overall	Did you enjoy today's training?	98	96.0
	Do you think today's training equips you to deliver an interesting and meaningful next Link Day?	95	95

APPENDIX 2

Methodology and ethical approval

Item 1: Online survey for teachers, headteachers and school governors

Online survey template - schools

- This survey is circulated to the following:
 - Teachers (introduced in the Participant Information Sheet that is circulated via email by 3FF two weeks ahead of the observation of CPD1. Introduced again in person at CPD 1, with an opportunity to ask questions. Survey link email sent to teachers by 3FF on LP's behalf after CPD1, October 2017
 - Headteachers and school governors (paper copies of the survey which link to the online version will be circulated by the linking teachers, along with Participant Information Sheets and return envelopes)
- The results will be summarised and discussed at a focus group at CPD 3

You have been invited to complete this survey by Lucy Peacock, a PhD student at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University. Lucy is undertaking the first systematic review of 3FF's Faith School Linking programme, with support from 3FF. Her research seeks to shed light on the important yet under-researched topic of interfaith relations among young people, and contribute to discussions on the effectiveness of faith-based approaches to building peaceful relations in schools.

This survey has been circulated to all linking teachers, headteachers and school governors from the schools signed up to the 2017-18 Faith School Linking programme. It is open to all - you do not have to have first-hand experience of the programme's activities to take part. Your participation in the survey will be anonymous. The survey does not ask you for your name and, although we wish to know which school you are affiliated with for analysis purposes, the school name will be anonymised in the research. The survey is voluntary and there will be no negative consequences if you decide not to take part. All questions are optional; you can skip any questions as you proceed or withdraw at any time.

The survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete and consists of three sections, followed by an opportunity to make comments. The anonymised findings will be used as part of Lucy Peacock's PhD research, due for completion in September 2019. They will also make up part of a written 3FF report and may be used in subsequent publications.

Content removed on data protection grounds

Section 1: School Information:

1	Are you a teacher / head teacher / school governor? a) If teacher, what year is the class? b) 'core' or 'alumni'?	Select as applicable a) Drop down b) Select as applicable (including 'don't know')
2	Role title	Free text
3	Name of school (for analysis purposes – will be anonymised)	Free text

Section 2: Your involvement in the Faith School Linking programme:

4	Are you aware that your school is taking part in the programme?	Yes / No
5	Were you aware of 3FF's work before now?	Yes / No / To some extent
6	Have you been involved on the programme before?	Yes / No / Don't know
7	Have you or your school been involved in any similar programmes? a) If yes or to some extent, please describe	Yes / No / To some extent a) Please describe
8	How is your participation on the programme funded?	Free text
9	Why did you choose to take part in the scheme?	Free text
10	In your own words explain your understanding of 3FF's mission	Free text
11	In your own words explain your understanding of the aims of the Faith School Linking programme	Free text
Section 3: Expectations and challenges: For these questions, please expand your answer to include the expected impact on students, teachers and the wider school community (including those with the authority to make decisions), specifying examples for each group if possible.		
12	What are your expectations of the programme's impact in terms of the development of knowledge? (e.g. increased awareness of the linked students' beliefs or cultural heritage; increased recognition of prejudice and drivers of conflict)	Free text
13	What are your expectations of the programme's impact in terms of the development of skills? (e.g. improved communication; ability to think critically)	Free text
14	What are your expectations of the programme's impact in terms of the changing of attitudes? (e.g. emphasis on values such as tolerance, respect and empathy; sense of equality)	Free text
15	What barriers to achieving your expected impact, if any, do you foresee at the student, teacher and school level? These can include practical challenges, such as funding or policy issues, as well as theoretical barriers such as the complexities involved in changing attitudes or the perception/presentation of religion in social and political commentary	Free text
Closing remarks		
	Please use this text box to make any additional comments. If you are a class teacher who has recently attended 3FF's first training day, you can use this box to share any thoughts that you did not state on the evaluation form.	Free text
	Preliminary results from the survey responses will be discussed in April 2018 by teachers on the 2017-18 Faith School Linking programme. This discussion provides an opportunity to determine what impact, if any, has been seen. Participants will also be shown a range of proposed barriers to change and discuss ways of overcoming them. If you do not want your (anonymous) response to be included in the discussion please tick this box.	Tick box

Content removed on data protection grounds

Item 2: Online survey for parents

Online survey template - parents

- This survey will be created in Bristol Online Survey (BOS) and circulated to parents by the class teachers, alongside A5 invitations (see ethics application item 9a) after CPD3, April 2018. Detailed information (item 9b) is available on request.
- No consent form required if consent information is clearly stated within the online survey introduction.

