

THE BUILDING BRIDGES THROUGH INTERFAITH DIALOGUE
IN SCHOOLS PROGRAMME: AN INVESTIGATION INTO
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A MODEL OF INTERFAITH EDUCATION

Submitted by

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Statement of Sources

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of this thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution. All research procedures reported in this thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees.

Signed:



Dated:

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Abstract

This thesis investigated the effectiveness of the “Building Bridges through Interfaith Dialogue in Schools Programme” in promoting intercultural and interreligious understanding, faith, empathy, trust, respect and co-operation between students from different faith, cultural and social backgrounds.

This experiential education programme involves students in years ten and eleven and teachers from different schools and backgrounds to meet and dialogue, question and explore each other’s lives and faiths over six sessions in a year. The researcher used a survey questionnaire and guided interviews with 84 students, 16 teachers, 15 facilitators of the small groups and four regional co-ordinators alongside the general capabilities of the new Australian curriculum and various measures of empathy and intercultural understanding to make this assessment. Results revealed a majority of participants had grown significantly in trust, respect and interreligious understanding of the other and their faith tradition through direct engagement with a peer of a different faith background. The small group dialogues and informal conversations over a meal proved to have greatest impact on participants’ learning. The research also found that experiential interfaith education of this nature developed critical and creative thinking skills, challenged inaccurate stereotypes, increased awareness of one’s own values and faith commitments, improved self-confidence and the social capability to work successfully in religiously and culturally diverse teams.

In promoting four of the general capabilities of the Australian curriculum, the research confirmed that experiential interfaith education such as the Building Bridges Programme offers an excellent model for educating new generations of Australians in religion, faith and culture, for them to become competent global citizens and leaders in the twenty-first century.

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Chapter One: Why Research the Building Bridges Programme?

Introduction

The research project reported in this thesis investigated the effectiveness of one model of interfaith education called the Building Bridges through Interfaith Dialogue in Schools Programme (BBP). This project assesses how effectively the BBP promoted faith and four key general capabilities identified for the Australian Curriculum (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2012). These four capabilities are critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, ethical behaviour, and intercultural understanding. As the BBP specifically intends to educate students about religion, interreligious understanding is included among these general capabilities.

This chapter outlines the purpose of researching the effectiveness of the BBP and the critical issues, terms and questions guiding this research. It does this by examining the background of the programme through an investigation into the Australian socio-cultural, religious, and educational context, together with influential factors from the researcher's experience. It then provides a full description of the BBP with its aims and process, and the key research questions. Finally, it defines all the key terms as understood and used in this research project.

The background of the research project.

This research project arose for two reasons. The researcher wished to assess the effectiveness of the Building Bridges Programme (BBP) in achieving its aims of building trust, respect and interfaith understanding between participants from different religious, cultural and social backgrounds. The programme has run continuously since 2004 and has grown tenfold in the number of schools involved since then, so it seemed it was time to gather empirical data on its effectiveness to meet these aims. Secondly, in light of the

changing global, national and educational context, the researcher wanted to explore the relevance and viability of this model of interfaith education for the new Australian curriculum. As far as the researcher is aware, there are no other models of interfaith education besides the BBP with a focus on dialogue around personal experiences of life and faith that exist in Australian secondary schools today. The BBP uses an inclusive model for educating participants on faiths and religions that could meet the educational aims for studies in intercultural and interreligious understanding and integrate Indigenous spiritualities more effectively into the new national curriculum. Given the current uncertainty and heated debates surrounding the study of religion in state schools in Australia, an examination of this model of interfaith education for secondary schools seemed particularly appropriate and timely for the Australian curriculum.

The Building Bridges Programme (BBP) was developed in 2003 and began in Melbourne the following year. It arose in a country challenged by growing religious diversity and touched by terrorism on the world stage, in classrooms where teachers wrestled with how to make faith relevant and engaging for students in a changing global and educational environment and initiated by a Christian who was convinced that interfaith dialogue could make a significant contribution towards world peace. Each of these factors is explored in turn- the Australian context, the educational environment and the emerging interfaith consciousness, in order to understand the background, purpose and significance of this project for contemporary research in religious education.

Australian Context

Growing religious and cultural diversity. Despite being an island, Australia has been profoundly affected by globalisation and international movements to become one of the most diverse nations on earth. Ethnically, over a quarter of Australia's permanent residents in 2011 were born overseas and a further one fifth have at least one overseas born parent

(Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2012a, p. 1). Further, there are over 400 different languages spoken in homes across the country (ABS, 2010). Australians are also becoming more religiously diverse.

Whilst the majority of Australians still identified as Christian (61 %) in the 2011 census, down from 68 % in 2001, the proportion of Buddhists increased by 48 % (to 2.5% of the population), Muslims by 69 % (to 2.2 % of the population) and Hindus by 189 % (to 1.3 % of the total population) over the same period (ABS, 2012a; See also Bouma, Cahill, Dellal, & Zwartz, 2011, pp. 15-18). Most of this increase occurred through immigration, with over 60 % of these groups registered in the census as born overseas (ABS, 2008). So the religious and cultural landscape in Australian has dramatically and irreversibly changed in the last twenty years, visible from the diverse forms of dress and the languages spoken on the street, to the minarets, temples, and prayer halls that have sprung up around the cities.

Alongside this increasing religious diversity is a growth in ‘secularism’, understood as “a decline in the salience and significance of religion culturally, politically, institutionally and within individual consciousness” (Mason, Singleton, & Webber, 2007, p. 204). This is reflected in the 22 % of Australians who declared they had ‘no religion’ in 2011, an increase of seven percent from a decade before (ABS, 2012a; Bouma et al., 2011). In this category, interestingly, only a tiny proportion consider themselves atheists (0.16 %), with many more simply not providing further definition or not identifying with a particular organised form of religion (Hughes, 2010). This growth of religious diversity alongside increasing secularism creates challenges for social cohesion, policy and education in Australia today (Jupp, Dawson, & Nieuwenhuysen, 2007). How well is Australia addressing these challenges-politically, socially and educationally?

Young Australians reflect many of these trends. The most recent census revealed that 28 % of those aged 15-34 reported they had no religious affiliation (ABS, 2012a). Research

into the spirituality of ‘Generation Y’, young people born between 1981 and 1995 in Australia, conducted from 2002 to 2006 found over 50 % believed in God; 32 % didn’t know; and 17 % had no belief in God (Mason et al., 2007). The findings also revealed that although only 41 % of young people actively belonged to a religious tradition, 45 % prayed (including 16 % of those who didn’t know or didn’t believe there was a God) and 75 % said there definitely or probably was an inner being that they could discover (Hughes, 2007b, pp. 136, 156-157). Additionally, the research identified that significant proportions believed in life after death (56 %); reincarnation (31 %); angels (43 %); and had explored other religious practices, particularly Buddhism (38 %) (Hughes, 2007b, pp. 138, 155). It seems clear that many of these young people are relatively open to the spiritual dimension, questioning and exploring faith from a range of religious traditions and spiritual practices according to their own eclectic tastes and needs. In summarising the findings, Philip Hughes says: “Most Australian young people feel religion is a personal matter and they’ll find what works for them. It is something they can turn to for help if they feel they need to. The sense that religion is a therapeutic resource is widespread in Australia.” (2007b, p. 148).

These young people have grown up in a society characterized by globalisation, individualism, materialism, post-modernity as well as the increasing cultural and religious pluralism already referred to. Much has been written on the impact of these global forces or flows on society in general, and youth in particular (Heelas, 2005; Schreiter, 1997; Taylor, 2007; Wright, 2000). According to researchers, such rapid global and cultural changes in their world have led the generation Y to “a radical isolation of the individual in post-traditional society” (Mason et al., 2007, p. 320). A young Australian growing up today does not enjoy the same security and resilience of the fairly stable social, religious, communal and familial environment of the post-war generation. There is an apparent trend toward retreating into one’s own world of relationships and away from engaging with the wider community

that includes the religious other or ‘stranger’ (Mason et al., 2007, p. 321). These forces have therefore challenged young peoples’ attitudes and capacity to empathise with those who are different in religion, culture or values from them (Ghosn, 2008; Mason et al., 2007). How will Australia address these challenges, politically, socially and educationally to equip young people with the resources to effectively engage with those who are different in civic life, for increased stress on social cohesion is evident.

As the Australian population has grown in diversity, so have incidents of vilification, hostility and violence towards those from ‘other’ cultural and religious backgrounds, especially those from the Middle East and South Asia. The local repercussions in Australia after the terror attacks of 9/11 and the hotel bombings in Bali on 12th October 2002 where 88 Australians were killed were strong and immediate. The national government increased security and surveillance police, turned back boats of desperate asylum seekers coming to Australia to flee persecution, and went to war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Among the wider populace, there was heightened anxiety and fear in public spaces and on talkback radio, especially towards people of Middle-Eastern appearance or those wearing specifically Islamic dress. In 2003, William Jonas, the Acting Race Discrimination Commissioner summarised what the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) ‘Islam-Listen’ report heard from the 1400 Arab and Muslim Australians they interviewed (2003, p. iii):

Participants identifiable as Arab or Muslim by their dress, language, name or appearance told of having been abused, threatened, spat on, assailed with eggs, bottles, cans and rocks, punched and even bitten. Drivers have been run off the road and pedestrians run down on footpaths and in car parks. People reported being fired from their jobs or refused employment or promotion because of their race or religion. Children have been bullied in school yards. Women have been stalked, abused and

assaulted in shopping centres. Private homes, places of worship and schools were vandalized and burned. ‘Terrorist’ ‘Dirty Arab’ ‘Murderer’ ‘Bloody Muslim’ ‘Raghead’ ‘Bin- Laden’ ‘Illegal immigrant’...are just some of the labels and profanities that we were told have been used against Arabs and Muslims in public places. Arab and Muslim Australians were told to ‘Go back to your own country’; even those whose families have been in Australia for many generations...Many Arab and Muslim Australians said they were feeling isolated and fearful. ‘I don’t feel like I belong here anymore’ was a common sentiment...For most Arab and Muslim Australians, discrimination and abuse is not an everyday occurrence. However, when it does happen, it leaves a lasting impression that contributes to a sense of alienation, distrust and fear of future discrimination and attacks.

Whilst it is acknowledged that Australia is largely a tolerant multicultural nation with core values of egalitarianism and a ‘fair-go’, as this report reveals, there is still significant evidence of racial and religious prejudice, Islamophobia, rising religiously targeted intercultural conflict including physical and verbal abuse and widespread ignorance of the religions and cultures of one’s immediate neighbours (Al-Natour, 2010; Ata, 2009; Cahill, 2003; Department of Immigration & Citizenship, 2005; Howie, 2010; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2003; Mansouri, Jenkins, Morgan, & Taouk, 2009). Muslims and Indians have been the main targets of such attacks, regularly subject to negative stereotyping and demonization in many forms of the media (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC], 2007). This situation perpetuates fear and attitudes of intolerance toward the religious other, threatening cohesion within the wider society (HREOC, 2007; 2003; Jupp et al., 2007; Knox, 2011; Rabah, 2011; Zwartz, 2011).

The researcher argues that this racism and intolerance of the religious other needs to be acknowledged and addressed at a political and social level, as well as through clear

educational strategies in school curricula, so that all young Australians can learn and benefit from the positive values of compassion and respect for all of life that each religious tradition affirms (Armstrong, 2009, 2010; Byrne, 2009; Ho, 2007; Howie, 2010; Jupp et al., 2007; Mansouri et al., 2009; Religion in Education: Dialogue or Conflict [REDCo], 2008). This is all the more critical since many students do not even study religion in any form at secondary school.

Educational Context

The state of religion and faith in secondary schools. The Australian education system is made up of three main sectors: Government schools (71%); Catholic schools (18 %); and Independent schools (11 %) (ABS, 2012b). Independent schools are comprised of faith-based schools including Christian denominational schools, Jewish and Islamic schools, as well as some special schools. The proportions for secondary and combined schools (those incorporating both primary and secondary grades) are Government schools 57 %, Catholic and Independent 43 % (ABS, 2012b).

Across Australia's schools the study of religion or Religious Education (RE) varies. In non-government faith-based schools, such as Catholic and Islamic schools, students are instructed in the religious tradition of their school (Rossiter, 2001). In non-government independent schools such as those with a unique specialization, there may or may not be a religious programme or practice. In government schools, a subject called 'Special Religious Instruction' (SRI) in Victoria or 'Special Religious Education' (SRE) in NSW (Bouma, 2011) is offered as a student option with parental approval for up to thirty minutes a week, if there's an available volunteer from a religious tradition to teach it, but this unit is not common at secondary level (Byrne, 2010b; Crawford & Rossiter, 1994). Finally, some accredited units that use a phenomenological, inquiring and multi-religious perspective like 'Texts and Traditions' and 'Religion and Society' are available at senior secondary level (Engebretson,

2009b, p. 154; Green & Samuel, 2012; Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2010). Although these have been quite popular in faith-based schools including Catholic, Protestant and Jewish schools, barely a handful of government schools have taught them across the country (Rossiter, 2001). Therefore, most secondary students do not study religion in any form.

Currently, the Australian government has commissioned the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to thoroughly revise and oversee the implementation of a new curriculum across the entire country. This is being rolled-out in stages according to fields of study. As part of this revision, ACARA have formulated the educational aims of the new curriculum in a document called the General Capabilities (GC).

The general capabilities of the Australian curriculum (GC). The general capabilities document was released in January 2012 and outlines seven goals to be achieved through the new curriculum at different year levels, including literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology, critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, ethical behaviour and intercultural understanding. “They play a significant role in realising the goals set out in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training & Youth Affairs, 2008) that all young people in Australia should be supported to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active informed citizens” (ACARA, 2012, p. 3). The GC comes from a recognition that twenty-first century learning needs to look beyond subject areas alone, and contribute to a student’s total life development of capabilities across a range of fields (ACARA, 2012). They are discussed quite broadly and generally in the GC document, providing an “interconnected set of knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that students develop and use in their learning across the curriculum, in co-curricular programs and in their lives outside school” (ACARA, 2012, p. 5). The last four general capabilities

particularly pertain to the themes of this research project, namely, intercultural understanding, ethical behaviour, personal and social capability, and critical and creative thinking. As part of investigating the BBP's effectiveness, the programme was analysed in view of how well it promotes these four general capabilities, especially intercultural understanding and personal and social capability. The GC stresses that "it is important to recognise that the capabilities are intended to be 'general' and operate across the whole curriculum. More 'specialised' knowledge and skills will be detailed in learning areas, particularly related to literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology" (p. 5). The four capabilities are outlined in the General Capabilities document (ACARA, 2012)¹ in the following way:

Intercultural understanding. This capability refers to students learning to value their own cultures, languages and beliefs, and those of others.

The capability involves students in learning about and engaging with diverse cultures in ways that recognise commonalities and differences, create connections with others and cultivate mutual respect. Intercultural understanding addresses this role, developing students who are active and informed citizens with an appreciation of Australia's social, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, and the ability to relate to and communicate across cultures at local, regional and global levels...Intercultural understanding encourages students to make connections between their own worlds and the worlds of others, to build on shared interests and commonalities, and to negotiate or mediate difference. It develops students' abilities to communicate and empathise with others and to analyse intercultural experiences critically. It offers opportunities for them to consider their own beliefs and attitudes in a new light, and so gain insight into themselves and others (p. 87).

¹ All quotes and page references in this section refer to the document: Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2012). *General capabilities*. Sydney: ACARA.

Intercultural understanding stimulates students' interest in the lives of others. It cultivates values and dispositions such as curiosity, care, empathy, reciprocity, respect and responsibility, open-mindedness and critical awareness, and supports new and positive intercultural behaviours. Although this description of intercultural understanding includes beliefs and religions, since this investigation into the BBP specifically explored religion, for the purpose of this research interreligious understanding was included as an additional element in this capability.

Personal and social capability. This capability refers to how students learn to understand themselves and others, and manage their lives, relationships, work and learning more effectively. This capability “involves students in a range of practices including recognising and regulating emotions, developing empathy for and understanding of others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, working effectively in teams and handling challenging situations constructively” (p. 66). The main elements included in this capability are growth in empathy; appreciating diverse perspectives; contributing to civil society, advocacy for and service to others; and understanding relationships.

Ethical behaviour. This capability involves students learning to behave ethically as they investigate ethical concepts, values, character traits and principles, and understand how reasoning can assist them in making ethical judgments. As students build a strong personal and socially oriented ethical outlook, they develop an awareness of the influence that their values and behaviour have on others and can better manage conflict and uncertainty (p. 78).

Creative and critical thinking. The thinking considered in this capability involves students learning to “generate and evaluate knowledge, clarify concepts and ideas, seek possibilities, consider alternatives and solve problems” (p. 55). It therefore includes the ability to interpret and analyse concepts and develop arguments (p. 60).

The study of religion. In March 2012, ACARA released a discussion paper among key stakeholders, proposing that the study of religion be incorporated into the field of Civics and Citizenship in the new national curriculum. This field is allocated only 20 hours a year or 30 minutes a week of class time, so the possibility of a serious secular or inclusive study of religion is virtually nil (Australian Association for Religious Education -Victoria., 2012; Zwartz, 2012). Many of these stakeholders, such as the Australian Association for Religious Education (AARE) and Religious Education, Ethics Network of Australia (REENA) are currently making written submissions for a larger time allocation.

The researcher contends that there are two critical issues around the study of religion in secondary schools that the new curriculum needs to address. Firstly, considering the increasing religious and cultural diversity in schools and government affirmations on promoting religious and cultural literacy, more tangible support needs to be given for a non-denominational general study of religions or faith, both in the curriculum and in the training of teachers, particularly of state schools (Halafoff, 2011; Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training & Youth Affairs, 2008; Rossiter, 2001). This can allow religion and faith to be discussed in an open non-judgmental forum and address the widespread ignorance and exaggerated stereotypes about the religious other that currently exist among many students and teachers. It will also enable the students of religious families to feel more included within their school environment, and thereby probably draw more respect in turn from their families towards those public schools. This would also be a significant improvement on the current situation that perpetuates existing religious divisions. With faith-based schools teaching mainly their own tradition, and government schools not offering any non-denominational general religious education (GRE) despite the diversity of faiths in their classrooms, little knowledge, understanding or respect for the religious other is created,

allowing ignorance, inaccurate stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes to continue (Byrne, 2010a, 2011).

The second issue pertains to the teaching methods and language used for the study of religion. The methods of studying religion need to engage more with the interests and daily life experiences of teachers and students, to avoid the current low proportion of schools taking up the multifaith units mentioned earlier (Rossiter, 2001). When the content relies too heavily upon factual, descriptive details of the different religions as abstract belief systems, the view is reinforced in students “that religion has little relevance to contemporary society, or to their own lives” (Rossiter, 2001, p. 3). If, as it has been suggested, the study of religion will be paired with ethics within the field of Civics and Citizenship, it would seem to imply the subject would continue to be taught this way (Zwartz, 2011). The interpretation of religion also needs to be broadened. If religion is considered solely as something ‘out-there’, that is, the abstract belief systems, religious practices and communities that others may belong to, and not also an inquiry into one’s own ‘inner’ spiritual quest for meaning and identity, the researcher believes it will continue to lack the power to engage the interest, imagination and lived experience of more teachers and students. As the researchers of young Australians found: “In talking about religious education, a number of students said that they valued the opportunity to ask questions and to have discussion. They wanted their questions and their ideas to be taken seriously. They want people to hang out with them, to develop relationships with them in which there is genuine dialogue, rather than to push them into programs... Young people want their autonomy in matters of faith to be respected. But they are willing to enter into dialogue if they feel that the environment will let them explore faith in ways that are meaningful to them.” (Hughes, 2007b, pp. 201, 203).