You have been invited to complete this survey by Lucy Peacock, a PhD student at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University. Lucy is researching Three Faith Forum's (3FF's) Faith School Linking programme to see how the activities build relationships between young people of different faiths.

This survey has been circulated to all parents/guardians of the students signed up to the 2017-18 Faith School Linking programme. Nobody will know that you've taken part – you won't be asked for any names. We'd like to know your child's school for the research but it will be removed when the project is written up. This survey is optional and there will be no consequences if you decide not to take part. You can also skip any questions as you go through or close the window at any time if you change your mind. If there is more than one parent or guardian in the household, the survey can be completed more than once.

The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete and consists of three sections, followed by the chance to make comments.

The results (including quotes with no names) will be used as part of Lucy Peacock's PhD research. They will also make up part of a written 3FF report and may be used in publications such as articles or book chapters.

Content removed on data protection grounds

If you agree to take part in this study, please continue to the questions.

Section 1: Background Information:

1	Name of your student's school (for research purposes – will be removed)	Free text
2	What is the religious status of your child's school?	Christian (Catholic) / Christian (CoE) / Jewish / Muslim / Don't know / Other
3	Which were the three most important factors in your decision for your child to attend their school? <i>[note, multiple choice options to be refined once more information on the 2017-18 3FF schools becomes available]</i>	Choose up to three: Exam results / location / religious status / Ofsted report results / single-sex / co-educational / diversity / status as a state school / status as an independent school /

		other (if other please describe)
4	Do you identify as a 'practicing member' of the school's religious tradition? a. Please describe	Yes / No / To some extent / Don't know a. Free text
5	Would you describe your child as a 'practicing member' of the school's religious tradition? a. Please expand	Yes / No / To some extent / Don't know a. Free text
Section 2: You and your child's involvement in the Faith School Linking programme:		
6	How many Link Days has your child attended?	1 / 2 / 3 / Don't know
7	Did your child talk to you about the Link Days? a. Please describe	Yes / No / To some extent a. Free text
8	Before your child took part in the Link Days, would you say he or she had experienced an 'interfaith encounter'? a. Please describe	Yes / No / To some extent / Don't know a. Free text
Section 3: Impact: please answer the following questions using examples where possible		
9	Have the Link Days had an impact on your child's development of knowledge? (e.g. awareness of other beliefs; understanding of causes of conflict) a. If yes or 'to some extent', please describe	Yes / No / To some extent / Don't know a. Free text
10	Have the Link Days had an impact on your child's development of skills? (e.g. improved communication; ability to question) a. If yes or 'to some extent', please describe	Yes / No / To some extent / Don't know a. Free text
11	Have the Link Days had an impact on your child's attitude? (e.g. development of values such as tolerance, respect, empathy or equality) a. If yes or 'to some extent', please describe	Yes / No / To some extent / Don't know a. Free text
12	Has your child attended any classes or activities this year (other than the Link Days) that may have had a similar impact as the three types listed above? a. If yes or 'to some extent', please describe	Yes / No / To some extent / Don't know a. Free text
13	Did your child tell you about anything that they found difficult or challenging with the Link Days? a. If yes or 'to some extent', please describe	Yes / No / To some extent / Don't know a. Free text
14	Has your child's attendance at the Link Days had an impact on a. you b. other family members c. the wider community? If yes or 'to some extent' please give one or more example	Yes / No / To some extent / Don't know (to all a-c) Free text
Closing remarks		
	Please use this text box to make any additional comments.	Free text

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Item 4: Participant information sheet for secondary school participants



I'm looking forward to meeting you at your Link Day!

Hello! My name's Lucy and I'm a PhD university student at Coventry University. This year I'm working with 3FF to see how their Faith School Linking Programme makes a difference to teachers and students. Your school has agreed that I can sit in on your Link Days but it's just as important that you know why I'm going to be there, what I'll be doing, and your options for getting involved. So here are some answers to questions that you might have!