For this reason, the researcher prefers the broader term interfaith education than study of religion. Faith here is understood as a human universal, a stance in life taken toward one’s

ultimate questions and the practices that help in one's search for meaning (Fowler, 1981, 1995). Even if not all agree with the conclusions, these ultimate questions need to be asked as part of one's education: why are we here, what is the purpose to life, how can humans live together harmoniously, and what do humans share in common? It would also help non-religious students, who represent at least 48 % of Generation Y, to consider the sustaining values and beliefs by which they wish to live (Mason et al., 2007).

So will this new curriculum proposal for the study of religion or faith promote the intercultural and interreligious understanding so desperately needed in Australian society? The revising of the national curriculum also provides a potentially rich opportunity to bridge the tragic gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, by including an exploration of key elements of Indigenous spiritualities that can promote greater understanding and acceptance of their way of life and deep insights into the land of Australia. It is because the BBP addresses each of these issues that the researcher argues that it could provide a relevant and viable model for interfaith education across secondary schools in the new national curriculum.

Interfaith Education and Dialogue

The BBP began in 2004 partly out of the founding director's positive experiences of interfaith dialogue in the US and Australia. Engaging in genuine dialogue with Native Americans of the Lakota tribe, he was invited into a deeper understanding of his Christian faith. He received the gift of a new appreciation of Jesus as the non-violent peacemaker, who absorbs and forgives the wrongs perpetrated against him rather than retaliating or taking it out on others. Listening to Muslims in Australia share their personal experiences of faith, he discovered surprising commonalities, that evoked empathy, compassion and kinship with them. If such bonds of trust, deeper understanding and respect can be built through interfaith dialogue, why not provide such opportunities for young people at secondary school when

they are making decisions about their values and beliefs? So this led the director, who is also the researcher, with support from the WellSpring Centre, to meet with teachers from a Jewish, a Muslim and a Christian school to discuss and then establish the Building Bridges Programme in Melbourne.

Discovering the religious other. Our world has changed, and an urban dweller can no longer avoid meeting a religious other. “The robes, head dress, veils and multi-coloured faces of all races and faiths have become obvious on the streets” (Kirkwood, 2007, p. 1). The real question is not whether one will engage with them but how. The researcher believes that dialogue is the most responsible and appropriate way to engage the religious other, a way that can reduce fear and hostility and promote understanding, knowledge, empathy and respect for the benefit of social cohesion and world peace.

Although the term “interfaith dialogue” is quite recent, faiths and religions have interacted with each other since the beginning (Hall SM., 2010, p. 48). Jesus strongly affirmed and went out of his way to actively engage with religious others, such as a Samaritan woman (John 4:1-26), a woman from Syro-Phoenicia (Mark 7:25-30) and a Roman centurion (Luke 7:1-10). Likewise the early church remained heavily engaged in dialogue with its Jewish roots and then the Greek and Roman world in which it spread (Hall SM., 2010, p. 49). Such interaction and dialogue profoundly shaped the new community’s language, forms and expression in the world.

On a more international level, the “interfaith movement” can be traced to the first Parliament of World Religions (PWR) at the World Congress in Chicago in 1893 (Braybrook, 1992, p. 42), when it was recognised that global issues needed collective action by religious leaders, who often held more influence over local communities than their politicians. This movement has now gained considerable fresh momentum over the last twenty years due to the rise of a pluralistic outlook in the Western world. This outlook,

according to Peter Kirkwood is the result of globalisation, the transition from modernity to postmodernity and the threat of religiously inspired terrorism (2007, p. 10). The increased commitment to interfaith dialogue is evident from the growing number of organisations dedicated to this endeavour around the world. Apart from the PWR that reconstituted itself in 1993 and now holds international consultations every five years, there are other global interfaith organisations such as Religions for Peace, and national interfaith councils such as the Councils of Christians and Jews (CCJ), the Jewish, Christian Muslim Association of Australia (JCMA), and multiple local interfaith networks in cities around the country. All of these organisations attest to the value of engaging in dialogue with those from across the religious or faith spectrum for the benefit of the common good. Dirk Ficca, the Executive Director of the Council for the PWR writes, “Interreligious dialogue is no longer merely an academic exercise, or a spiritual luxury. It is a moral imperative and a global necessity” (quoted in Kirkwood, 2007, p. vi).

As mentioned, the researcher believes genuine dialogue with religious others can unveil new insights into one’s own religious tradition or faith perspective, and recall a person to the core values of their faith, thereby revealing what is most distinctive or of most value from their tradition for the enhancement of the world community. Additionally, since faiths explore ultimate questions of meaning, truth and purpose of life, engaging with these human questions will benefit all students from a wide range of backgrounds. Further, as interfaith dialogue is an invitation to encounter the other face-to-face, it promotes the re-humanisation of that other, thereby reducing the risk of over-generalised stereotyping, vilification and violence being perpetrated against them. Studies have identified that most violence arises out of the dehumanisation of the other party (Schreiter, 1992). So this research was inspired and driven by the underlying conviction that faith and faith traditions (or religions), despite appalling instances of religiously-inspired violence throughout history, can be a valuable

resource for promoting intercultural understanding, social cohesion, and peace between peoples from different backgrounds. The researcher contends therefore that interfaith education and dialogue offer an effective and relevant means of promoting intercultural and interreligious understanding, education about various faiths, improving personal and social capabilities and encouraging ethical behaviour towards those who are significantly different, religiously, culturally and socially at secondary school. The Building Bridges Programme is one model of interfaith education that could fulfil these objectives, and so is worthy of a thorough investigation into its effectiveness.

The Building Bridges Programme (BBP)

A description of the nature and purpose of the BBP. The Building Bridges Programme (BBP) is an interreligious and intercultural exchange programme that brings students from different religious and cultural backgrounds and schools together over six sessions each year. It aims to build bridges of trust, understanding and co-operation among students and staff from those different backgrounds through dialogue around one's personal experiences of faith and life (McCowan, 2006). It uses an inclusive, experiential model (Dewey, 1938, 1997) of interfaith education, so that students from any faith background or no faith background can participate fully and equally. The BBP operates in regional clusters of diverse schools, led by a regional co-ordinator, as indicated in Figure 1.1 (overleaf). In 2011, about 250 students from years 10 and 11 were involved from 30 schools in five regions across Melbourne, Australia.

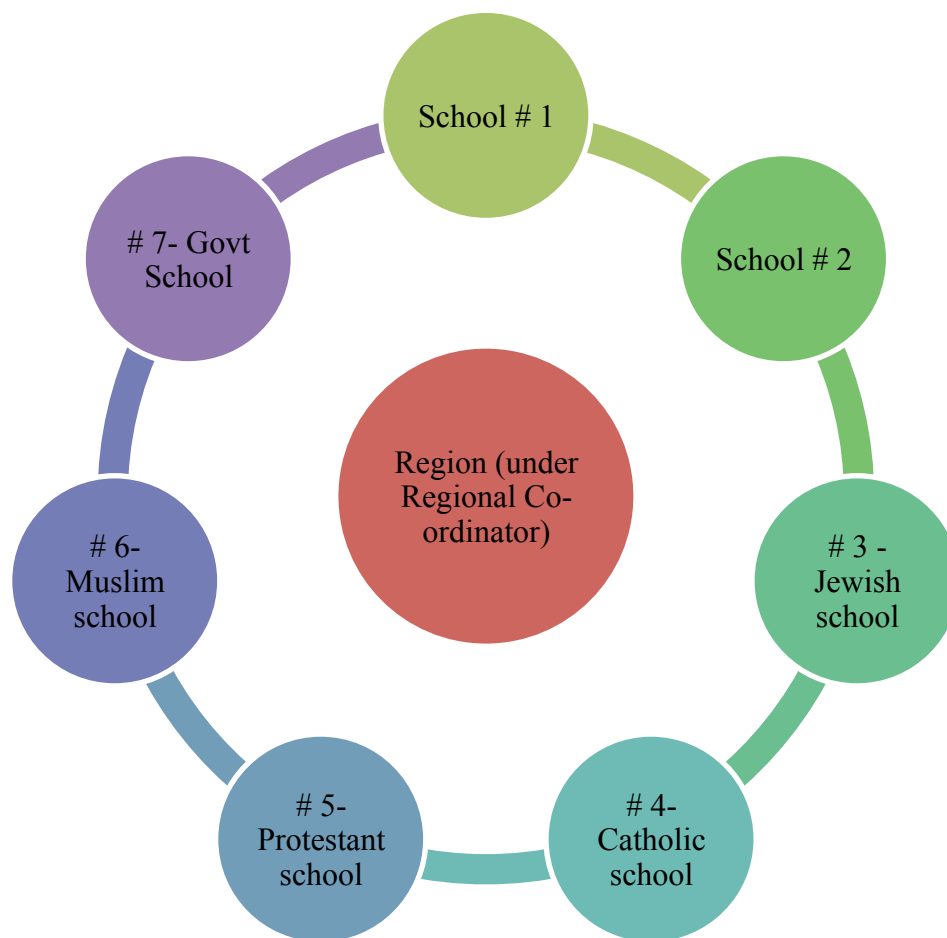


Figure 1.1 Regional structure of BBP

Students in the programme participate voluntarily, meeting in five two-hour sessions generally held after school, as well as one full day activity, followed by a final presentation evening. All sessions are held at one of the participating schools in rotation. During the programme, students are invited to question and explore their understandings and experiences of faith, religion and spirituality as these shape and are expressed in their everyday lives. The dialogues around faith and life occur in small, facilitated groups as well as more informally over meals and relationship-building activities.

Each session schedule runs according to the diagram in Figure 1.2

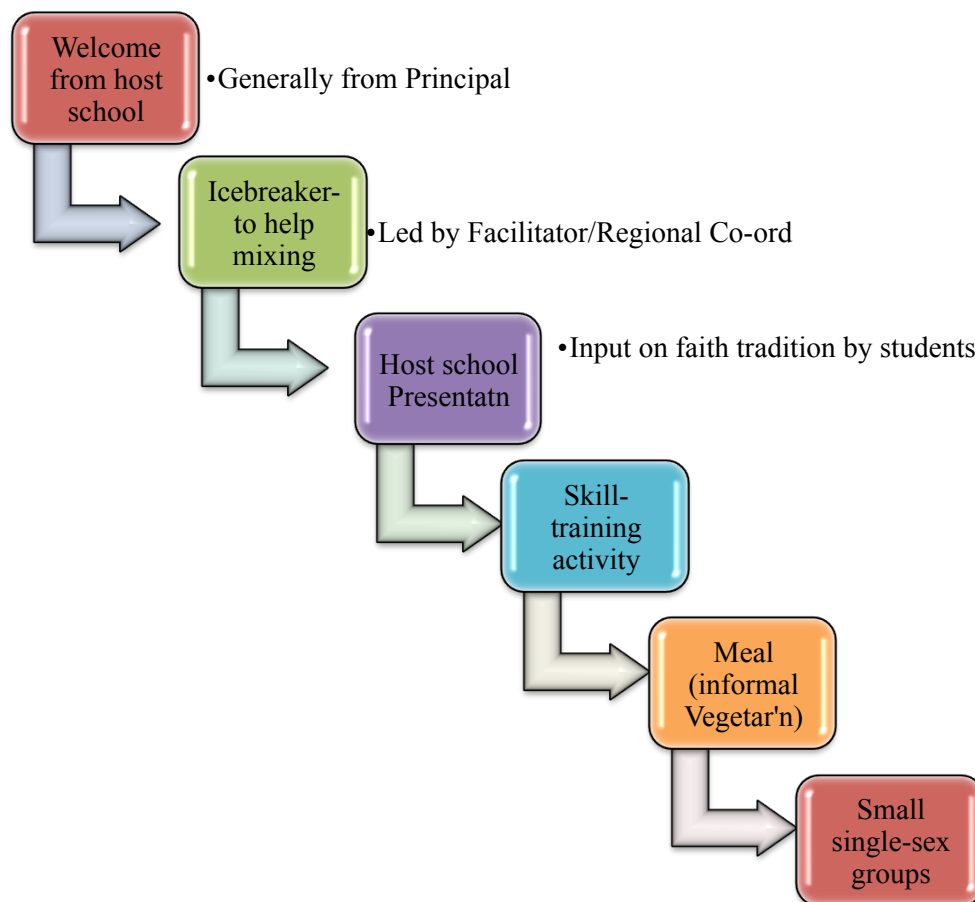


Figure 1.2 Building Bridges session outlines

As indicated in the diagram, each session begins with a brief welcome from the school principal or staff member declaring their school's support for building bridges of understanding across cultural and religious differences. This is followed by an 'ice-breaker', a short interactive activity to encourage mixing between schools and genders, and to learn something about the backgrounds of those present at the session. This is led by the coordinator of the regional cluster of schools or one of the small group facilitators in the programme. After the icebreaker, a short (five to ten minute) presentation of the religious tradition or culture of the host school is then given by students from the host school, with an opportunity for questions and discussion with the visiting students. These presentations are

intended to provide students with some brief but important information about the faith tradition or something unique about the host school, with an opportunity for questions and response from the other students. The explanations by the students often involve a short powerpoint presentation, or even a demonstration of prayer (at the Muslim schools) or viewing the Torah in the Synagogue (at one of the Jewish schools) or exploring a state-of-the-art science lab at one of the Government schools. The meal-times in the programme are opportunities for students to mix and converse informally between schools and genders over food (usually vegetarian out of respect for religious sensibilities) and a drink. Students then move into small stable single-sex groups of about eight led by a trained young adult facilitator. These groups are intended to be as culturally and religiously diverse as possible. The facilitator is there to encourage honest, personal reflection and responses to several open-ended questions, and to enable the students to enter empathetically into the world of the other and to actively engage with the real stories of a practitioner of another faith tradition or spirituality. Students can also ask their own questions of each other, if done respectfully.

Each session of the programme builds on the learning of the previous one, and follows themes relating to the metaphor of building a bridge, as indicated in Figure 1.3. Students are trained in one skill for dialogue with those who are different, in every session.

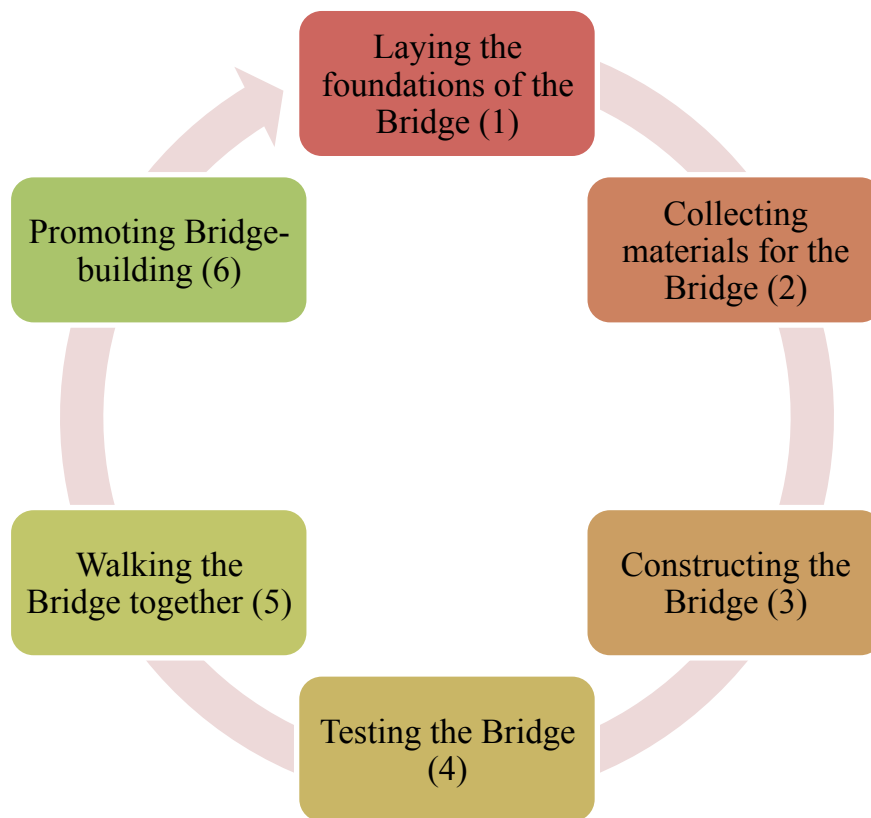


Figure 1.3 Outline of the five session themes

In the first session, students explore how to lay the foundations for the bridge, namely creating a safe, respectful space for all to share their stories. They reflect upon and consider the attitudes, behaviour and values by which they want to engage in dialogue with the other participants. Session two gathers the materials for the bridge, which are predominantly the student's personal experiences around life and faith, religion and spirituality. This contrasts with theological dialogue, where distinct concepts of theology or doctrine may be discussed. The third session starts constructing the bridge through active listening to discover commonalities the participants share with each other. Session four tests the bridge, by exploring differences and how one can respect someone with whom they disagree. It encourages students to name their unique differences and expand their capacity to respect those differences. Session five explores ways to walk this 'bridge' beyond the programme, in the reality of their daily life. Session six is held over a whole day and allows students to

reflect creatively together on what they've learnt through the programme, either with various media (like making an art or musical piece, or a multi-media presentation) or being involved in a project together to benefit the wider community. Rebuilding fences after bush-fires, tree-planting, or tutoring primary students at a local school have been some examples of these projects. The final event of the programme is the Presentation Night, when students are invited to share their learning, respond to questions from members of the wider community and receive their certificate of participation. Both the sixth session and presentation night aim to promote the building of more bridges of trust and understanding in the larger society.

The small group questions. The formal questions asked in the small groups are intentionally developmental, building on the previous session, as outlined below.

Session 1: Laying the foundations of the bridge.

- Share two things about your life you would like others to know about you.
- Why did you decide to join the Building Bridges Programme?
- What is your favourite food and why?
- Do you have a place that is special or 'sacred' to you? Why is it special?

Session 2: Gathering the materials for the bridge.

- Which person (friend, relative, teacher, sportsperson or celebrity, etc) has had a big influence on your life or faith or values and why?
- Do you or your family have any special celebrations or religious traditions? If so, what happens at them?
- How do your beliefs or values differ from your family?
- What qualities would your ideal partner have? Would you go out (on a date) with someone of another faith?

Session 3: Constructing the bridge.

- Share an experience that has made a significant impact on your life (Eg. 'a light-

bulb' discovery or a major crossroad or an important decision you've made). Or what has been a really enjoyable experience you've had, and how has it changed you?

- When do you feel most 'spiritually alive' or most connected with God or others or yourself? (For example, it might be when you're doing something you really love or when you feel most happy in your life).
- Do you pray or have some regular 'spiritual' practice? If so, what form does it take?
- What question would you like to ask, respectfully, of another member of your small group?

Session 4: Testing the bridge.

- What has been a significant hard or sad time of your life and how did you get through it?
- What is the hardest question or issue for your life at this time?
- Have you ever been put down because of your beliefs or values? What happened?
- What question would you like to ask, respectfully, of another member of your small group?

Session 5: Walking the bridge together.

- What is a significant gift or benefit that you have received from being part of this group over these sessions?
- What question has arisen for you, that you'll take away and reflect upon?
- What will you do as a result of being involved in this program?
- Spend a minute or two on this scenario: How would you encourage your closest friends from school to befriend members of your (this) multifaith and multicultural small group, if they came to visit your school next week? What would you get them to do and how?

The BBP operates through the leadership and co-operation of the programme director, the schools, regional co-ordinators, teachers and facilitators.

The Director. The director oversees the expansion of the programme into new schools and regions, assists the regional co-ordinators with ensuring the programme runs according to the aims of the programme, the recruitment and formation of the small group facilitators and sources funding bodies to sustain the viability of programme. The current director was also the researcher of this project.

The schools. The programme could not operate without the strong co-operation of each school. For a school to participate in the BBP, they need to have the approval and support of the school leadership. Any school that joins participates on a probationary basis in their first year. If that school then decides to commit for subsequent years, and their participation is considered satisfactory, they contribute an annual voluntary contribution towards the facilitation and management expenses of the programme.

Regional Co-ordinators. The Regional Co-ordinators are responsible for running the Building Bridges Programme for their regional cluster of schools. They liaise with the other teachers in their cluster to determine the dates and locations of all the sessions at the beginning of each year, and then manage all the administration and oversight to ensure sessions run according to the spirit and aims of the programme. In addition, they arrange the small dialogue groups according to the composition of faiths and genders of students and the number of facilitators available. They run the plenary segments of each session that includes introductions and presentations from the host school, skill-learning activities, the informal dinner and the formation of the small groups.

Teachers. The teacher's role in Building Bridges Programme is principally to manage the programme at their school. They are responsible to recruit and organize the students, arrange the session dates and locations for the year, liaise with the school leadership and

administration regarding timetables and access to students, as well as organize the hospitality and student presentations when their school is hosting a session. In addition, teachers may assist on the sixth session, (the ‘Creative day’ or communal project) by providing their skills or running activities for the students. Teachers must attend all the sessions since they are responsible for their students, including the transport to and from the host schools, and oversight of their student’s behaviour at the sessions.

Facilitators. The facilitator’s role within the BBP is to oversee a small group and facilitate the dialogue between the students from diverse backgrounds in an environment of safety, hospitality, inclusiveness and respect. Since groups are all single-sex, the facilitators are people of the same sex as the members of their small group as far as possible. Facilitators may also lead the interactive activities such as the ‘ice-breaker games’ or the skill-learning activity.

The research questions.

With this background, the research questions that underpinned and guided this research project were:

1. How effective was the BBP at promoting faith and four of the General Capabilities of the Australian curriculum, (intercultural and interreligious understanding, personal and social capability, creative and critical thinking and ethical behaviour) among the participants (students, teachers, RCs and facilitators)? By “promoting faith” the researcher means expanding and developing the range of participants’ personal and spiritual resources to make meaning of their experiences. It does not refer in any way to promoting one faith tradition or any form of proselytising, which is prohibited in the BBP sessions. Further elaboration is provided under “faith” in the terminology section later in this chapter.
2. What components of the BBP were most and least effective in promoting faith and these general capabilities?

3. What characteristics are needed to facilitate effective interfaith dialogue and empathetic understanding between diverse participants? These characteristics may include personal qualities and competencies or skills, as well as environmental factors such as space and time.
4. What are the key challenges and principles for educators to facilitate effective experiential interfaith education among Australian young people?

The significance of this research.

This research project provides valuable data into an existing model of interfaith education that has been practically operating continually for nine years. It therefore yields insights into how one model of interfaith education can make a positive contribution to achieving the general capabilities outlined in the Australian curriculum (ACARA, 2012). Furthermore, this project yields data on the value of experiential models of interfaith education that can be used for comparisons with current studies of religion in secondary schools. Finally, this research extends the growing body of literature around the role of faith in the lives of adolescents, and the qualities and skills needed to facilitate effective interfaith dialogue and education among young Australians. Thus it contributes to literature about interfaith education, experiential education, youth spirituality and advances knowledge which has the potential to create greater social cohesion in Australia and elsewhere.

The limits of this research.

This project was limited by the following constraints: The research was confined to the Building Bridges Programme and does not compare it with any other models of interfaith education. In addition, since it was not a longitudinal study, it does not have any official data on the pre-BBP experience of the participants, or the longer-term effect of the programme on the participants beyond four years. The research was also constrained by the fact that the researcher was not involved in RE teaching or a teacher at a secondary school, and so had no

first-hand understanding of current and effective pedagogies of RE in Australian schools. Since the programme only operates in Melbourne and not in regional or rural areas or interstate, it therefore does not yield any data on how it might work in other cities or rural communities. The research was also limited by having only one government school involved at the time of data collection, preventing the possibility of gaining a broader picture of how an interfaith programme impacts upon a wider range of state schools. Finally, because no Indigenous schools and students were involved, unfortunately, no data could be gathered on the effectiveness of the BBP in promoting inclusion of these students and their spirituality into secondary classrooms. However, despite these limitations, this first study of a youth programme in interfaith dialogue and education is significant for its present contribution and for the direction it gives to future research.

Terminology

Terms used in this thesis are defined in the following ways:

Faith. Drawing particularly on the work of James Fowler, Wilfred Smith, and Paul Tillich, the researcher uses the term ‘faith’ as a verb as well as a noun. He thereby understands it as an orientation toward the whole of life that affects how one perceives, experiences and makes meaning out of one’s experiences, as well as the pool of resources (language, imagery and community) that a person uses to construct that meaning (Fowler, 1981, 1995). Faith for Fowler is “a way of moving into and giving shape to our experiences of life” (1995, p. 16). Smith adds: “Faith is...an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one’s neighbour, to the universe; a total response...and a capacity to see, to feel, to act in terms of, a transcendent dimension” (1979, p. 12). It is the way that “human beings, either unselfconsciously or self-consciously, individually and together, compose a sense of the ultimate character of reality and then stake [their] lives on that sense of things” (Parks, 2000, p. 20), or how one makes meaning of reality- of self, other, world and God (Bachand, 2010,

p. 144). When it comes to young people, faith is defined as “the organization of trust which affords an individual ontological security, that is, meaning, hope and purpose. Such organisation involves both process and structure. The process of faith is the ongoing investment of trust in one or more referents such that threats to ontological security are kept at bay....Faith is trusting in someone or something so that the individual’s life is given meaning, hope and purpose” (Collins, 2010, pp. 165, 166).

With this understanding, faith is an activity rather than a fixed thing, the distinctly human drive to make sense of what would otherwise be a chaotic collection of experiences (Bachand, 2010, p. 145). Therefore, it is a human universal, something that all people have, even if they do not express a belief in or feel they belong to any religious tradition (Fowler, 1984, pp. 50-52).

Faith development. Faith or human meaning making is understood as inherently developmental in this research project. Just as historically situated selves and groups grow and change over time, so does faith, and the way one makes sense of and relate to God or the sacred. This understanding does not necessarily subscribe to the full ‘faith development’ theory of Fowler and others, that interpret faith primarily through the lens of developmental psychology (Fowler, 1981, 1995), but affirms that the way a child makes sense of their self, the other and the world is significantly different from that of a teenager and an adult. This position therefore recognises that one’s faith is influenced by one’s geography, physiology, psychology and cultural and religious background (Bachand, 2010, p. 145).

Religion. Religion, in this research project, is the particular faith tradition of a community, which incorporates the cumulative and varied expressions of that faith tradition of people in the past. Religion is a structured and organised system built around responses to ultimate questions of faith (Engebretson, 2009b, p. 16). It has a dynamic, reciprocal relationship with faith and spirituality, as each grows or is renewed through its interaction

with the other (Fowler, 1981, 1995, p. 9). One's religion is what provides the individual and community with the language and rituals to interpret one's experiences and engage in appropriate communal actions for the good of others.

Spirituality. The researcher defines spirituality as “our lived response to the questions Life (or God) asks of us”.² It is conscious action (rather than just thoughts or feelings) in response to a prompt, experience or encounter with a ‘spiritual’ dimension or ‘transcendent referent’ (Mason et al., 2007, p. 39). The spiritual dimension is that which resides within the individual and within all living things. It seeks authentic expression, and is one's innate “capacity for going out of oneself and beyond oneself; or again, the capacity for transcending oneself” (Macquarrie, 1972, p. 44). Since the researcher believes spirit is personal, it assumes this is an opening up to an Other, a divine, human or even non-human other, that acts as the transcendent referent. Macquarrie says that the more a person goes out from or beyond him or herself, the more the spiritual dimension of their life is deepened and the more they become truly human (Macquarrie, 1972, p. 45). In summary, spirituality “connotes the fundamental self-transcending orientation inscribed into human existence. It also refers to the ways such an orientation is actualised in human lives” (Kelly, 2001, p. 310)

Interfaith. Interfaith refers to the engagement of people across their faith traditions, in contrast with the term “multifaith”, that refers to the condition of multiple faiths without implying they necessarily engage with each other.

Dialogue. In this research project, dialogue is defined as a “living experience of inquiry within and between people” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 9). The roots of the word dialogue come from the Greek words *dia* meaning ‘through’ and *logos* meaning word, meaning or relationship (Isaacs, 1999, p. 19). In essence, a dialogue is a flow of meaning between people, out of which may emerge some new understanding (Bohm & Nichol, 2004, p. 7;

² Personal communication from Jill Manton, 2004 (adapted from an unknown source).

Isaacs, 1999, p. 19). Bohm contrasts this with “discussion”, which having the same root as “percussion” means to break things up, rather than create something new in which everybody wins, as in genuine dialogue (Bohm & Nichol, 2004, p. 7). Drawing on the insights of Martin Buber, Kramer explains: “Dialogue becomes genuine when each of the participants is fully present to the other and others, openly attentive to all voices and willing to be nonjudgmental” (Kramer & Gawlick, 2003, p. 33). It can degenerate into technical dialogue when the need to understand something or gain information becomes the focal point of the exchange. It can deteriorate even further into monologue when one participant is only interested in imposing his or her point of view to the exclusion of all the other views (Kramer & Gawlick, 2003, p. 33).

Experiential Interfaith dialogue. Experiential interfaith dialogue is understood in this research project as the honest, respectful sharing of one’s personal faith, religious experience or spirituality, between two or more people of different faiths. This differs from the more typical interpretation of interfaith dialogue between adults, as youths have less developed understandings of their own tradition (Engebretson, 2009b, p. 57). To be noted is the fact that it is between *people* of faith not between religions, on the level of their personal understandings, concrete experiences and practices, not abstract concepts, dogma, theology or political views (Rowe, 1998, p. 24). It is grounded in a recognition of the mutuality of humankind’s common life, and aims to create “an environment where diversity is held within a framework of mutual appreciation, common exploration and a shared search for the peaceable kingdom” (Rowe, 1998, p. 43).

Interfaith education. Interfaith education here is understood as an interactive process through which people learn about and learn from a diversity of religions and faiths (Engebretson, 2009b, p. 36). It would include forms of spirituality that don’t easily fit within the category of religion, including Indigenous spiritualities.

Adolescents, teenagers and youth. The terms adolescent, teenager and youth are used interchangeably in this research project for the students involved in the BBP, who are generally fifteen or sixteen when they participate.

Social cohesion. The researcher understands a society to be cohesive “where its members share fundamental values, have a sense of trust and belonging and are willing to participate in the community” (McKinnon cited in Jupp et al., 2007, p. 192).

The structure of this thesis

This chapter outlined the purpose for researching the effectiveness of the Building Bridges Programme (BBP), and the critical issues, terms and questions guiding this research. It did this by examining the background of the programme through an investigation into the Australian socio-cultural, religious, and educational context, together with influential factors from the researcher’s experience. It then provided a full description of the BBP with its aims and process, and the key research questions that formed the parameters of this inquiry into the effectiveness of the BBP to promote intercultural and interreligious understanding and faith development. Chapter two will review current literature relating to issues around experiential interfaith education, both in Australia and elsewhere, to situate the BBP and this research project within this growing field.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the purpose and background of this research project into the effectiveness of the Building Bridges Programme in promoting faith, intercultural and interreligious understanding, personal and social capability, critical and creative thinking and ethical behaviour. It set this investigation within its Australian and educational context, and outlined the researcher's background. It also provided the core questions guiding this research, and defined the key terms.

In order to investigate and analyse the effectiveness of the Building Bridges Programme, it is necessary to review current literature relating to religious and interfaith education in Australia. This second chapter therefore examines recent, relevant literature on particular themes pertinent to investigating the programme's effectiveness as a model of experiential interfaith education in secondary schools. This sets both the context of this study within current research to which it will contribute, and provides some comparisons for analysis of the theories emergent from the data. The literature is examined under the four themes of adolescent spirituality and faith, interfaith dialogue and education programmes, experiential education and transformative education.

Adolescent spirituality and faith were chosen in order to provide frames of reference, definition and understanding about how young people make meaning and how they might interpret their experiences of dialogue and engagement with others in the BBP. Models of interfaith education were examined for comparison and analysis of their aims, pedagogy and effectiveness against the BBP. Experiential education was investigated to assess Building Bridges against other experiential education programmes that foster empathy, trust and co-operation with 'strangers'. Finally, literature on transformative education was reviewed to

identify criteria for assessing how participants have changed in their perspectives, attitudes, and behaviour toward those from other backgrounds through involvement in the BBP.

Adolescent Spirituality and Faith

In the last decade, there has been a growing body of literature exploring and examining the spirituality and values of young people (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; De Souza, 2006; Eckersley, Wierenga, & Wyn, 2006; Engebretson, 2007; Hay & Nye, 2006; Huntley, 2006; Hyde, 2008; Lerner, 2008; Mason et al., 2007; Roehlkepartain, 2005; Savage, Collins-Mayo, Mayo, & Cray, 2006; Smith & Denton, 2005; Yust, 2005). This reflects a concerned interest in the diverse ways that young people are responding to their world, characterised by the challenges of globalisation, secularism, post-modernity, individualism, and a pluralism of faiths among many issues, in order to make meaning of their lives today.

Charles Taylor makes a compelling argument that the secular culture in which young people are immersed is a spiritual and moral phenomenon, and therefore presents not simply a negative influence on religious faith but a new opportunity for dialogue and witness by communities of faith (Taylor, 2002, 2007; Taylor & Heft, 1999; See also Engebretson, 2012a). “The interesting story is not simply one of decline but also of a new placement of the sacred or spiritual in relation to individual and social life” (Taylor, 2007, p. 437). He contends that there is a continuing strength and appeal of religion, as people have a need for a sense of fullness that is a reflection of transcendent reality (Shantz, 2009, p. 15; Taylor, 2007, p. 768f). Shantz summarises Taylor’s argument as a shift in the conditions of belief in the modern age saying, “Religious belief no longer enjoys unchallenged status as in earlier centuries. The modern world is pluralist and many forms of belief and unbelief jostle, unsupported by social structures. Belief in our age is marked by the experience of being cross-pressured, prone to doubt... We have a spirituality of quest” (2009, p. 16). This corresponds with data from Australia and elsewhere that found even though young people

have a relatively low level (41 %) of interest and involvement with religion, there is reluctance to reject it outright, and an openness to learn more, particularly as a resource to better understand themselves and others (Collins, 2010; Hughes, 2007b; Mason et al., 2007, pp. 301-302). This perspective provides insight into likely sources of motivation and intention of young Australians around interfaith education. It also means that faith and religion can and need to be part of the educational curriculum at school, as an aid to make informed choices about constructing meaning for their lives.

Taylor claims that secularism developed partly because of the Protestant Reformation with the move towards a privatisation of religion and what he calls the ‘Nova Effect’, namely the rise of multiple alternative options outside of the faith community for discerning what is good and true (Engebretson, 2012b; Taylor, 2007, p. 423). With modernity, came a new emphasis on the individual as the agent of reason and a lessening of the control of most forms of external authority, including religious authority. With this turn to the self, the purpose of life became self-understanding and a search to be true to oneself, or what Taylor calls an ‘ethics of authenticity’ (Taylor, 2007, p. 475ff). This explanation is also borne out in recent research that young people wanted to think through faith for themselves, ask questions, be taken seriously in their views and make their own decisions, rather than be pushed into programmes or simply told what to believe (Hughes, 2007b, p. 201). This perspective reveals at least two points pertinent to this research project: That a lot more is resting on young people’s own capacity to construct meaning for their lives than in former generations, and that interfaith and religious education needs to both build relationships and then provide tools and resources that empower students to make meaning from their experiences, rather than simply pass on a heritage.

In terms of the resources for making meaning of life, research has found young people rely on a few primary relationships for life fulfilment. For them, “life revolves around

primary relationships, excitement and fun”, rather than traditional religion and alternative spirituality (Hughes, 2007b, p. 200). Hughes found in the depth of their personal relationships, in their ‘I-Thou’ encounters, young people experience something that transcends their individualism (2007b). This confirms Hay and Nye’s research conclusion that “relational consciousness” is a more fitting definition of spirituality for children than those that use more specific religious terminology (2000). It also correlates with findings of Engebretson who found Australian teenage boys “deeply relational” (Engebretson, 2007, p. 205). Similarly, research done with 1000 English students found that faith for young people was mainly organised reflexively around family, close friends and the self. “Family and close friends were the faith referents which located the young person in their world and provided a source of happiness...Autonomy and authenticity were therefore important” (Collins, 2010, p. 171). Most did not reject Christianity and common religious beliefs outright but viewed them as helpful, selectively utilising them to gain information about the self or others. Collins therefore called this ‘immanent faith’, since it had no permanent transcendent referent (2010). Even for the few who had high ‘Christian religiosity’ scores, their transcendent faith was rooted in immanent faith since it was strongly connected with a family member or close friend who shared their faith (p. 173). These findings correlate very well with recent studies in Australia, where parental example and enthusiasm were crucial factors in the likelihood of the young person moving to a more committed level of spirituality (Hughes, 2007a, 2007b; Mason et al., 2007). The situation is virtually the same for students in religiously affiliated schools as for those in government schools, as Engebretson summarises:

Although many of the [students] are affiliated with a religion, the psychological and social landscapes of the young people are shot through both consciously and unconsciously with secularization. This means that if they have religious beliefs or practice religion it is held by their society to be a private matter. Many of them will

have dissociated themselves from their religion and many others will never have known a religious tradition. Among these young people there will be a pervasive individualism in spirituality and religious expression and often dominant spirituality which rejects belonging to a faith community for a personal search (often quite undefined). For many of them spirituality will be an eclectic collection of ideas from a range of religions and ideologies, and for a few others their religious beliefs will deeply define their identity. Not unrelated to the secularization of their age, there will be a good deal of religious illiteracy among these young people (Engebretson, 2012b, p. 18).

The foregoing data informs this research, particularly in emphasizing the value of interpersonal and peer relationships and genuine dialogue when learning of faith and religion, and in understanding the tools and spiritual resources young people use to make meaning and interpret the world around them.

Recent studies also uncover some important challenges for faith educators. In data from the US, that would correlate with research in Australia, Smith found teens possess an ‘instrumentalist faith’, worshipping a God who meets needs rather than makes demands, and whose job is to solve our problems and make people feel good (Smith & Denton, 2005, pp. 149, 165). Rather than traditional faith, he calls their faith ‘Moralistic Therapeutic Deism’, with God acting as a “Cosmic Therapist” or “Divine Butler” (p. 165). Bachand rightly counters that this is understandable, considering teens’ age and faith perspective, but she also argues that faith educators need to spend time with young people critically reflecting on their personal experience of faith and integrating those reflections into dialogue with religious language and stories (Bachand, 2010, p. 149). This resonates well with the BBP’s methodology of combining cognitive input with dialogue and stories about life and faith from peers. However, does the programme bring in enough of the primary religious narratives with critical reflection and evaluation on those stories and their experiences in the light of

those narratives? Engebretson suggests several criteria to help critique religious phenomena that could prove beneficial for interfaith education (2012a, p. 10).

Savage and others illuminate this further through their study *Making sense of Generation Y* in the UK. They discerned the storyline of a young person's worldview as a 'happy midi-narrative' (2006, pp. 37-41). It's a midi-narrative she explained because it operates on a small, communal scale (me, my friends and my family) between a meta-narrative (a grand story that contains an end goal of humankind) and an individualistic mini-narrative (Savage et al., 2006). It is 'happy' because their young respondents believed that "this world, and all life in it, is meaningful as it is" and "the universe and social world are essentially benign and life is okay" (pp. 37, 38). Engebretson adds: "The goal of life is personal happiness. The individualism which comes from this means that all choices are relative, and all choices are deemed to be good if they are what the individual wants (2012b, p. 6). This reveals not only the strong influence of the secular and postmodern culture on young people, but the need for an appropriate critique of the dehumanising forces within this culture that perpetuate injustice and violence against those with less political influence and should be regularly addressed (Engebretson, 2012b, pp. 17-18).