Why are you at my Link Days?

I'm doing some research on 3FF's Faith School Linking Programme. Your teacher has spoken to you about why you're taking part and what you'll be doing, but my job is to see how the programme works. After watching your three Link Days I can report back to 3FF on how it's gone and then help them write about their work.

I also want to see what you think of the activities and the themes that you'll be exploring. I'm excited to see if anything's changed by the end of the year!

What will you be doing?

Mostly you'll find me sitting in a corner writing in my notebook!

I'll be watching the activities and making notes about what you and your classmates say and do. I might wander around the room or sit at different tables but you can pretend I'm not there.

Don't worry, I won't come up to you and ask you questions. But you can ask me anything, or tell me about what you're doing.

About me

Name: Lucy Peacock

Favourite book: The Hobbit

Favourite film: Moana

Family: I have two sisters who are teachers and a brother who lives in America

Pets: I have a black Labrador called Dottie and a huge white Sheepdog called Zoli

Interesting fact: I live on a working farm!



Do I need to do anything?

At the Link Days I'll introduce myself and you can ask me anything. You'll have red, yellow and green cards that you can hold up to show me whether you're happy for me to make notes. If you're happy then just enjoy the Link Days!

Will people know that I've taken part?

Not at all!

After I've made notes of what you say, these quotes might be included in my university work or be used in books and presentations. But all of my quotes will be anonymous, which means that your real name won't be used. I also won't include the name of your school so whoever reads my work won't know who was involved in the research.

What if I don't want to take part?

That's fine! You don't have to take part if you don't want to. There won't be any bad consequences and you won't get into trouble. You can tell your class teacher or me. You can show me your red card or even just shake your head! I'll be with you for all three Link Days and it's fine if you change your mind once the day has begun. You don't have to give a reason and you can still take part in all of the Link Day activities as usual. The important thing is that you feel comfortable.



I still have a question!

You can ask your teacher as many questions as you like about the research before the Link Day.

At the Link Day you can ask me questions or show me your yellow card.

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APPENDIX 3

Quantitative analysis: supplementary information

Item 1: Table of the three most frequently stated adjectives and reasons given for feelings towards school Linking, per face (primary school)

	BASELINE		ENDPOINT	
	Write a word to describe how you feel	Why do you feel this way?	Write a word to describe how you feel	Why do you feel this way?
Smiley 	Happy (33) Excited (9) OK (8)	Meeting new people (40) Other (19) Potential to make friends (12) Experiencing a new / different religion (10)	Happy (21) Ok (5) Fine (3)	Other (14) Met new people (8) Made new friends (6)
Very smiley 	Excited (180) Happy (44) Great (3)	Meeting new people (110) Potential to make friends (75) Experiencing a new / different religion (27)	Happy (47) Excited (25) Amazing, Great, Good (3 each)	Made new friends (35) Met new people (27) Experienced a new / different religion (11)
Worried 	Nervous (19) Scared (8) Worried (8)	Meeting new people (12) Insecurity/lack of self-confidence (10) Unsure about Linking (9)	Nervous (2) Sad (2) Worried (2)	Negative experience of Linking (6) Insecurity / lack of self-confidence (3) First time (2)
Confused 	Nervous (12) Confused (8) Puzzled (4)	Meeting new people (18) Unsure about Linking (9) Experiencing a new / Other (6)	Confused (10) Anxious, Awkward, Bad, Clueless, Fine, In the middle, Not sure, Puzzled, Speechless (1 each)	Negative experience of Linking (7) Experienced a new / different religion (5) Other (3)
Thinking 	Curious (7) Nervous (6) Shy (5)	Meeting new people (16) Unsure about Linking (9) Experiencing a new / different religion, First time (6 each)	Ok (4) Worried (2) Amazed, Anxious, Awkward, Daydreamer, Don't know, Interested, Nervous, Not understanding, Weird (1 each)	Negative experience of Linking (5) Insecurity / lack of self-confidence (3) Met new people, Other, Experienced a new / different religion (2 each)
Confident / proud 	Confident (12) Happy (9) Proud (6)	Meeting new people (14) Experiencing a new / different religion (6) First time (6)	Proud (12) Happy (3) Confident (2) Good (2)	Made new friends (9) Developed knowledge / skills / attitudes (5) Met new people (5)
Multiple faces	Excited and one other adjective (11) Confident (1)	Meeting new people (6) Insecurity/lack of self-confidence (4) Potential to make Unsure about Linking (3)	None	None