Interfaith Education

Interfaith education, as used in this project, is aligned with the interreligious mode of religious education, rather than the mono-religious (that affirms one religious perspective) or the multi-religious (that studies cultural information about believers' religious experiences) (Hermans, 2003). In this interreligious mode, believers are encouraged to understand their own faith as well as that of others (Ziebertz, 2005). As described in the first chapter, interfaith education is an interactive process through which people learn about and learn from a diversity of religions and faiths (Engebretson, 2009b, p. 36) including Indigenous spirituality. In the BBP, such a process occurs through the facilitated dialogues around faith,

life and spirituality in the small groups, and over the informal conversation at mealtimes and other relational-building activities. Experiential interfaith dialogue is a subset of interfaith education, and is understood in this research project as the honest, respectful sharing of one's personal faith or religious experience or spirituality, between two or more people of different faith backgrounds.

Goldburg and Jackson have outlined several pedagogical approaches to interreligious education that help situate the BBP within the wider movements taking place in the field (Goldburg, 2010; Jackson, 2004). The main pedagogical approaches used in secondary education are the phenomenological (Smart, 1973), typological (Moore & Habel, 1982), the critical model (combining some of the typological and critical theory) (Lovat, 1989), the interpretive (Jackson, 1997), constructivism (Grimmitt, 2000), and the inquiry-based approach of the Queensland Studies Authority (2008).

Broadly speaking, the Building Bridges Programme uses an interpretive approach, by which is meant that the knowledge and experience of students and teachers forms part of the content and methodology of religious education, in an interactive form of learning (Jackson, 2004). This approach recognises the complexity and internal diversity within religions, enabling students to engage with the actual diversity and difference they find in their neighbourhoods, and learn how to critique constructively and sensitively both the content of what they're learning and the methods employed. Three key characteristics of this approach according to Jackson (2011), all of which apply to the BBP, are: representation, (acknowledging the wide diversity within religious traditions, ethnicities, groups and individuals thereby validating each person's unique experience); interpretation (the individual's presuppositions are specifically recognized and engaged with the insider's perspective, and between the insider's understanding and the wider tradition) and reflexivity (the importance of students' reflections upon their learning, as well as critiques of their own

understandings, the course material and the methods employed) (2011, pp. 1-5). More specifically, Building Bridges uses a dialogical approach to interfaith education that relies on the students as the key resources and actors in this pedagogy (Jackson, 2004). Such dialogue may occur between pupils, between pupils and the study material and between students and their teacher. Albert Raasch for the Council of Europe, explains some of the functions of this educational theory of dialogue as serving to discover others' beliefs and values, aimed at knowing oneself better, that helps acquire the skill of empathy and providing a means of practical co-operation between faiths (Keast, 2007, p. 91).

A critical question for this project remains whether an adolescent, particularly in today's global society strongly influenced by secularism, can be or is committed enough to a faith tradition to genuinely engage in interfaith dialogue. This issue is important because this research is an investigation into the effectiveness of a model of interfaith education involving teenagers. Some scholars argue that adolescents generally have a very undeveloped religious faith or "suspended belief" (Rummery, 1975, p. 181) or tacit faith (Fowler, 1981, 1995), and therefore cannot engage in 'formal' inter-religious dialogue to the same degree as adults who are strongly formed and committed to their religious tradition (Engebretson, 2012a). This is certainly borne out by recent research into young people in Australia where only about 17% of young people are committed to a faith, with similar percentages in other Western societies (Collins, 2010; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Hughes, 2007b; Knauth, Jozsa, Bertram-Troost, & Ipgrave, 2008; Mason et al., 2007; Savage et al., 2006). Nevertheless, this research argues with many religious educators that faith (or human meaning making) is inherently developmental, affected by the person's physical, physiological, psychological and religious environment (Bachand, 2010). This is particularly evident for adolescents who need to form an identity whilst negotiating an expanding world of peers, street society and media; a much wider world than the home and school of their childhood (Fowler, 1981, 1995). Teenagers,

due to their age and experience of life, cannot help but relate to religious faith in a subjective rather than objective way (Kegan, 1994), so are consequently less able to articulate the way they make meaning of God. As Parks says, they are more receivers and users rather than composers of religious meaning (2000, p. 55). Considering the huge transitions adolescents are traversing, and the insecurities and instabilities these generate in their lives, is it any wonder that they seek a God of consolation like the 'Cosmic Therapist' (Smith & Denton, 2005) to provide some security? Nevertheless, the task of religious education with such young people is to help them critically reflect upon their own lived experiences and integrate these reflections into an ongoing dialogue with their religious (and cultural) traditions, visions and stories (Bachand, 2010). This is part of one aim of the BBP: to help students hear the stories and visions of various faith traditions through the dialogues with those from other backgrounds, and discover connections between those stories and their own lived experiences of faith. Hopefully, it also helps expand their imagination beyond a faith (and God) that just consoles, to recognise the responsibilities for service that flow from a living faith. These insights may come from sharing with someone from the same faith tradition or from another religion or culture. It recognises that the sharing of life-stories and experiences of spirituality and faith (broadly understood) by adolescents is an important and valuable means of educating and promoting faith or meaning making and understanding between those from different religious traditions and cultures. This correlates with Jackson's research that has informed the use of interpretive and dialogical approaches in religious education (2004), namely, that religions are not monolithic but are expressed in diverse ways in an interactive relationship with cultures, groups and individuals. This means that an individual's experiences of faith not only inform but need to be engaged for there to be genuine understanding of those traditions, and for ignorance and prejudice towards those who are different to be challenged. Such recognition and incorporation of students' own reflections

upon their religio-cultural experiences have also generated more of their interest in religious or interfaith education.

Walker (1996, p. 597) confirms that opportunities to speak about what is meaningful in and constitutive of one's identity transcend whatever knowledge one has gained about another from reading or discussing, since it frames the knowledge of the other in a living context. The researcher would argue with Lovat (2003), that interfaith engagement and study "offers one the chance to discover much about oneself, about one's limited education, limited understanding, one's blindspots and bigotries, if one is open to knowing in this way. In short, it offers one the chance to change, to be different, to grow, and to help create a new order of understanding, communication and mutual self-reflectiveness between these traditions" (Lovat, 2003, p. 8). Indeed, according to Lovat, those engaged in multifaith dialogue come to an enriched understanding not only of their religious tradition or that of the other's tradition, but of their own selves (p. 3). So research into the impact of this experiential model of interfaith engagement on each participant's self-understanding, faith, intercultural and interreligious understanding is critically needed. The nature of the "interfaith dialogue" engaged in by students in the BBP in this sense, therefore, is more preparatory, a first step in initiating a relationship with a 'stranger' from a different background and building trust together, as well as an invitation to explore new questions of one's faith and consider 'the other' in a new light, rather than a more formal theological dialogue as between adults committed to a faith. This level of dialogue is appropriate for adolescents as they are exploring issues of self-identity, life-values, faith and the making of meaning out of their many and varied experiences (Bachand, 2010). They are still learning faith, what it means, what it feels like to live a life of faith and so on. In addition, the researcher contends that dialogue of relationship, religious experience and life as occurs in the BBP provides the best

foundation for any of the other more theological forms of dialogue to occur, such as between people of diverse religious traditions.

In Europe, questions have been asked about the value of religious or interfaith education in secondary schools (Knauth et al., 2008). A study undertaken among eight European countries, using a qualitative questionnaire given to 70 students per country found that whilst religion had little importance in young peoples' lives and was rarely talked about outside of school, students were positive and approving of religious pluralism and diversity, the possibility of peaceful co-existence between different religions, and were very interested to learn about other people's religious beliefs and practices (Knauth et al., 2008). They also thought that a joint (or integrated) religious education was important enough to be taught at school, in order to contribute to peaceful co-existence between people (Knauth et al., 2008, pp. 406-410).

In many European countries, adolescents predominantly reject catechetical religious education and, due to their experience of religious plurality in society, are interested in a form of religious education which offers information about other religions and seeks encounters with them. The significance of religious education in school as described by adolescents carries even more weight when we realise how great the lack of knowledge and the prevalence of prejudice is among adolescents (2008, p. 244).

Reflecting on the responses from the students in Hamburg about the contents of religious education, Knauth writes that:

The proposals...range from material-oriented information on fundamental tenets and facts about the world religions to lessons oriented to personal experiences and a search for religious phenomena in their personal environment and local community....The students appreciate an encounter and exchange about positions on central religious questions. They are interested in the personal element of religion...Underlying this

dialogical dimension of education on religion, we find personal interest in the ‘lifeworld orientation’ of religion, in questions of how religion is applied to life and gives guidance on distinguishing between right and wrong (2008, p. 234).

These insights broadly correlate with the views expressed by young Australians in recent studies that demonstrate their interest to learn about those of different faiths and spiritualities (Hughes, 2007a, 2007b). It also strengthens the case for an integrated, inclusive approach to religious education in Australian schools (Byrne, 2009, 2010a; Rossiter, 2001). This relates to another question for this research, namely, whether the BBP model of interfaith education can be a viable form of education on religion for the new Australian curriculum in general, and the general capabilities in particular. In other words, does the BBP effectively promote intercultural understanding, creative and critical thinking, personal and social capability, and ethical behaviour (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2012)? These findings from Europe underline the value of inclusive, dialogical approaches to education on religion and cultures for young people, such as in the BBP model, and its potential for promoting intercultural understanding and the other general capabilities of the Australian curriculum.

Arweck and Nesbitt’s three year ethnographic study in the United Kingdom found a significant gap exists between the religious beliefs and practices as described in the class texts compared with the lived reality of members of faith communities who may even be present in the classroom (2011). This confirms the value of experiential, interpretive approaches to interreligious education, and the need for research to be done into their effectiveness in order to bridge that gap.

In this section the researcher will review studies into several other models of interfaith education for insights and learning into this approach for religious education, and to situate this project on the BBP within the research into this relatively new field. As the world becomes more characterised by religious and cultural pluralism there is a growing number of

models of interfaith education using a dialogical approach being trialled in Australia and overseas, but research studies into their effectiveness are still relatively few. Two European research groups are compiling empirical and theoretical research on aspects of religion and education in relation to intercultural issues in the multi-volume series, *Religious Diversity and Education in Europe* (Knauth, 2008). Jackson discusses three dialogical approaches to religious education that have been used in Europe that are briefly explored here: the Building E-Bridges project run in the UK by Julia Ipgrave; the Interreligious/Intercultural learning classroom in Hamburg, Germany with Wolfram Weisse; and the contextual **dialogical approach in Alta, Norway** developed by Heid Leganger-Krogstad (Jackson, 2004).

The Building E-Bridges Project. The Building E-Bridges Project (BEBP), initiated by Julia Ipgrave, brought primary school pupils together from different religious and cultural backgrounds in the United Kingdom to form relationships of friendship and dialogue through email (McKenna, Ipgrave, & Jackson, 2008). Ten schools in Leicester, a multicultural city in the Midlands district, and five schools in East Sussex, a coastal region with relatively little diversity were involved (McKenna et al., p. 20). Children aged 7-11 were paired with an email friend of contrasting religious or cultural background from the same year group at the partner school. Five of the Leicester schools were paired with an East Sussex school, and the other five were paired with one of the other Leicester schools. The teachers at the respective schools facilitated the project, the engagement of their pupils in regular, often weekly, email exchanges, as well as two residential weekends held at the beginning and end of the project (McKenna et al., 2008, pp. 20-21). Building E-Bridges aimed to promote positive attitudes towards difference and diversity through email exchanges and dialogue. It sought to “use electronic dialogue exchanges to broaden the children’s experience of difference by introducing them to a greater diversity of cultures than the demography of the school allowed (primary dialogue), to give them the skills and confidence to deal with a wider range of views and experiences and to encourage them to relate as friends to dialogue partners from

backgrounds different from their own (secondary dialogue), and to encourage them to engage with another on a range of relevant topics (tertiary dialogue)” (McKenna et al., 2008, p. 22).

A matrix of the three forms of dialogue as illustrated in McKenna, Ipgrave and Jackson is shown in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Dimensions and strands of Dialogue

Strands Dialogue Dimensions	Dialogue of Life	Dialogue of social involvement (for justice and peace)	Theological dialogue	Dialogue of Experience
Primary Dialogue (context): acknowledgement of diversity, difference and change.	Diversity of interests and experiences; cultural, religious, social diversity. Global links of children's families. Geographical diversity	Ethical issues for debate; diversity of positions; different priorities, understandings and values.	Diversity of beliefs; faith positions (including non-theistic); responses to life's 'big questions'.	Diversity of religious practices, and experiences; patterns of meaning in everyday life.
Secondary Dialogue (attitude): being open to and positive about change, being willing to engage with difference and learn from others.	Positive interest in and openness to the lives of others; preparedness to share something of their life with others; making friends.	Positive interest in and openness to the views of others; preparedness to share their own views, reviewing own opinions in response to others interest in justice and fairness for others.	Positive interest in and openness to the beliefs of others; preparedness to share their own beliefs, reflecting on own beliefs in light of encounter with others; interest in joint search for truth and meaning.	Positive interest in and openness to the religious practices and experiences of others; reflecting on own practices and experiences and their patterns of meaning in light of those of others.
Tertiary Dialogue (activity): Actual verbal interchange between children, its forms and structures.	Initial email exchanges: introduction to selves, sharing interests, likes and dislikes, school experience geographical location, personal histories.	Email exchanges: ethical debate; sharing views of on given questions of justice and social concern; jointly seeking solutions to given problems and case studies.	Email exchanges: reflecting on some of life's big questions; expressing own beliefs and sharing and comparing viewpoints.	Email exchanges: describing and explaining (where applicable) own practices, religious observance, celebrations, finding out about each other's practices and comparing experiences.

The Strands and dimensions of dialogue (from the Building E-Bridges Project) (McKenna et al., 2008, p. 23)

This table, with the strands and dimensions of dialogue, provide a helpful schema of the different forms of dialogue that also occur through the Building Bridges programme. Over the course of the programme, participants would normally engage in primary, secondary and tertiary dialogue, and the strands of the dialogue of life, experience and to a slightly lesser extent theology, but may not have explicitly discussed social involvement relative to their own faith experiences. Would incorporating a dialogue on social involvement enhance the programme or the effectiveness of it in meeting the general capabilities of the national curriculum?

The evaluation of the Building E-Bridges project occurred with six schools, three each from Leicester and East Sussex. It was intended to assess the extent to which the project facilitated positive attitudes to cultural and religious difference, the use of email dialogue as a pedagogic tool in RE, and the ability of the schools to assimilate the BEBP into their school curriculum. The evaluation involved questionnaires with 13 teachers and 231 pupils, seven individual interviews with teachers and 20 small group interviews with pupils, observation of some email sessions, 23 sets of email transcripts, and one teacher focus group interview at the end of the project (McKenna et al., 2008, pp. 25-39).

The BEBP research found it gave a positive picture of the pupils' attitudes toward their email partner including the use of the language of friendship, evidence of learning about the external manifestation of the religious and cultural practices of others, but a perceived over-readiness to identify with the similarities and not the differences with their partner, and very little engagement in theological dialogue. Research with the teachers discovered the project had not changed their approaches but given them opportunity to reflect upon their educational practice and apply their commitment to diversity in a concrete situation. They also discerned the need for more direct guidance from the teachers in order to extend their pupil's discussions into more challenging and meaningful debate (McKenna et al., 2008).

Despite being focused on primary aged children and not secondary, and reliant on email rather than face-to-face encounters, the E-Bridges project in the UK bears many similarities with the Building Bridges Programme. Both models aim to promote positive attitudes towards diversity through dialogue and personal encounter with those of different backgrounds, teach skills for students to engage with greater confidence and respect with those who are 'other', and encourage learning through question and dialogue with peers of diverse background, as a step towards learning multicultural leadership and global citizenship (McCowan, 2006). Interestingly, a characteristic finding from the research into both programmes was the pupils' emphasis on discovering similarities with 'the other' rather than exploring their differences, and a stronger interest in the external manifestations of the different faiths rather than the underlying meaning of that religious or cultural practice. This may indicate a stronger desire for connection with the other rather than a genuine appreciation of their otherness.

The E-Bridges project raises questions about the use of information communication technology (ICT), email correspondence and social media, as it is in such common use by adolescents. It certainly can be used to advantage in learning about the other faith (Gross, 2010) and building relationships with the religious other, but to what degree does it filter honest responses and restrict relationship when non-verbal cues are absent? How did they manage students to not send unsolicited or inappropriate emails to their 'partner'? When facebook (FB) was first mooted for a way for the BBP students to connect with each other, the director and one of the regional co-ordinators experienced strong opposition from both the Muslim and Jewish schools in that region. The concern was that students might form inappropriate or boyfriend/girlfriend relationships with someone of another faith. How might the E-Bridges results differ if they were with secondary students? Is email something that could effectively complement the BBP, especially offering an alternative approach for

dialogue between diverse schools who cannot commit to the full participation of students in the programme over the six sessions?

Hamburg Inter-religious/Intercultural learning model. Wolfram Weisse brought secondary students from different religious and cultural backgrounds into the same classroom for dialogue, drawing on their diverse experiences of religion and culture as well as aspects of citizenship education (Weisse, 2003). He used a variety of pedagogical strategies according to the context and composition of the class, together with an experience-orientated understanding of dialogue in which pupils participate with their different and various religious and ideological backgrounds to help form their views and positions on life, death, justice and civic discourse (Jackson, 2004, pp. 114-116). Drawing on Martin Buber, who understood that dialogue facilitated religious experiences when turning toward one's fellow human being, and the ecumenical theologian Hans Jochen Margull, who believed that all religions were 'incomplete', Weisse developed this encounter-approach so students could develop and clarify their own religious and ideological positions (Weisse, 2003). Although research findings into his approach in English were unobtainable, he maintained this approach encouraged the students to discover similarities and differences to each other and learn respect and the principles of dialogue for promoting wider civic interest and engagement (Weisse, 2003). His approach shares many similarities with the BBP in its use of interreligious and intercultural dialogue as informed by Buber, and to develop skills in the pupils for civil engagement and co-operation. The fact that this dialogue occurred in the classroom would potentially make this pedagogy easily transferable and appealing for teachers interested in an experienced-based approach to religious education. However it would be beneficial to know the extent of the demographic diversity within his class, how the citizenship curricula were integrated with the various religious and cultural traditions in the

room, and the overall effectiveness of this approach, in order to engage with the findings of this project.

Contextual dialogical approach in Alta, Norway. Heid Leganger-Krogstad developed a contextual approach to interfaith education in rural Norway, as an attempt to provide more appropriate resource material for rural children in a vastly different context from the urban one in which the syllabus texts were written (Jackson, 2004). She was convinced that the children's own lifeworld and concerns of the local Altan culture should be her primary source material, so she drew on these through ethnographic field studies and action research, that were then implemented into a new curriculum. This corresponds to Arweck and Nesbitt's ethnographic study mentioned earlier (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2011) and confirms the need for models of interfaith education that draw on local religious and cultural sources and content. By encouraging co-operation between schools and religious communities, she arranged visits to local places of worship and for community representatives to visit schools, and provide background history and information about each faith community in their locality, all of which enabled pupils to better understand the religious traditions in their neighbourhood (Jackson, 2004). Visitations to local places of worship as well as the religious or sacred sites in schools, such as the synagogue or chapel or mosque on a school campus, also occur in the BBP, and have been remarkably popular with the students and broadened their understanding of the different religious practices of their peers. A helpful reminder for this research comes from Leganger-Krogstad's distinction between the dialogue of primary-aged children and adults:

Dialogue between children in the classroom is tentative and shows signs of curiosity. Children often argue on behalf of their parents, their religious community and their customs, but not always on behalf of themselves. The child in the classroom is both a part of different groups he or she identifies with and free and distant from those

groups....Children at the age of 6-10 are very open-minded and it is important that they meet education that gives them both support for their own background and information about others. (Quoted in Jackson, 2004, p. 114).

Although this seems more pertinent to pre-adolescent students whose self-identities are less developed, it remains true that many teenagers do not yet fully 'own' the faith they espouse for themselves; they are still exploring what faith means for their lives, independently of their parents, peers, their faith or cultural community (Bachand, 2010). Yet their openness to explore different faith perspectives and understandings of their everyday reality also underline the value and relevance of experiential interfaith programmes appropriate to their age. As Leganger-Krogstad says, support and discernment also need to be provided by teachers and facilitators to ensure the faiths, cultural traditions and views of the students in these programmes are sufficiently respected and not ridiculed, throughout their involvement. As mentioned, her project also demonstrates the need for more educational resources that draw on local content.

Socratic Circles strategy of the Melbourne Intercultural Cluster. The Socratic Circles learning strategy (SCLS) of the Melbourne Interfaith and Intercultural Cluster (MIIC) is another model of interfaith education with similarities to the BBP (Chapman, Devine, & Staples, 2008). This cluster was formed as one of 26, to identify good approaches to values education. The MIIC comprised of five schools: St Monica's College, a Catholic co-educational school in Epping; Australian International Academy, an independent Islamic co-educational school in Coburg; King David School, an independent Jewish co-educational college in Armadale; Thornbury High School, a government secondary school; and Siena College, a Catholic girls school in Camberwell. The aim of this cluster was to provide opportunities for interaction among students from different cultural and religious traditions, so that they could dialogue around relevant issues in their lives, such as understanding and

social inclusion (pp. 50-51). Socratic circles is a method of disciplined conversation, inspired by the theory of knowledge of the Greek philosopher Socrates (Copeland, 2005). It “promotes dialogue in a non-adversarial manner creating an environment designed for social learning and personal development” (Chapman, et al., 2008, p. 51). The methodology focused on rigorous examination of important issues through shared inquiry, active listening, sharing of ideas and questions in response, and a search for evidence to support one’s ideas. “Participants are encouraged to listen, to make meaning, to find common ground through dialogue. This dialogue expands and possibly changes a participant’s point of view and generates openness” (Chapman, et al., 2008, p. 51). Studies have shown that this approach improves students’ ability to listen attentively, speak clearly, write logical arguments, think in a reasoned manner and interact positively in groups (Copeland, p. 25).

The SCLS with the Melbourne cluster involved the students preparing for the discussion sessions by critically reading a selected text, taking detailed notes in response to specific questions, and identifying their own questions to ask of other participants to better understand the text. At the interschool gathering sessions, the students were organised into two circles. An inner circle of pupils engaged in discussion on the texts and an outer circle observed and made comments on the substance and nature of the inner circle discussion. Teachers acted as facilitators of the day and worked only on the periphery of the groups, not amongst them. Although the teachers worked with the students over the selected texts in the preparatory stage, their role as facilitators at the gatherings and not as teachers changed the dynamic, allowing their students to learn experientially both the art of dialogue and how to deal with conflict and silence. Themes discussed in the various interschool sessions included: Does racism exist in our community? How do we combat stereotypes about particular cultural or religious groups? What is the role of place, memory, treasured objects

and story in one's journey? Students also engaged in creativity and art works on some of the interschool sessions.

Although research has not been completed on this MIIC model of intercultural dialogue, the project identified relationship building, independent learning, communicative competence, intellectual depth and creative expression as observable benefits on student development and learning (Chapman, J. et. al., 2008, p. 54). Students learnt how to collaborate rather than compete, how to represent their own beliefs and values, and how to give specific feedback that is not personal.

The Building Bridges Programme correlates with several elements of the Socratic circles learning strategy of the MIIC. Both were showcased in the 'Talking Faiths' exhibition through Victoria's Immigration Museum, for the Parliament of World Religions conference in Melbourne in December 2009. The similar emphasis on non-adversarial dialogue and shared inquiry as the learning strategy, the students' identification of the questions and concerns of interest to them; the provision of a safe environment and structure for participants to deepen their understanding of issues; the emphasis on active listening skills; the encouragement of creativity in their collaborative learning, and the teachers' involvement as impartial facilitators rather than controllers of the conversations are all similarities between the two programmes. The Socratic circles approach, unlike the BBP, focused more on nine particular values identified by the Australian Government rather than faith or religion, and consequently was not specifically aimed at helping participants learn about and understand different religions. The SCLS dialogue also operated more as a theoretical discussion around values, rather than a sharing of personal experiences that had shaped a student's life and faith. Its pedagogy was also more developed and explicit than the BBP and therefore potentially transferrable to other topics of conversation beyond values, which may include faith.

Dialogue at Washington High (California) Project. This project was initiated by Len and Libby Taubman and the Jewish-Palestinian Living Room Dialogue group, who had been actively involved since 1992 in promoting understanding and peace through dialogue between American Palestinians and Jews (Traubman & Traubman, 2007). The dialogue at Washington High involved fifty year 10 students brought together in 2007 to tell their personal stories uninterrupted to someone of another background. Their methodology was based on their experience of creating spaces for story telling and dialogue between rivals for fifteen years. After an introduction to the principles of dialogue, the students were shown an 18-minute video clip of a Palestinian man and Jewish woman to exemplify the kind of dialogical process involved for the students. The pupils were then given guidelines for what they might include in their own story telling. For instance, they were invited to share some of the history of their family with the high and low points, what they were taught about others who were unlike them, and what had brought them to this point in their lives (Ibid). Each student had fifteen minutes to share uninterrupted before their partner could inquire into their storyteller's narrative for a further fifteen minutes. Then the pair swapped roles so the listener became the storyteller and vice versa. Following this, the teacher invited all the students back into the class circle to reflect back on what happened, what they learnt through the dialogue and the experience of being listened to, and of being a listener only. The process used an experiential education pedagogical approach in order to give students a taste of quality dialogue, involving both personal story and active listening over ninety minutes. This project had been developed into a 43 minute video teaching resource package (Traubman & Traubman, 2007). The Traubmans also provide regular email updates on programmes around the world that use story and dialogue as a means of creating community and peace between those from different religious, cultural and socio-political backgrounds.

The value of this project for the BBP research is from the Traubmans' experience around the nature of the dialogue that is necessary for students to build trust and understanding of those who are different. In particular, they have learnt that good dialogue means learning to suspend one's opinions and judgements in order to truly listen to another, and requires persistence, a willingness to stay in the dialogue even when one's closely held beliefs are challenged. Further, they discovered that dialogue can result in divergent views converging to reveal a new social intelligence (2007), and even an expanded religious consciousness.

The Catholic-Jewish Colloquium: an experiment in interreligious learning. Mary Boys and Sarah Lee facilitated a colloquium of 22 Jewish and Catholic religious educators over six intensive two day sessions over three years (Boys & Lee, 1996). These two educators, one Catholic and the other Jewish, hoped for transformation in understanding and attitude of the participants in regard to the other's tradition and their own, through the study of theology and revisiting history in the presence of the other in order that they might educate differently. The colloquium brought 5 men and 17 women of varying ages, from the northeast quadrant of the United States, together for academic study and personal engagement with practitioners of these two faiths. All participants were committed to practising one of the faiths and to religious education. The process involved extensive preparation with guest scholars giving input and feedback, 17 selected books and carefully crafted questions sent in advance of the sessions for participants to fully engage with the material cognitively and affectively. Although the sessions were very well planned, the process was not linear, as they found it needed to be adapted in response to their experiences of leading and reflection as well as the candid questions and comments from the participants.

The evaluation of the colloquium involved transcripts, journals, evaluations and personal comments from participants. Some initial findings from this project included the

need for a neutral ‘safe’ atmosphere; participants not knowing their own tradition as well as they thought; friendships created between the participants that led to intending the good of the others’ tradition, and a sense of the other being present to them even when they were geographically removed (p. 450). They found that the commitment to study a religious tradition in the presence of a person of that tradition, with this occurring through dialogue for which there was preparation and support, was a key to the participants’ transformation, and led to a sharpening of the similarities and diminishing of the differences between the two traditions. Furthermore, they discovered that the participants wanted to invite the other into the soul of their faith, to feel it from the inside as it were through sharing their sacred spaces and liturgies, not just to provide an academic understanding of their faith (p. 432). They realised that learning that seeks to be transformative will affect many aspects of an individual’s self-understanding and identity, and will affirm religious pluralism (p. 456). A result of their interreligious learning was the need to hold in tension both theological humility and religious particularity as the “explaining [of] one’s tradition to the other in response to questions never asked before or sharing one’s traditions with others of a different faith leads to a deepening and strengthening of religious beliefs” (p. 457).

Apart from these findings, an insight particularly relevant to this research into the BBP was their critique of dialogue. They had often experienced dialogue as reduced to sharing opinions and uninformed perspectives, rather than something based on good study, reflection and critical engagement. As a result, they chose to call what they were doing ‘interreligious learning’, and incorporated a strong element of study and serious engagement with texts (p. 432). Some of the insights from Boys and Lee’s evaluation of the colloquium relate significantly to the educators’ perspectives and experiences from the BBP, since these involve adults involved in religious education, and these insights are followed up in Chapter five.

Experiential Education.

Although it could be argued that all learning is experiential in that a learner must experience the subject (Joplin, 1981), experiential education is the “approach that has students actively engaged in exploring questions they find relevant and meaningful, and has them trusting that feeling, as well as thinking, can lead to knowledge” (Chapman, McPhee, & Proudman, 2008, p. 8). This approach has often been associated with active and outdoor activities, but is better understood as a learning process. Experiential learning is distinct from experiential education according to Itin (1999). The former is best understood as changes in the individual resulting from reflection on a direct experience with or without a teacher, whereas the latter is a mutual transactive process between the educator and student (Itin, 1999, pp. 91-92).

Experience is also at the heart of religion, for religious experiences have to do with primary human experiences that leave us with a sense of the unknown (Jarvis, 2008). So a crucial role for religious education is to help students make meaning of their primary experiences through their own life-worlds and the varied perspectives of different faith communities and cultures. Interfaith dialogue, critically, can enable students to recognise commonalities between religious experiences, and recognise that it is the meanings put on their experiences and not the experiences themselves that lead to disputes and conflict between traditions (Jarvis, 2008, p. 563).

For good experiential learning to occur, Proudman insists that students need direct experience that is emotionally engaging and meaningful to them, combined with guided reflection and analysis (Chapman, S., et al., 2008). Others confirm that effective transformation of participants’ values and assumptions about the ‘other’ in experiential education requires critical reflection (Engebretson, 2009a; Nazzari, McAdams, & Roy, 2005). A crucial part of this reflection involves the student being responsible for their learning and

growth, and making their own sense of their experiences. The teacher is responsible to, rather than for their students in this process. They create the parameters, define the boundaries to ensure a safe learning environment within which the student can be fully immersed, and then act as “problem poser, mediator, and coach” (Chapman, S. et al., 2008, pp. 9-10). This is not to suggest the teacher is merely a bystander in the process. On the contrary, as research into Christian service learning has shown, intentional guided reflection and critical analysis needs to be provided, usually by the teacher, for students to engage with the deeper meaning of their action or experience, and equip them in learning to critique the injustice that exists in the wider society (Engebretson, 2009a). So experiential learning involves action that creates an experience, reflection upon the action and experience, abstractions drawn from the reflection, and application of the abstraction to a new experience or action (Itin, 1999). Kolb’s four learning styles of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation are relevant to this process (Kolb, A & Kolb, D 2005; Kolb, D 1984).

The purpose of engaging with the literature on experiential education is not just because the BBP uses an experiential approach and so this project can provide further research in this field, but because a key tenet of experiential education, as outlined by Dewey and Hahn, is growing the capabilities of individuals such as students to participate more fully in the democratic process, with political awareness and action (Dewey, 1938, 1997; Itin, 1999). Similarly, Paulo Freire understood education as an experiential process inseparable from the larger issues of a person in their socio-political environment (Freire, 2000). “His theory of ‘conscientization’ is about raising the critical consciousness of individuals through education so that they will be better able to participate in the democratic political process” (Itin, 1999, p. 93). Byrne sees Freire’s philosophy as particularly pertinent for religious education, in that it promotes students’ questions and spiritual search in the context of a

mutual dialogue between pupil and teacher that can change perspectives (2011). Therefore, another measure of the effectiveness of the BBP in promoting intercultural understanding is how well it empowers or increases the self-efficacy of the participants to engage in Australia's civil society with good critical understanding and in appropriate action for their stage of life. Admittedly this is hard to gauge when the study is not longitudinal, but questions were asked of the students' interest in promoting the benefits of religious and cultural diversity and engaging in wider interreligious activities.

Presence in facilitation.

A critical component of the BBP involves facilitation, especially by the Regional Coordinators of the programme overall, and the facilitators of the small groups. This facilitation is critical because the programme's effectiveness is contingent on the facilitator's capacity to evoke openness, interest and trust in the participants, and foster relationships characterised by understanding and respect between them. Hence, both the third and fourth research questions address this theme of facilitation. The third question asks for the characteristics needed to facilitate effective interfaith dialogue and the fourth question explores the challenges and principles for facilitating effective interfaith education.

There has been a growing interest in the role of facilitation, especially since the shift to more student-centred learning in classrooms, and increased use of group-work for mediation, community development and in therapeutic settings (Thomas, 2008). A quality that has been identified as vital in good facilitation and teaching is variously called 'presence' (Kornelsen, 2006; Meijer, Korthagen, & Vasalos, 2009; Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006), 'wide-awakeness' (Greene, 1973), authenticity (Palmer, 1998), 'living divided no more' (Palmer, 2004) and mindfulness (Tremmel, 1993). Briefly, presence has been defined as "the experience of bringing one's whole self to full attention so as to perceive what is happening in the moment" (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006, p. 267). This quality is understood as crucial

for education to achieve its essential purpose of creating a democratic society (Dewey, 1938, 1997). More fully, it is “a state of alert awareness, receptivity and connectedness to the mental, emotional and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environments and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate best next step” (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006, p. 266). It involves a willingness to be vulnerable with the students, to be true to oneself and one’s emotional state in order to open a space that is sufficiently safe for the appropriate expression of feelings that are an integral part of the students’ personhood, without it being turned into a therapy group (Palmer, 1983, 1993). With such vulnerability, it has been found that a caring, respectful and trusting environment can be more easily engendered between the students and facilitator or teacher, and issues around the power differentials in the group can be mitigated (Kornelsen, 2006). Other elements of this quality of presence according to Kornelsen, include a genuine interest in the subject matter with a willingness to engage with it and learn alongside the students, cultivating an instinctive sense of balance between freedom (allowing some ‘go with the flow’ of the topic) and order (involving good preparation on the subject matter) and being open to spontaneity (2006). In discussing the facilitator’s role in a similar sort of circle to the BBP’s small groups, Palmer summarises that he or she is:

[T]o be first among equals in creating and protecting a space where everyone’s soul can feel safe. But that role is not so easily played. It requires grounding, training, mentoring and experience. Deeper still, a facilitator must understand the solemn responsibility that accompanies a work in which people are invited to make their souls vulnerable and promised that they will be done no harm (2004, p. 77).

Part of making the space safe, he says, requires receptive listening and an attitude of “no fixing, no saving, no advising, no setting each other straight” (2004, p. 115). This receptive listening is “an active, relational, and interpretive process that is focused on making

meaning” (Schultz, 2003, pp. 8-9). It implies becoming deeply engaged in understanding what another person is attempting to say through their words, gestures, and actions. In other words, this kind of listening in the quality of presence is about being in relationship to another and through this relationship supporting change or transformation. But such listening at depth to others also allows one to more deeply listen to one’s self (Palmer, 2004).

So this quality of ‘presence’ is an important quality especially for the Regional-coordinators running the BBP, and the facilitators attending to the members of their small groups, so that all the participants feel safe, heard and understood, not just emotionally but cognitively, physically and spiritually and that the environment of dialogue and learning is as hospitable as possible (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006).

Sharing experiences through stories and storytelling.

The Building Bridges Programme specifically draws on the personal experiences of participants, especially those that have shaped them in some way. These are the focal points for the dialogues around faith and life, rather than discussions around tenets or doctrines of faith traditions. This element arises out of the conviction that stories of one’s life reveal a truth about a person that go deeper than their opinions, ideas and beliefs (Palmer, 2004), and also from the researcher’s own experience with Native Americans. Personal story-telling of one’s life has become a popular and powerful means of peace-building between former enemies (Kuriansky, 2007; Traubman, 2007). Sharing stories makes discourse more concrete than abstract ideas and therefore generally fosters stronger connections and a sense of community with others. “We believe that we will find shared truth by going up into big ideas, but it is only when we go down, drawing deep from the well of personal experience, that we tap into the living water that supplies all of our lives” (Palmer, 2004, pp. 123-124). Stories are also a powerful tool to build trust and connection between people, and between their inner and outer reality as Michael Jackson has stated:

“Our lives are storied...Stories make it possible for us to overcome our separateness, to find common ground and common cause...A story enables us to fuse the world within and the world without...In telling a story we renew our faith that the world is within our grasp.” (2002, p. 245)

Sharing stories of one’s life and faith provide opportunities to build those bridges of trust and understanding between participants in the BBP and hope in a sustainable and peaceful future (Wheatley, 2002).

Transformative Education

Since this research concerns the assessment of how participants have changed in their perspectives, attitudes, and behaviour toward those from diverse backgrounds through involvement in the BBP, studies in transformative education that pertain to interfaith and interreligious programmes are particularly relevant.

The field of transformative education is usually associated with Mezirow’s ‘perspective’ transformation. This theory is based on Habermas’s (1971) three kinds of knowledge: instrumental (cause and effect derived from scientific methodologies), communicative (understanding ourselves and others) and emancipatory (the self-awareness that frees us from constraints through critical reflection) (Cranton, 2002). The “emancipatory aspect of transformative learning occurs when individuals change their frames of reference by critically reflecting on their assumptions and beliefs and consciously making and implementing plans that bring new ways of defining their worlds” (Benson, Hewitt, Heagney, Devos, & Crosling, 2010, p. 28). Whilst acknowledging the usefulness of Mezirow’s understanding of transformation, particularly in assessing changes in perspective of those from a different religious or cultural background as in this project, the researcher understands transformative education more broadly with Boyd and Myers (1988), as an enlarging of one’s consciousness through understanding and engaging with the dynamics of one’s inner and outer worlds (p. 261). This involves not just the development of one’s ego towards self-

actualization, but helping the ego serve the larger purpose of the Self in transcendence. In relation to the BBP, this transformation would consider the degree to which participants had engaged with various internal structures of the Self, including their ego, whilst encountering the other participants. Such engagement would involve recognition for instance, of the internal forces or elements that created their fear of the other participant, and helping them understand and accept those fears within themselves. Such internal processes of spiritual transformation are considerably harder to measure empirically than in perspectival transformation. Given this reality and the fact that perspective transformation is still, despite what has just been said, critical and relevant for adolescents to foster healthy development of their ego, and gives them the opportunities and tools to realise their goals and take their unique places within the broader community (Boyd & Myers, 1988), most of the measures of change used in this project relate to perspectival transformation.

Perspectival transformation is concerned with this change of one's frame of reference through the process of learning, which Mezirow understands as closely aligned with the researcher's description of spirituality, the making of meaning (2000). Mezirow's theory was developed out of his research into female adults returning to university after a break, so the degree to which it is relevant for adolescents who are at a different stage of development needs wise discernment. He has defined transformative learning as a process of exploring, assessing and working to change limiting frames of reference and habits of mind (2000). Originally, he understood perspective transformation to involve ten stages, starting with a disorienting dilemma, moving through self-examination, critical assessment of assumptions, recognition of discontent and exploration of options, trying of new roles until one ended with a restored equilibrium (Mezirow, 1981, 1991), but recently acknowledged that it can be a more gradual and cumulative process (Mezirow, 2000). The students in the BBP, when they meet and dialogue with a religious other whom they have never met or talked with before, typically experience something like a disorientating dilemma or an "activating event"

(Cranton, 2002, p. 66) that exposes a discrepancy between what they've always assumed and what they're experiencing in the programme. This sets them on a journey of potential transformation in their perspectives and beliefs. Most descriptions of this journey involve a dilemma leading to some recognition and articulation of one's underlying assumptions followed by critical self-reflection, an exploration of alternative viewpoints, a revision to a more justified perspective, leading to action based on their revised understanding (Cranton, 2002). In essence, perspective transformation occurs when "an individual becomes aware of holding a limiting or distorted view. If the individual critically examines this view, opens herself to alternatives, and consequently changes the way she sees things, she has transformed some part of how she makes meaning out of the world" (Cranton, 2002, p. 64). This perspectival change does correlate with some of the elements of the process the students undertook in the programme, although the degree to which they seriously and critically examined their views and considered alternatives is unclear. It is appropriate to ask therefore if they did not, what this means for their changes, and does the same process of transformation apply to adolescents as to adults?