Item 2: Associations and correlations between student baseline Likert scales scores and demographics

		BASELINE STATEMENTS						
		The children will be interested in me and will want to know more about me	I will feel able to work with the children from the link school	I will feel able to talk to the children from the link school	I know a lot about the faith and beliefs of my link school	I think the students at my link school will be similar to me	I know a lot about the faiths and beliefs of people in my class	I think the students at my link school will be different to me
Responses		772	767	769	761	756	757	759
		Demographics for the respondents' schools						
Chi-Square	Faith ethos	.184	.000**	.000**	.000**	.000**	.000**	.074
	Core / alumni	.030*	.108	.068	.000**	.012*	.286	.479
	Gender	.065	.392	.649	.003**	.008**	.004**	.147
	City	.113	.405	.439	.000**	.000**	.001**	.193
	Borough	.000**	.012*	.000**	.000**	.000**	.000**	.008**
	Pri or sec	.018**	.014*	.159	.000**	.000**	.011*	.036*
	Key Stage	.005**	.162	.334	.000**	.000**	.010*	.176
Year	.009**	.051	.031*	.000**	.000**	.035*	.008**	
Spearman correlation results	% first language not English	-.075*	.016	.050	-.227**	-.146**	-.028	.000
		.038	.656	.165	.000	.000	.435	.999
		772	767	769	761	756	757	759
	% free school meals	-.144**	-.040	-.023	-.017	-.022	-.078	-.014
		.000	.330	.579	.686	.600	.060	.736
		593	590	592	587	584	584	585
	Primary - % meeting standard	.061	.109*	.051	.038	.081	.071	.149**
		.176	.016	.260	.406	.078	.122	.001
		488	486	487	483	480	481	482
	Secondary - % meeting standard	.218*	.211*	.158	.214*	.158	.468**	-.082
		.028	.033	.113	.033	.115	.000	.417
		102	102	102	100	101	100	101

		Demographics for the respondents' Link Schools						
Chi-Square	Faith ethos	.041*	.301	.287	.000**	.010*	.001**	.323
	Core / alumni	.007**	.015*	.022*	.000**	.018*	.001**	.484
	Gender	.016*	.163	.817	.024*	.081	.245	.494
	City	.113	.405	.439	.000**	.000**	.001**	.193
	Borough	.000**	.000**	.000**	.000**	.000**	.000**	.018*
	Pri or sec	.046*	.031*	.375	.000**	.001**	.013*	.059
	Key Stage	.005**	.049*	.253	.000**	.000**	.001**	.075
	Year	.001**	.128	.026*	.000**	.000**	.048*	.015*

Spearman correlation	% first language not English	-.020	.006	-.023	-.250**	-.153**	.159**	.038
		.584	.861	.529	.000	.000	.000	.301
		772	767	769	761	756	757	759
	% free school meals	-.104	-.039	-.077	.170**	-.002	.095*	.006
		.010	.330	0.55	.000	.969	.019	.885
		619	613	616	609	605	606	606
	Primary - % meeting standard	-.174**	-.038	-.028	-.159**	-.161**	.029	.025
		.000	.361	.510	.000	.000	.492	.549
		571	565	568	562	557	558	558
	Secondary - % meeting standard	-.075	.005	.037	-.076	-.171	-.033	.016
		.406	.956	.684	.406	.059	.719	.857
		124	124	124	122	123	123	128
** Significant at the 0.01 level								
* Significant at the 0.05 level								
* and ** Significant but with more than 30% of cells with fewer than 5 values (i.e. sample size too small to infer statistical significance)								

Item 3: Associations and correlations between student endpoint Likert scales scores and demographics