The scale of ethnocultural empathy. In investigating the effectiveness of the BBP in promoting intercultural and interreligious understanding and faith development, this research needed some instruments to measure this effect on participants' attitudes and perspectives. One such useful instrument is the "Scale of Ethnocultural Empathy" (SEE), a self-reporting instrument to measure empathy and peoples' attitudes toward those of different racial and ethnic backgrounds developed by Wang and others (Wang et al., 2003). Although not explicitly assessing attitudes to those of other religious backgrounds, the scale's specific delineations on different attitudes were very relevant for this study dealing with attitudes towards the religious other. The authors categorised cultural empathy across four domains: empathic feeling and expression; empathic perspective taking; acceptance of cultural differences, and empathic awareness (p. 225). Empathic feeling and expression involved

how one felt or responded to things like racist jokes or events promoting equal rights for people of backgrounds different to one's own. Empathic perspective taking incorporated understanding what it feels like to be from another racial background or appreciate the difficulty of putting oneself in the shoes of the other. Acceptance of cultural differences measured how much one understood why people wished to keep their language or cultural traditions, or their level of impatience when communicating with those from other backgrounds. Finally, empathic awareness included knowledge of how society differentially treats those from other backgrounds and recognition that the media portrays people largely based on ethnic stereotypes (Ibid). Several of the questions from this scale provided insights for the construction of the survey questionnaire for this research.

A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. Another useful instrument to measure the attitudinal changes in the participants of the BBP is the model of intercultural sensitivity developed by Milton Bennett, founder of the Intercultural Communication Institute (ICI) (Bennett, 1993). Whilst it also was not assessing sensitivity towards those of other religious backgrounds, it holds considerable relevance for this study as many of its domains seemed accurate for measuring sensitivity to religious differences. Bennett's model arose from his personal experience overseas and running in-service training programmes with those working for extended periods among foreign cultures. Its value in this research is in providing a broad outline of a process one may undertake when engaging regularly and intentionally with those who are different, and an instrument to measure students' sensitivity and understanding of the religious and cultural other. His model identifies three ethnocultural stages and three ethnorelative stages. Each stage has two or three attitudes that characterise it. He defines ethnocentric as "assuming that the worldview of one's own culture is central to all reality" (p. 30). In defining ethnorelativism he is quick to insist that it does not imply a blanket relativism that accepts all difference equally or prohibits choosing or acting upon a preference for one worldview over another. "Cultures can only be understood relative to one

another”, he says, “cultural difference is neither good nor bad, it is just different” (p 46).

Perhaps a better word than ethnorelativism would be ethnopluralism, indicating that there are many valid ways of living in the world (Schreiter, 2000). Bennett’s model is outlined in the following table (1993, pp. 30-66):

Table 2.2 Bennett's Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

	<i>The Ethnocentric Stages:</i>
1.	Denial: this may involve a choice to isolate or separate oneself from the other, in an attempt to deny any difference.
2.	Defense: this may involve denigrating the other, or holding an attitude of superiority over the other, or conversely “going native” from a belief that the other’s culture is better than one’s own.
3.	Minimization: this may involve some sweeping generalisation that declares all humans are the same underneath, and so minimises and devalues the obvious and important differences between cultures (and religions).
	<i>The Ethnorelative (or Ethnopluralist) Stages:</i>
1	Acceptance: this may involve respect for those behaviours and values that one discovers are different from one’s own culture or religion.
2	Adaptation: this may involve empathy- namely trying to perceive the other from their perspective rather than one’s own, and pluralism- trying to see the others’ perspective as valid and as important as one’s own.
3	Integration: this may involve the attempt to integrate disparate aspects of one’s identity into a new whole while remaining culturally marginal in the foreign context. It is a process that is particularly self-conscious and ‘chosen’.

From this measure, it is evident to the researcher that participants in the BBP were not only on a continuum, but that some actually had changed through their engagement with religious peers from other faith traditions. Since the programme is self-selecting, no pupils would be expected to occupy the ethnocentric stage one of denial of difference. However, many acknowledged their prior prejudice towards those of other religious backgrounds before

joining the BBP. Yet, among those who participated in an interview or completed the survey questionnaire, many acknowledged that they had moved from a defensive posture (stage two), to a variation of the minimisation phase (three), that ‘we are just the same’. For several others, who had more significant conversations with religious others, they seemed to have moved to an acceptance of the values and beliefs of the other (ethnopluralist stage one). An even smaller number of students who felt able to engage very fully and seriously self-reflect upon their own prior beliefs, moved toward a genuine recognition and empathetic respect that the others’ beliefs and values are as valid and as important as their own (akin with ethnopluralist stage two).

A model of Inter-religious learning and competence. Altmeyer proposes a two dimensional model of Inter-religious learning and competence, drawing on Habermas’ understanding of faith as communicative action, and models of competence for both religious education and intercultural dialogue (2010). His purpose in examining the pedagogical concept of competence was to provide sound criteria for how religious education can contribute to wider educational goals for students (p 627). He identified five elements of competence for Religious Education (p 633-634):

- Spiritual sensitivity (subjective dimension): meaning that religious learning helps develop awareness of a person’s inner world of ultimate concern;
- Religious knowledge and ability of reasoning (objective-material dimension): religious learning brings the material (and social) dimension of faith as an interpretational frame to connect spirituality with reflected experience;
- Ability for relationship (inter-subjective dimension): that religious experience necessarily involves an encounter with self and others, including those of other religions;

- Capacity for action (contextual dimension): religious learning helps people to be religious in their thinking, acting and communicating, in the light of their tradition;
- Faculty of expression (aesthetic dimension): religious learning encourages people to search and find an appropriate way of correlating their personal belief with the traditional religious forms.

He argued that consideration of these characteristics is insufficient to assess inter-religious competence, lacking the relational or inter-subjective dimension of faith. To overcome this, he plotted these competencies against eight characteristics of competence in interreligious dialogue that were derived from intercultural communication (p 635-637). With Wiseman, he defined intercultural communication competence as involving “the knowledge, motivation and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures” (2004, p. 208). Altmeyer’s eight sub-competencies (drawn from a study by Matthias Vott in 2002) were grouped under the three basic components of competency-knowledge, motivation and skills (p 628)- and included self-awareness, avoiding premature attributions, empathy, appreciation and respect, tolerance of ambiguity, appropriate self-disclosure, behavioural flexibility and meta-communication.

Although Altmeyer provided no explanation of what each mean in the context of inter-religious dialogue, his grid provides a helpful means for discussing competencies of the participants in the BBP. The schema needs to be tested against actual models of inter-religious and interfaith education for how useful it is, however, it provides a fruitful point for comparison with the general capabilities document of the Australian curriculum on intercultural understanding, critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability and ethical behaviour (ACARA, 2012).

Summary of findings from the Literature Review.

The main findings from this review of the literature are outlined in the following table.

Table 2.3 Key Findings from the Literature Review

Theme	Key Findings
Adolescent Spirituality and Faith Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth are influenced by secularism, characterised by a turn to the self, a quest for authenticity, reduced control of external authorities like religious authority in meaning-making, and perceive the universe as benign and life as okay. • Youth have a low level of involvement with religion • Youth want to learn about other faiths and make own decisions about what to believe and value • Faith is organised around family, close friends and self rather than traditional religion • Faith is immanent and instrumentalist but developing.
Interfaith Dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value of critically reflecting on teenagers' experiences of faith in dialogue with religious traditions and their stories (Socratic Circles and Colloquium) • Incorporate preparatory study on tradition, text, themes, and questions. • Four strands and three dimensions of dialogue outlined.
Experiential Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value of direct experience that is personally engaging and meaningful for youth, combined with critical reflection • 'Presence' fosters a safe, hospitable space for sharing experiences through personal stories (that build personal relationships between participants)
Transformative Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perspectival transformation involves changes in limiting frames of reference through critical reflection on assumptions and beliefs, then examines and chooses an alternative, through a process of learning. • Use of scales of empathy and intercultural sensitivity, inter-religious learning and competence. This involves moving from ethnocentrism to ethno-pluralism that can be characterised by acceptance and adaptation of others' differences; and growing towards competency in knowledge, motivation and skills.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the current literature relating to religious and interfaith education in Australia. It examined recent, relevant literature on the particular themes pertinent to investigating the BBP's effectiveness as a model of experiential interfaith education in secondary schools, namely adolescent spirituality and faith, interfaith dialogue and education programmes, experiential education and transformative education. This examination set both the context of this study within current research to which it will contribute, and provided some comparisons for analysis of the theories emergent from the data that will be outlined in chapters four through six.

The next chapter will outline the research design of this project, providing a thorough description of the methodology and methods chosen to collect data from the participants and why these were selected, in order to investigate how participants had been affected by their involvement in the Building Bridges Programme. The chapter also provides the researcher's underlying theoretical and epistemological perspective that laid the foundation and rationale for why that methodology and those methods were chosen.

Chapter Three: The Research Design

Introduction

The purpose of the research reported in this thesis is to abstract theory from the data provided by the participants, to investigate the effectiveness of the Building Bridges Programme at promoting faith development and four general capabilities of the Australian curriculum. The previous chapter reviewed literature in the field of religious and interfaith education as a means to compare and critically engage with the theories emergent from the participants' data. This chapter outlines the research design of this project, including the methodology and methods chosen to collect data from the participants and generate theory from that data to address the four research questions. These four research questions are:

1. How effective was the BBP at promoting faith and four of the General Capabilities of the Australian curriculum, (intercultural and interreligious understanding, personal and social capability, creative and critical thinking and ethical behaviour) among the participants?
2. What components of the BBP were most and least effective in promoting faith and these general capabilities?
3. What characteristics are needed to facilitate effective interfaith dialogue and empathetic understanding between diverse participants?
4. What are the key challenges and principles for educators to facilitate effective experiential interfaith education among Australian young people?

This chapter on the research design provides the ontological and epistemological presuppositions and understandings underlying this research, and then explains and justifies the methodology and methods chosen. Finally, the chapter explains in detail how the research was conducted and the theories that were extracted from the data.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher acknowledges the need for clear definitions and articulations of his theoretical framework as many of the terms used in qualitative research bear different meanings depending on the scholar using them (Schwandt, 2007, p. 37). So for instance, some refer to “Constructivism” as a paradigm or overall philosophy that leads to a relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology (Guba, Lincoln, & Lynham, 2011), whilst others refer to it as an epistemology arising out of either a subjectivist or a relativist ontology (Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2000).

Table 3.1 presents an overview of the path taken by the researcher in this chapter.

Table 3.1 Overview of the Research Design

Ontology	Epistemology	Theoretical Perspective	Methodology	Method
Relativist <i>Humans put together their own personal reality</i>	Constructivism <i>Knowledge is individually constructed, based on socially contextualised learning</i> Social constructivism <i>Humans construct meaning as they encounter the world they are interpreting, and share their interpretations in the community.</i>	Phenomenological Hermeneutics <i>All understanding is interpretation, a continual dialogical process between participants' pre-understandings and new experiences of social interaction with others. All experienced phenomena are interpreted through the action and purview of the researcher.</i>	Grounded Theory <i>A methodology that enables the researcher to move from the collection of data to the generation of theory, in a to-and-fro constant dialogue and comparison.</i> Layered Case Studies <i>A detailed, in-depth description of a particular phenomenon in a specific programme</i>	Mixed Methods approach, including: <i>Open-ended Questionnaires.</i> <i>Semi-structured Interviews</i> <i>Discourse analysis</i>

Ontology

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality, or more specifically, what one believes constitutes social reality (Blaikie, 2000, p. 8). In regard to research, it pertains to the worldviews and assumptions under which researchers operate in their quest for new knowledge (Guba et al., 2011, p. 102). One's ontological position profoundly affects research in that it determines what of one's reality the researcher can acquire knowledge of (Hay, C., 2002, p. 61). The researcher adopted a 'relativist' ontology, believing that "realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions socially and experientially based, local and

specific, dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them (Guba, 1990, p. 27)”. In other words, this perspective views reality as socially constructed and multiple, rather than a singular verifiable reality (“naïve realism”) or identifiable but only imperfectly apprehensible (“critical realism”) or a virtual reality shaped by social, political and cultural forces (“historical realism”) (Guba et al., 2011, p. 100). This view sees that “our individual personal reality- the way we think life is and the part we are to play in it is –self-created. We put together our own personal reality” (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p. 73). Adopting a relativist ontology presumes that the participants and the researcher construct knowledge through their lived experiences and interactions with others, and that it is necessary for the researcher to participate with the subjects, to ensure the knowledge gained is reflective of their reality (Guba et al., 2011, p. 103). This was appropriate considering that the project was to assess the effectiveness of the BBP through the socially constructed perceptions of multiple participants. This meant recognising as valid and analysing the multivalent, subjective experiences of the students’ “reality”, including their perceptions, attitudes and behaviours towards those from different backgrounds, prior to, during and after participating in the BBP. It also required drawing data from as wide and as varied a sample of participants in the programme as possible.

Epistemological Foundations

Epistemology, the study of knowledge, is concerned with how one knows what one knows, both as a philosophical theory and a practice (how knowledge is gained). In research it pertains to the relationship between what one knows and what one sees (Guba & Lincoln, 2005), or between the researcher and that being researched (Creswell, 2007). From a relativist ontology the researcher adopted a constructivist, and more specifically social constructivist, epistemology to underlie this research.

Constructivist Epistemology

Constructivism is the epistemological theory that humans construct meaning and an understanding of reality based on one's interactions with their surroundings and between their experiences and ideas (Crotty, 1998). This definition obviously overlaps with the aforementioned relativist ontology. As noted, others have referred to constructivism as a paradigm, therefore understanding it in a wider frame than an epistemology. In this sense, constructivism stands in contrast to positivism (adopted by 'realists' with a belief in total objectivity), post-positivism (taken by those who believe one can only approximate nature), critical (the paradigm that aims at creating change to benefit the oppressed) and participatory paradigms (broadening the epistemology beyond experiential knowing to propositional, presentational, and practical knowing) (Guba et al., 2011, pp. 98-116). Constructivism holds that the human world is different from the natural physical world and therefore must be studied differently (Guba & Lincoln, 1990; Patton, 2002), and that meaning is not discovered but constructed (Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2000, p. 197).

Constructivism, following Jean Piaget, asserts that individuals construct new knowledge from their experiences through the twin processes of assimilation and accommodation. An individual assimilates new knowledge when their experience aligns with their internal representation of the world, or accommodates new knowledge when they reframe their internal representation in the light of new experiences (Atherton, 2011). Further, constructivism suggests that "each one's way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other" (Crotty, 1998, p. 58), and no two individuals can share the identical understanding.

In contrast with a positivist epistemology where the researcher remains distant and independent of that being researched, the constructivist researcher aims to interact with those involved in the study, and seeks to minimize the distance between the researcher and those

being researched (Guba, 1990, p. 27). It assumes one cannot separate oneself from what one knows. The researcher chose constructivism for this research because of the centrality of the participants' experiences and 'new knowledge' arising out of their interactions in the BBP. It meant he could not impute his understandings of what happened to the participants in the programme, nor that their experiences could simply be empirically observed and recorded, but that he needed to probe and explore their unfolding constructions- their perceptions, explanations and gradually changing behaviours- as a result of their participation, in order to investigate the programme's effectiveness.

Social constructivism

Social constructivism recognizes these processes, but emphasizes the influence one's culture and social interactions have on individuals, shaping the way they see things and construct knowledge about reality. It considers "all of our understandings as contextually embedded, interpersonally forged, and necessarily limited" (Neimeyer, 1993, pp. 1-2). Social constructivism claims that all meaningful reality is socially constructed and not separate from the 'real' world (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and aims to reveal the ways groups and individuals participate in constructing their perceived reality. "We are born, each of us, into an already interpreted world and it is at once natural and social" (Crotty, 1998, p. 57). In other words, one's interpretations are not created in isolation but with the shared understandings, practices and language of others (Schwandt, 2000). This approach has profound implications for how one does qualitative research, as Creswell states,

For the qualitative researcher, the only reality is that constructed by the individuals involved in the research situation. Thus multiple realities exist in any given situation: the researcher, those individuals being investigated, and the reader or audience interpreting the study. The qualitative researcher needs to report faithfully these

realities and to rely on voices and interpretations of informants. (Creswell, 2007, pp. 5-6).

The ‘world’ of the participants involved in the BBP therefore was understood as a socially, culturally, religiously and historically created world. It is constantly constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed by those participants as they interact with other students, facilitators and teachers, as well as their families and local communities. So social constructivism was particularly appropriate for this research not only because the programme itself involved social interactions, but because this epistemology recognised the influence of participants’ peers, families and their religious, cultural, and social backgrounds on how they constructed meaning from their experiences in the programme. Understanding as much as possible these multiple influences on the participants was integral to a fuller and more accurate interpretation of their world. Considering that their unfolding perceptions, attitudes and behaviours towards those from different backgrounds were part of the focus of the research, it was pertinent and necessary to understand these influences in order to interpret their experiences. These social influences were apparent in the interactions participants had during the programme (both informally and formally in small group sessions) and during the interviews in the research gathering, as these generally involved multiple interviewees interacting and helping each other to construct meaning from their experiences. This sometimes made it more difficult in the interviews to distinguish a participant’s own understanding of their experience from the meanings constructed and described by another. However, the researcher sought to alleviate this difficulty by ‘staying with’ the interpretations given by each individual, returning to them if necessary, and probing their particular constructed meanings further as much as possible, through open questions.

As a social constructivist, the researcher understood himself as a co-constructor of knowledge and a facilitator of multi-voice reconstruction (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 196),

seeking to gain greater understanding of the participants' world by interpreting how they perceived and interacted within and beyond the social context of the BBP. Thus, the view of knowledge as socially constructed informed the research design of this study. A discussion of the theoretical perspectives that developed from this epistemological position and that underpin the development of grounded theory as a methodology are now be examined.

Theoretical Perspective

Consistent with social constructivism, the theoretical perspective of this research project was interpretivism, namely, that meanings are interpreted through interaction between the subjects and their experiences. Crotty outlined the three primary interpretivist approaches as:

- (i) hermeneutics, where all experienced phenomena are interpreted through the action of the one who experienced them;
- (ii) phenomenology, which is the descriptive study of the individual conscious experience from the perspective of that individual; and
- (iii) symbolic interactionism, where reality is experienced individually, and meaning results from interaction with the objects of that experience (Crotty, 1998, p. 71).

The interpretivist philosophical perspective is often used in qualitative research because it aims to understand the meanings inherent in human action (Schwandt, 2000, p. 191). The researcher used the interpretivist perspective for this study in order to grasp the meanings of participants' actions, such as their relationship-building, their manner of interacting and story-telling with those from other backgrounds, how they practised their religion with or around others in the programme, as well as interpreting the meanings that they themselves had constituted about their experiences of the programme. However, unlike many other

interpretivist approaches, the researcher did not assume that the meaning he reconstructed would be the original intended meaning (Altheide & Johnson, 2011, pp. 588-592).

The specific theoretical perspective chosen from within the interpretivist paradigm for this research was hermeneutical. This perspective arose from the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975, 1976) inspired in turn by the work of Martin Heidegger (1962). Whilst it initially developed in relation to interpreting texts, an adapted form called phenomenological hermeneutics has been increasingly employed to understand human interactions and behaviour, such as those within the BBP.

Philosophical hermeneutics argues that the work of understanding is interpretation and an unavoidable part of being human (Gadamer, 1970, p. 87). With Lye it states “in order to understand one must ‘foreunderstand’, have a stance, an anticipation and a contextualization” (1996 para 10). It also recognises that traditions like religions and cultures are living entities that necessarily shape and bias one’s understanding of the world, so genuine interpretation requires not denying their influence or attempting to remove one’s sociohistorically inherited prejudices and biases, but to seriously engage them (Gadamer, 1975). This engagement involves more than simply acknowledging one’s prejudices relative to that which is being interpreted, but “risking one’s stance and acknowledging the ongoing liminal experience of living between familiarity and strangeness” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 207). As Garrison explains, “The point is not to free ourselves of all prejudice, but to examine our historically inherited and unreflectively held prejudices and alter those that disable our efforts to understand others and ourselves” (1996, p. 434). Furthermore, Gadamer’s approach contends that only in a dialogical encounter with what is ‘other’ or ‘strange’, can one open sufficiently to risk and test one’s prejudgements and preunderstandings (Bernstein, 1983). In effect, this approach views understanding as participative, conversational and dialogic (Schwandt, 2000, p. 195). Such a perspective is especially suited to interpreting the changing understandings of students

and teachers in an experiential interfaith programme that involves active participation and dialogue.

So phenomenological hermeneutics was particularly appropriate for this research with the BBP participants, because it recognised the significance of the participants' traditions influencing their preunderstandings of the religious and cultural 'other' prior to their engagement with them in the programme; it articulated a dialogical process of change that correlated well with the programme's activities and aims; it appreciated that a participant's experience can exceed their articulation of it; and it understood transformation as an open-ended dialogue, both for the individuals themselves and their understanding of reality. These elements were important for participants who were engaging with others beyond their normal horizon or worldview, and exploring attitudinal and behavioural transformation through their dialogue and engagement with that other. The many interviews with participants confirmed the value of a phenomenological hermeneutical perspective for this research, as it became evident that the regular engagements with the religious other over several sessions allowed new questions and understandings to develop between sessions and to be more fully explored in the successive session. It also allowed participants to bring these unfolding new understandings into dialogue with their own horizon, which was influenced and biased by their family, peers, and religious community if they had one. So the dialogical nature of these interactions facilitated a stronger potential for transformation of their attitudes, perspectives, and behaviour, as well as their understandings. This perspective also allowed the researcher to acknowledge and critique his own interpretive position, including risking his particular biases and prejudgements about the programme and its participants, as well as the possibility for his transformation through the process of engaging with the participants and the data.

Methodology

Grounded Theory

Methodology is concerned with the strategy for using the selected research methods (Crotty, 1998, p. 7). Since this research study sought to understand how the participants constructed meaning out of their intersubjective experiences within the BBP, particularly how it affected their attitudes, perspectives and behaviour, the researcher believed that grounded theory rather than programme evaluation would be the most suitable methodology for this project.

Grounded theory emerged through the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) in part as a reaction to more functionalist, positivist and logico-deductive theory that assumed the aim of social research was to uncover preexisting and universal explanations of social behaviour (Suddaby, 2006, p. 633). It has become the most influential paradigm for qualitative research in the social sciences today (Denzin, 1997, p. 18). Glaser and Strauss describe grounded theory (GT) as “the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research” (1967, p. 2) or Glaser says more specifically, “the systematic generating of theory from data, that itself is systematically obtained from social research” (1978, p. 2). It is a practical method for conducting research through a creative, interpretive process. GT aims to develop new theory by carefully contrasting “the daily realities (what is actually going on) of substantive areas” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 239) with the interpretations of those realities made by those who participate in them (Suddaby, 2006, p. 634). Glaser repeatedly and helpfully emphasized that “all is data” (1998, p. 3) and that theory is always emergent from the data (Glaser & Holton, 2004 and elsewhere). “The central focus of grounded theory is the development of theory through constant comparative analysis of data gained through theoretical sampling” (1998, p. 3). Hence, the method as outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is built on the two concepts of constant comparison (between the data and analysis

occurring simultaneously), and theoretical sampling (the process of deciding what data to collect next, based on the emergent theory) (Suddaby, 2006, p. 634).

Strauss and Corbin (Coyne, 1997, p. 625) developed a more prescriptive form of grounded theory in an effort to provide more standardization and rigour to the analytical process. Their approach was heavily criticized by Glaser (1990) for over-emphasizing the mechanics of research to get toward full conceptual description, rather than remaining sensitive for the theory to emerge creatively from the data. It appears that Glaser stressed openness, flexibility and emergence, letting the data tell their own story (1992), whereas Strauss considered every possible contingency that could relate to the data (2008). Whilst Glaser has argued that “Constructivist grounded theory is a misnomer” (Goulding, 2002, p. 47), others believe he misunderstood the aims of the constructivist position, in his zealous attempt to protect the classic grounded theory position (2002, para 1).

Grounded theory has changed and developed since Glaser and Strauss’s initial descriptions, particularly away from some of their positivist assumptions. Like Charmaz, (2000, 2006) the researcher viewed grounded theory as a set of principles, flexible guidelines and practices to generate theories that are constructions of reality, rather than exact pictures of it. So grounded theory was chosen because it provided these systematic yet helpful guidelines and a practical way of collecting and analysing the data from the interviews and surveys, and then a method to interpret them that not only stayed close to the data itself (grounded), but encouraged the creative generation of theories from that data that can directly address the research questions, namely to understand how participants had been affected by their involvement in the Building Bridges programme, and to assess its effectiveness in promoting empathy and respect for the ‘other’ and social cohesion.

Whilst a phenomenological approach may have yielded valuable insights into the subjective experiences of the participants’ lifeworlds (Husserl, 1969), the researcher sought

theories of the relations and changes among the participants abstracted from those subjective experiences, which grounded theory was more suited to provide. The researcher's primary interest one could say was on eliciting information on the social interactions in the BBP, rather than just in the stories gathered (Suddaby, 2006, p. 635).

Grounded theory methodology provides "interpretive researchers with disciplined process, not simply for generating concepts, but more importantly for coming to see possible and plausible relationships among them" (Piantanida, Tananis, & Grubs, 2002, p. 3). It is an inductive process leading to an integrated theory that emerges through sensitive and constant comparison and verification of codes from the data. As well as sensitivity, patience is required for the naming of the categories and sub-categories that are constantly adjusted or refined until the final phase where the force of the data leads to a point of saturation or certainty (Charmaz, 2006). It therefore provided a valuable framework for conceptualizing a theory on the impact on the participants of their involvement in the BBP and to assess its effectiveness at developing an empathetic understanding of the other, emerging out of the data gleaned from the participants. This is especially suited to research that will alternate between the data of unfolding and transforming perspectives of the participants and developing hypotheses on the effectiveness of the overall programme.

In this research, the methodology followed the principles of data collection and analysis promoted by Glaser where the emphasis is on categories and theory emerging from the data (Goulding, 2002). The researcher used grounded theory because any assessment of the effectiveness of the BBP needed to emerge from the categories arising from the fieldwork data with the participants and systematic comparative analysis. This then allowed for the generation of theory to answer research questions one and two, namely, how the participants were affected by their involvement in the programme, and what were the most and least effective components of the BBP.

Several key challenges arose from the use of grounded theory methodology for this project. As others have noted (Suddaby, 2006, p. 636), it was often difficult to identify the emerging theories on a higher level of abstraction than the data itself. That is, to note new theoretical understandings about how the students were interpreting their reality beyond the anticipated perspectives or mere confirmation of preconceived notions of what was observed, or those of the researcher's own preunderstandings of what occurred. Another challenge was in holding the tension between the 'art and science' of this methodology or to maintain what Glaser referred to as "theoretical sensitivity" (1978). This sensitivity was needed to balance the techniques of the methodology with the open space required for interpretive and creative insights. In attempting to be faithful to the methodology, as a learner and first time user of GT, the researcher leant more regularly and easily on the techniques, rather than allowing creative space for profoundly new insights to emerge.

Grounded theory in this project involved the following steps:

- a) Gathering the qualitative data (via transcripts of the semi-structured interviews)
- b) Approaching the groups in discrete groups (pre 2010 and 2010 participants, involving students from the different faith-based and government schools, girls and boys).
- c) Conducting broad brush identification of the categories, through constant comparison
- d) Rating the categories, according to frequency of reference
- e) Discerning whether to discard some categories, and if so which ones to discard and why.
- f) Finer analysis, namely identifying the properties of each main category, through retracing through the data on several occasions
- g) Tabulating the results and telling the story.

This qualitative research involved ‘sampling’, identifying the set of people to be interviewed within the project that would prove the most fertile for the research questions. This meant choosing the student and teacher sample for the semi-structured interviews and the questionnaires that would provide the most breadth and depth on the programme’s effectiveness. So approaches were made directly to 16 particular schools, chosen in order to achieve the breadth of perspective, background and experience that was sought. As mentioned, grounded theory involves “theoretical sampling”, usually understood as allowing the researcher to extend the sample constantly, to gather more data on the categories they’ve initially identified. However, as Coyne notes, there is considerable confusion and overlapping of types of sampling (1998) and so she suggests a more accurate term would be “analysis driven purposeful sampling” (Coyne, 1997, p. 623).

Theoretical sampling in the strict sense was not possible in this project because of several logistical factors: the narrow windows of time students had available for interviews; the size and the number of groups to be interviewed (84 students and 18 teachers at 16 different schools in the midst of school terms, ‘Holy days’, and examinations) plus requirements from the ethics committee and some schools that all questions be submitted in advance of the interview. So a purposeful, selective sample was used.

Purposeful, selective sampling according to Coyne “refers to a decision made prior to beginning a study to sample subjects according to preconceived, but reasonable initial set of criteria” (1997, p. 628). She notes, realistically, selective sampling is important early on “because neither ethics committees nor funding agencies are likely to approve a research project without a clear specification of the kinds of subjects desired for the study” (Sandelowski, Holditch-Davis, & Harris, 1992, p. 302). Further, the researcher heeded the oft-repeated warning against slavish adherence to one sampling strategy, when it didn’t serve the purpose of the research study (Coyne, 1997, p. 630).

Sandelowski (1995; 1992) has suggested three different kinds of sampling: maximum variation, phenomenal variation and theoretical variation. Maximum variation aims to have large variations in a sample; phenomenal variation relates to selecting the sample on the basis of the target phenomenon under study, and the theoretical kind considers variations of the theoretical construct associated with the project (p. 181-2). Coyne concluded that “all sampling in qualitative research is purposeful sampling, for the sample is always intentionally selected according to the needs of the study” (1997, p. 629). So the researcher adopted purposeful, selective sampling aiming for maximum variation, namely, to choose schools that would provide as broad a range of faiths, ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds whilst maintaining as much gender balance as possible.

An Investigative Layered Case study

Whilst definitions of case study vary across the literature (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 255), there is broad consensus that case studies aim to gain a detailed understanding of the processes of social phenomena involved within a setting either via single or multiple cases and numerous levels of analysis (Yin, 1994). For a case study’s capacity to provide detailed and rich descriptions of the social phenomena, namely the nature of the interactions and the changes that resulted for the participants in the programme, a layered case study approach (Stake, 2006) seemed particularly appropriate.

For the sake of clarity, the researcher adopted Simon’s definition of a case study as “an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a ‘real life’ context.... The primary purpose is to generate in-depth understanding of a specific topic...programme...to generate knowledge and/or inform policy development, professional practice and civil or community action” (2009, p. 21).

An investigative-layered case study for this research meant collecting data by surveys and interviews from a purposeful sample of diverse groups of students and teachers. The purpose of adopting the case study approach was to understand the social phenomena and the impact the programme had on a wide range of participants- students, teachers and facilitators from different backgrounds to yield the richest insights and ‘thickest’ data (Holloway, 1997, p. 154) on the effectiveness of the BBP. The size of the case study was determined by the responses from participants from the purposeful sample. This purposeful sample, as mentioned, was multilayered, so involved:

- Pre-2010 students and 2010 students
- Girls and boys from different religious, cultural and social backgrounds and schools
- Teachers at the schools involved in the programme, from different religious, cultural and social backgrounds
- Facilitators of the small groups- both male and female- from different religious and cultural backgrounds.
- Regional co-ordinators of the programme.

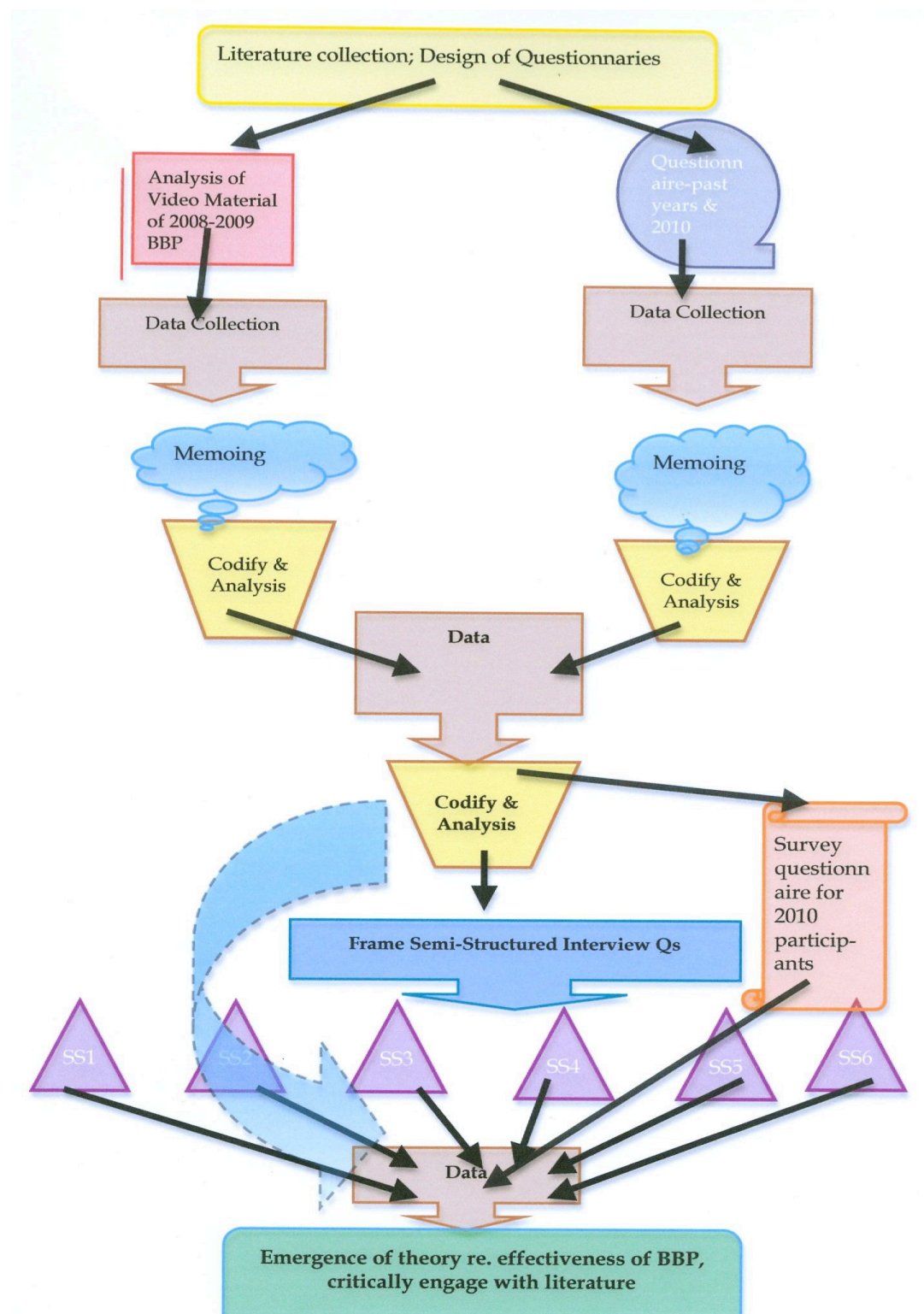
The researcher recognised that a disadvantage of using a case study relates to the difficulty of generalising the findings to a larger population (Bloor & Wood, 2006, p. 29) however with Yin (1994) argues that produced results can be generalizable to theoretical propositions, and contends that the benefit in depth and richness of description outweighed this disadvantage (Lincoln & Guba, 2002).

Methods

As the primary aim of this research was to understand how the participants had been affected through their involvement in the BBP, and the elements of the programme that had been most effective in promoting an empathetic understanding, attitude and behaviour toward

the 'other' from their own perspective, three methods were adopted. The methods comprised open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured or guided interviews and discourse analysis. Such a combination of methods provided methodological triangulation, and thereby strengthened the study (Goulding, 1999).

The grounded theory methodology involved the researcher getting into and close to the world of the participants in order to observe the environment in which the programme's activities took place, as well as the actions and interactions that occurred in it (Goulding, 1999). In this particular research, the worlds of the participants and those of the researcher were not entirely distinct; indeed the researcher became part of the context being investigated.

Figure 3.1 Data gathering and analysis processes

Initial Analysis

As indicated in Figure 3.1, this research began with analysis of video material and open-ended questionnaires of past year students. The video material included a comprehensive series of videos made for Museum Victoria's "Talking Faiths" exhibit, in preparation for the Parliament of World Religions which gathered in Melbourne in December 2009. These videos were all posted online at <http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/discoverycentre/talking-faiths/building-bridges/> in 2009, and are still publically available. The videos contain extensive footage of all components of the BBP, from each of the six sessions held in the eastern regional cluster of schools over that year. In addition, videos produced by the BBP for marketing to new schools, recruitment of students, as well as education and training of facilitators and teachers produced with support of government and private funding bodies, as well as footage of student responses from the annual public presentation nights of the programme in 2007-2009 were also used for preliminary analysis.

The aforementioned open-ended questionnaires involved anonymous, written responses from students involved in the programme prior to 2010, as part of the BBP's annual reviews. Students responded to four questions in these questionnaires: What did I learn from participating in the Building Bridges Programme? How have I changed since participating in the programme? What suggestions do I have to improve the BBP? How would I encourage other students to get involved in the BBP next year? Every student involved in the programme in 2008 and 2009 was given the questionnaire, and invited to respond and return them on their sixth session. Three hundred questionnaires were collected and used as part of this preliminary analysis. .

The videos and open-ended questionnaires revealed the nature of many of the changes student participants underwent through their engagement in the BBP, for example in their

expanded learning and appreciation of other faiths, their more inclusive attitudes and perceptions of the religious other, their willingness to challenge overly stereotypical views of the other, and even form lasting friendships with the other. These insights proved helpful in framing some of the questions for the semi-structured interviews and survey questionnaire. So the videos and questionnaires were analysed by a process of memoing and coding to identify four broad categories of impact on the students' interfaith education. The four categories identified were:

Cognitive learning: What did the students learn about faith- their own and others- from participating in the programme?

Emotional learning: How did the students' feelings change about faith, themselves and the 'other' through their involvement in the BBP?

Attitudinal and perspectival learning: How were the students' attitudes toward the other affected by their participation?

Social learning and behaviour: How was the students' behaviour towards the 'other' affected by their involvement in the programme?

These identified broad categories then provided some general guidance of fields to be explored in more detail through a second, formal survey questionnaire and for the semi-structured interviews.