		ENDPOINT STATEMENTS						
		The children were interested in me and wanted to know more about me	I felt able to work with the children from the link school	I felt able to talk to the children from the link school	I know a lot about the faith and beliefs of my link school	I think the students at my link school were similar to me	I know a lot about the faiths and beliefs of people in my class	I think the students at my link school were different to me
Responses		255	255	256	257	256	256	257
Demographics for the respondents' schools								
Chi-Square	Faith ethos	.001**	.125	.271	.005**	.000**	.000**	.166
	Core / alumni	.827	.328	.005**	.147	.003**	.173	.657
	Gender	.027*	.127	.158	.014*	.009**	.702	.190
	City	.003**	.476	.632	.882	.072	.000**	.352
	Borough	.001**	.072	.004	.000**	.000**	.000	.022*
	Pri or sec	.001**	.016	.069	.000**	.000**	.793	.891
	Key Stage	.009**	.073	.122	.000**	.000**	.560	.947
Year	.002**	.134	.088	.000**	.000**	.000**	.901	
Spearman correlation results	% first language not English	.044	-.064	-.056	-.015	-.135*	-.099	-.046
		.485	.305	.373	.817	.031	.113	.467
		255	255	256	257	256	256	257
	% free school meals	.131*	.077	-.011	.169**	.281**	-.389**	-.052
		.041	.229	.863	.008	.000	.000	.414
		244	244	245	246	245	245	246
	Primary - % meeting standard	.011	.080	.082	.002	-.107	.169	.010
		.866	.239	.225	.976	.114	.012	.882
		220	220	221	222	221	221	222
	Secondary - % meeting standard	.420*	.381*	.448**	.171	.478**	.432**	.297
		.012	.024	.007	.327	.004	.010	.083
		35	35	35	35	35	35	35

		Demographics for the respondents' Link Schools						
Chi-Square	Faith ethos	.006**	.044*	.001**	.000**	.000**	.000**	.004**
	Core / alumni	.827	.328	.005**	.147	.003**	.173	.657
	Gender	.050*	.126	.300	.001**	.002**	.978	.669
	City	.003**	.476	.632	.882	.072	.000**	.352
	Borough	.001**	.072	.004	.000**	.000**	.000**	.022*
	Pri or sec	.001**	.016**	.069	.000**	.000**	.793	.891
	Key Stage	.000**	.101	.100	.000**	.000**	.000**	.673
Year	.002**	.134	.088	.000**	.000**	.000**	.901	

Spearman correlation results	% first language not English	-0.142*	-0.163**	-0.169**	-0.161**	-0.451**	0.376**	0.174**	
		.023	.009	.007	.010	.000	.000	.005	
		255	255	256	257	256	256	257	
	% free school meals	0.164*	.147	.238**	.194*	.403**	.078	-.202*	
		.048	.077	.004	.019	.000	.351	.015	
		146	146	146	146	146	146	146	
	Primary - % meeting standard	-.230**	-.294**	-.351**	-.215*	-.494**	.074	.400**	
		.007	.001	.000	.012	.000	.393	.000	
		135	135	135	135	135	135	135	
	Secondary - % meeting standard	-.420*	-.381*	-.448**	-.171	-.478**	-.432**	-.297	
		.012	.024	.007	.327	.004	.083	.083	
		35	35	35	35	35	35	35	
	** Significant at the 0.01 level								
	* Significant at the 0.05 level								
	* and ** Significant but with more than 30% of cells with fewer than 5 values (i.e. sample size too small to infer statistical significance)								

Item 4: Changes in median, mean and mode for student baseline and endpoint Likert scale scores

Statement (* indicates statistically significant change in median before and after Linking)		Baseline	Endpoint
The children from the Link School will be / were interested in me and will want / wanted to know more about me*	Median	4	4
	Mean	3.7	3.6
	Mode	4	4
I will feel / felt able to work with the children from the Link School	Median	4	4
	Mean	4.0	4.1
	Mode	5	5
I will feel / felt able to talk to the children from the Link School	Median	4	4
	Mean	4.0	4.1
	Mode	5	5
I know a lot about the faith and beliefs of my Link School *	Median	3	4
	Mean	2.7	3.4
	Mode	2	4
I think the students at my Link School will be / were similar to me*	Median	3	3
	Mean	2.9	3.1
	Mode	3	4
I know a lot about the faiths and beliefs of people in my class *	Median	5	5
	Mean	4.3	4.5
	Mode	5	5
I think the students at my Link School will be / were different to me	Median	4	4
	Mean	3.6	3.6
	Mode	5	5