Determining the Participants (Purposeful Sample): The sample was chosen from particular schools rather than selecting one whole region, in order to ensure the greatest possible diversity across the current BBP participants and be representative of multicultural Melbourne. The schools selected were:

1. Mt Scopus Memorial College (MSMC, an explicitly Jewish co-educational school);
2. King David School (a progressive Jewish co-educational college, that is significantly different from MSMC);

3. Minaret College (an explicitly Islamic co-educational school, in a very multicultural demographic);
4. East Preston Islamic College (a socio-economically more challenged Islamic co-educational school, with students from diverse cultural backgrounds);
5. Australian International Academy (a large Islamic co-educational school with a diverse socio-economic demographic).
6. Mt Hira College (a small, Islamic/Turkish co-educational school in a poorer, culturally diverse demographic);
7. Aquinas College (a Catholic co-educational school but in a largely mono-cultural demographic);
8. Mazenod College (an explicitly Catholic boys school with a diverse socio-economic and cultural demographic);
9. Donvale College (an Independent, explicitly Christian co-educational school)
10. Carey Grammar (a co-educational private school with Christian background, but with a broadening cultural and religious demographic);
11. Caulfield Grammar School, Wheeler's Hill campus (a large co-educational school with a very broad cultural and religious demographic);
12. Strathcona Baptist Girls Grammar School (a moderately Christian, diverse religious faith, single gender school);
13. Strathmore Secondary College (a government school with a diverse cultural, religious and socio-economic demographic);
14. Avila College (an explicitly Catholic girls school) in a changing socio-cultural demographic);
15. Xavier College (an explicitly Catholic- Jesuit- boys school with students from a predominantly wealthier economic background);

16. St Columba's College (a Catholic girls school in a changing religious environment).

Survey Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire was chosen as a measure to collect data on more specific components of the programme, from a wider sample of participants than could be included in the semi-structured interviews. This was particularly in order to answer the second research question: What elements of the Building Bridges Programme have been most and least effective in promoting the educational goals of intercultural and interreligious understanding, personal and social capability, ethical behaviour and faith development for the students?

An initial questionnaire of 25 questions was sent out to the 'past' students (those who had participated in the programme prior to 2010) who had accepted the invitation to be interviewed. Their responses to the survey were then handed back to the interviewer or the researcher on the day of their interview. This was at the beginning phase of the data collection period. Twenty-two students of which 11 were girls and 11 were boys completed this initial questionnaire. On receipt of their responses, the researcher judged that the data received remained quite general, and did not provide sufficient detail on all the particular components of the programme. So the questionnaire was expanded with the assistance of a quantitative data expert to include 19 more specific questions, as well as questions about the ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds of the pupils. This updated version was then submitted to the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and approved. The initial expanded version of the questionnaire is included in Appendix 2, and the HREC approval is included in Appendix 6.

The expanded survey questionnaire was sent out to all teachers involved in the programme in 2010, by email. This was to draw on as wide a sample of the 2010 participants and graduates of the programme as possible. In addition to the initial 22 respondents, a further 85 self-selected students (57 girls and 28 boys) completed the second version of the

questionnaire with assistance from their respective teachers. The teachers then assisted in ensuring the students completed and returned the questionnaires within a reasonable time period. This meant a total of one hundred and seven students from sixteen schools sent back questionnaire responses, which was almost half of the total number of students who participated in the BBP in 2010. A breakdown of the students by school and gender, and the version of the questionnaire they completed is provided in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2 Student background in Survey Questionnaire

School-background	List of Schools (of this b'gnd)	Gender of students completing quest're.	No. students completing Question're- Version 1	No. students completing Question're Version 2	Total Student number
Jewish	MSMC, KDS	Girls	1	7	8
Jewish	MSMC	Boys	1	-	1
Catholic	AC, KC, NC, St C,	Girls	-	22	22
Catholic	MC, NC, XC	Boys	4	13	17
Protestant	CBG, CGS, DV, SBGG,	Girls	4	15	19
Protestant	CBG, CGS, DV	Boys	3	4	7
Government	SC	Girls	-	1	1
Government	SC	Boys	-	1	1
Muslim	EPIC, IC, MHC,	Girls	6	12	18
Muslim	EPIC, IC, MHC,	Boys	3	10	13
TOTALS			22	85	107

Four schools of the 16 (that had students who completed version 2 of the questionnaire) were not among those chosen for interviews. Three were Catholic schools (one single sex girls school and one single sex boys school and one co-educational school) and one was a Muslim co-educational school.

Both questionnaires allowed students to fill out the forms anonymously, and gave them a range of multiple options for each question. In the initial questionnaire (version one), a simple range of one through five options was provided for each of the 25 questions. In the second questionnaire (version two), the options ranged through two scales with six options in

each. The first scale ranged through nil, little, somewhat, quite a lot, a lot and don't know, whilst the second scale ranged through nil, occasionally, sometimes, quite often, always and don't know, over the forty-three questions. The questions explored students' general views, attitudes and behaviours in response to different aspects of the programme, and provided a range of possible responses. For instance they were asked: To what extent did you enjoy the small group sharing? In the category of 'understanding', students were asked to grade such things as their interest in learning about people from different religious and cultural backgrounds than their own. Under 'behaviour', they were asked questions such as: 'I am motivated to share what I have learnt about dialogue with those from other religious backgrounds'. In the category of 'attitudes', students were invited to grade their responses to statements that make fun of those from different backgrounds for instance.

A measure that uses multiple options such as this, it is recognised, is a somewhat imprecise instrument to measure students' responses, in that it is subject to their personal state, context and the time they had available, and how they interpret the words and impact of the programme on their lives. It only provides an approximate picture of the impact of the programme on the students to these specific questions on that particular day that they completed the survey. Factors that may have significantly affected their choice cannot be determined from their responses. This fact was one reason for asking more specific questions about their background, and particularly whether English was the main language spoken at their home or not. A breakdown of the background of the students who completed the expanded questionnaire by student numbers, including their faith background, whether they were born overseas and whether they spoke a language other than English at home is included in Table 3.4. As inferred, this information was not obtained from the 22 students who completed the first survey questionnaire. Given these limitations however, the value of the survey questionnaire was to collect data on a wider sample of students than in the

interviews, collect some data on more specific components on the BBP, and use an instrument that was more independent of the influence of the researcher than the interviews students had with him.

Table 3.3. Background information of students completing questionnaire version 2.

Major category by school	Faith background of student	Gender	Overseas born	Language other than English spoken at home
Jewish	‘Jewish’	Female	One of 8	One of 8
Catholic	‘Catholic’ plus 1 Greek Orthodox	Female	Six of 22	Seven of 22
Catholic	Catholic	Male	One of 13	Six of 13
Protestant	2 x Hindu, 1 x Greek Orthodox, 1 x ‘Muslim’, 1 x ‘Nil’, the rest ‘Christian’ or left blank	Female	One of 15	Three of 15.
Protestant	1 Buddhist, remainder were ‘Christian’	Male	Nil	Two of 4.
Government	‘Nil’	Female	Nil	Nil
Government	‘Atheist’	Male	Nil	Nil
Muslim	Muslim	Female	Two of 12	Nine of 12
Muslim	Muslim	Male	One of 10	Ten of 10

A full copy of the survey questionnaire is provided in Appendix 2, and the data collected and tabled, and the emergent theory is outlined with the wider and full responses of the students in chapter 4.

Students were then given a no-obligation invitation to participate in a semi-structured interview about their experiences of the programme through the BBP teacher representative at their school. Those students who self-selected were given appropriate accompanying correspondence, including a letter for their parents, a personal consent form to discuss with

their parents, that if they were in full-agreement were then to be returned through their teacher to the researcher.

Semi-structured Interviews

Initially, focus groups were to be a key source of qualitative data for this project, because they involve “a series of audio-recorded group discussions with differently composed groups of individuals...to provide data on group beliefs and group norms” (Bloor & Wood, 2006, p. 88). This would have involved students from different backgrounds and schools present in the one group, and thereby provided data by observation as well as verbally, of the kinds of interactions and furthering of relationships made between the students. However, such diversity in the focus group may well have inhibited some data from students who were cautious of offending the religious or cultural sensibilities of others in the focus group. As it was, it proved virtually impossible to run focus groups for this study because of the practical difficulty of scheduling dates and locations between different schools, with varying curriculum requirements, differing religious holidays, and transport issues. Such practical difficulties are apparently common with focus groups (Bloor & Wood, 2006, p. 89). So semi-structured interviews with participants from the same school were adopted instead.

The semi-structured interview is also called the ‘guided interview’, and involves outlining the topics or subject areas to be explored, within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe and ask questions that will illuminate that particular subject (Patton, 2002, p. 386). A semi-structured interview method was chosen (over a more structured approach) for its more informal, conversational style, and its freedom to be shaped partly by the researcher’s pre-existing question guide and partly by concerns emergent in the interview (Bloor & Wood, 2006, p. 104). Some advantages of this approach were that it allowed the interviewer to decide how best to use the limited time available and it made interviewing a

number of different people more systematic and comprehensive. Further, whilst the diversity of a focus group was not possible, the groups interviewed did comprise of some diversity: at the co-educational schools, boys and girls were typically present; students from different religious and cultural backgrounds at the same school were often interviewed together; and there was a wide range of religious observance represented among the students, facilitators and teachers. In addition, having students of the same school present proved advantageous for the interviews because of the strong familiarity and depth of trust between these students that facilitated in turn an ease of communication, as well as recruitment.

The requirement by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) that all the interview questions be determined and provided to the schools beforehand restricted somewhat the freedom to ask new questions of the respondents and to explore their responses to some of the theories emerging from the data of earlier interviews.

All the interviews of students and teachers were held in familiar, safe and suitable environments at their respective schools either during or after classes. The venues were arranged by the teachers at the school, and were generally held in classrooms or staff rooms, or a comfortable room with a table for the recording equipment to be located. Participants were positioned in the room with the aim to be as free from external distraction as possible, and clearly heard and audiotaped by the machine, so their actual words and perspectives were recorded. The size of the groups varied from school to school, and was affected by recruitment, availability of students, and curriculum expectations of students from teachers or parents. Eighty-four students were interviewed in these semi-structured 'guided' conversations, mostly in small groups, from three to seven. There were two main groups of student participants: those who participated in the programme before 2010 (28 students of which 17 were girls, 11 were boys), and those who participated in 2010 (56 students made up of 37 girls, and 19 boys). Generally, the groups of students smaller than six in number

provided more in depth exploration than the larger groups. With the latter, it proved harder to probe the responses of all interviewees in the time available, especially with the quieter or more introverted students, when others were swifter in their comments. At least one teacher representative from each of these schools was also interviewed, as well as two Principals, who were strongly aware of the programme, totally 18 teacher interviews. The questions in the teachers' interview are included in Appendix 3. Four regional co-ordinators were also interviewed, and their questions are contained in Appendix 6. Twelve facilitators from different religious and cultural backgrounds were also interviewed, and their composition was the following: three Jewish facilitators- two female and one male; two Islamic facilitators- both male; six Christian facilitators- four female and two male; and one female Buddhist facilitator. Their questions are contained in Appendix 7. Two different methods were adopted to protect the identity of respondents. Pseudonyms were chosen to replace students' names to provide a sense of personality to their responses and to assist in the preparation of a journal article based on the findings from the students. Codes were adopted for the educators and facilitators to protect their identity.

The full schedule of interviews of the students, teachers, regional co-ordinators and facilitators is contained in the following table.

Table 3.4 Interview Schedule with participants in the BBP.

Participants	No	Schools	Date of Interview
Students	84		
Female 5, Male 3 (2010)	8	Aquinas College	3 November 2010
Female (pre 2010)	6	Australian International Academy	16 February 2011
Female (2010)	3	Avila College	15 September 2010
Male (pre 2010)	2	Carey Baptist Grammar School	10 September 2010
Female 1, Male 2 (2010)	3	Carey Baptist Grammar School	10 September 2010
Female, male (pre 2010)	2	Caulfield Grammar WH campus	30 July 2010
Male (2010)	3	Caulfield Grammar WH campus	26 November 2010
Female 2 Male 2 (pre 2010)	4	Donvale Christian College	23 August 2010
Female (2010)	1	Donvale Christian College	23 August 2010
Female 2 Male 2 (pre 2010)	4	East Preston Islamic College	3 August 2010
Female (2010)	1	East Preston Islamic College	3 August 2010
Female (pre 2010)	2	King David School	4 November 2010
Female (2010)	2	King David School	20 November 2010
Male (pre 2010)	4	Mazenod College	16 August 2010
Male (2010)	4	Mazenod College	25 October 2010
Female 4, Male 1 (2010)	5	Mt Hira (Islamic) College	4 November 2010
Female 1 Male 1 (pre 2010)	2	Mt Scopus (Jewish) Memorial College	10 August 2010
Female (2010)	3	Mt Scopus Memorial College	26 October 2010
Female 4, Male 2 (2010)	6	Minaret College	11 August 2010
Female (2009)	1	St Columba's College	27 October 2010
Female (2010)	7	St Columba's College	27 October 2010
Female 2, Male 2 (2010)	4	Strathmore Secondary College	27 October 2010
Female (pre 2010)	2	Strathcona Baptist Girls Grammar School	11 August 2010
Female (2010)	4	Strathcona Baptist Girls Grammar School	21 October 2010
Male (pre 2010)	1	Xavier College	6 September 2010
Teachers	16		

Male	1	Aquinas College	3 November 2010
Male (Principal)	1	Australian International Academy	16 February 2011
Male (also facilitator)	1	Australian International Academy	16 February 2011
Female	1	Avila College	15 September 2010
Male	1	Carey Baptist Grammar School	10 September 2010
Male	1	Caulfield Grammar WH campus	30 July 2010
Male	1	Donvale Christian College	23 August 2010
Female	1	East Preston Islamic College	21 October 2010
Male	1	East Preston Islamic College	21 October 2010
Female	1	King David School	20 November 2010
Female (also facilitator)	1	Mazenod College	16 August 2010
Female	1	Minaret College	11 August 2010
Female	1	Mt Hira Islamic College	4 November 2010
Female	1	Mt Scopus Memorial College	10 August 2010
Male (also facilitator)	1	Strathmore Secondary College	27 October 2010
Female	1	Xavier College	6 September 2010
Regional Co-ordinators	4		
Male (Eastern)	1	Strathcona Baptist Girls Grammar School	11 August 2010
Female (Northern)	1	St Columba's College	27 October 2010
Male (also Principal) Southern	1	Mazenod College	16 August 2010
Female (Central)	1	(On Maternity leave from teaching)	15 October 2010
Facilitators	13		
Female	1	Catholic from Avila College	15 Sept. 2010
Female	1	Buddhist (from Tibetan tradition)	25 August 2010
Female & Male	2	Jewish and Muslim	29 Sept 2010
Female	1	Jewish	28 Sept 2010
Male	1	Jewish	7 October 2010
Female 2, Male 1	3	Christian- Baptist & Salvation Army	10 October 2010
Female	1	Catholic	26 September
Female	1	Catholic	1 October
Male	1	Protestant- Baptist/Churches of Christ	6 October
Male	1	Muslim	16 February 2011

The researcher stated at the beginning of each interview his explicit purpose for the interview, the aim of the research project and the data gathering, as well as provided verbal and written assurances to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants' statements. The intention of these interviews was to build "an intersubjective bridge between [the researcher] and their respondent to allow them to imaginatively share (and subsequently describe) their respondent's world" (Bloor & Wood, 2006, p. 104). This was done through expressing empathy, open-ended questions, pausing to allow participants to elaborate their responses, and gentle probes to uncover more of the interviewees' constructed meaning.

The questions used in the interviews with students included both descriptive (for instance, can you tell me about.....?) and contrast questions (such as asking about differences between their prior and post experiences in the BBP) (Spradley, 1979). The kinds of questions asked of the students were: Why did you join the programme? What part of the programme affected you most and why? What did you learn about yourself and others through your involvement? How comfortable do you feel mixing with those from a different religious or cultural background from yourself? How is your life different if at all because of your participation? A full list of the questions used in the student interviews is provided in Appendix 1, and with teachers, regional co-ordinators and facilitators in Appendix 5, 6 and 7 respectively.

The advantages of the semi-structured interview method for this research was that it focused directly on the case-study topics, it allowed participants to explain in their own words and actions their experiences and constructions of meaning, it permitted co-operation between students in recalling and articulating their experiences, and enabled a deeper engagement with their learning through reflection on their experiences.

However, it is noted with many other constructivists that the interview was context-bound, namely that the researcher actively collaborated with the respondents to produce a thick description of the participants' world, rather than this being entirely elicited from the participants alone (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004, p. 108). This pertains to the topic of reflexivity, the researcher's awareness of himself in the project, interviewing, surveying respondents and collecting data, and the role he played in constructing those situations (Bloor & Wood, 2006, pp. 145-146). He was not therefore a neutral information gatherer, but an active co-participant with the participants in the social construction of his research data.

Problematic in this co-participation was the fact that the researcher was also the current director of the programme being investigated, thereby potentially influencing the responses of the research participants unduly. This imbalance of power in the interviews could possibly skew the data toward what the participants perceived the researcher wanted, rather than their actual experience or their own particular constructions of meaning-making. However, it is to be noted that as director of the BBP, he had no direct involvement with any of the student participants at their schools, or with any assessments of their academic work, and he had very minimal contact with them directly through the programme itself. The researcher sought to minimize this power-imbalance and influence by explicitly encouraging the participants at the beginning of each interview to provide honest, frank responses about their experiences in the programme including criticisms and negative assessments of its elements. He also assured them that the interview period was a safe environment and their responses would be kept confidential. Regarding this, it is noteworthy that not only were students enthusiastic and keen to be interviewed about their experiences in the BBP, but that they generally seemed open, relaxed and very forthcoming about their personal experiences and often expressed this in their gratitude for the opportunity at the end of the interview. In addition,

the researcher sought experienced facilitators whenever available to do the interviews with participants, in order to reduce this undue influence.

This dual role also needed to be addressed to overcome any bias, real or perceived, in the interpretation of the research findings. So the researcher intentionally adopted a multiple methods approach, in order to verify and contrast data from the interviews with that from the anonymous survey questionnaires, and from discourse analysis of participants' comments made outside the programme, such as through surveys and feedback forms provided before this research and from the video material produced by the Immigration Museum.

The issues associated with the researcher being the director needs to be balanced by the value his experience and insights provide into the programme. The researcher's familiarity with all components of the BBP, including the schools involved in each region, the outlines of each of the six sessions, and staff involved as well as each school's geography proved advantageous when needing to ask more specific questions of participants about particular activities they engaged in and probing their responses for greater detail when necessary. In addition, his background and energy for developing the programme and his passion for it to be effective proved to be assets in the investigation of the BBP's effectiveness as a model of interfaith education.

So using the grounded theory methodology with this purposeful, selective sample (Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Coyne, 1997; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Sandelowski, 1995; 1992) five major themes and eight minor themes were identified that repeatedly arose in the students' responses, and are discussed in fuller detail in the next chapter. The researcher chose not to investigate gender differences in the participants' responses to the questions in interviews and the survey questionnaire primarily because eleven of the sixteen schools chosen for the sample were co-educational schools, and at these schools, students of both genders were interviewed together. Furthermore, the research aim was to investigate the impact on

participants from their interactions with those from different religious and cultural backgrounds regardless of gender. To attempt to separate the gender responses would have been logistically difficult in the interviews, removed a potentially significant dynamic that was present in the mixed interviews, and introduced an extra layer of complexity and difficulty to the interpretation of the research findings.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology and methods chosen for this project, including the underlying presuppositions (the ontology, epistemology, and theoretical perspective) that provide a rationale for why this methodology and methods were chosen. From a relativist ontology that perceives that humans put together their own personal reality, the researcher adopted a social-constructivist epistemology that understands knowledge and meaning to be constructed as people encounter the world and share their interpretations with others. To interpret this knowledge and the meanings generated by the participants, the researcher used philosophical hermeneutics that involved a continual dialogical process between the participants' pre-understandings and their new experiences from the social interactions they had with those from different backgrounds. To collect data the researcher used a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, and extracted theories from that data by Grounded Theory methodology.

The following three chapters will explore theories that emerge from the data collected and analysed from the students (Chapter four), educators and regional co-ordinators (Chapter five) and facilitators (Chapter six) through the Grounded Theory methodology as outlined in this chapter.

Chapter Four: Student Responses on the Effectiveness of the Building Bridges Programme

Introduction

This chapter presents and engages with the theories generated from the students' responses to the Building Bridges Programme, drawn from the Grounded Theory methodology outlined in the previous chapter. As indicated, these theories address the research questions on the effectiveness of the BBP at promoting educational outcomes such as intercultural and interreligious understanding, personal and social capability, faith development, critical and creative thinking and ethical behaviour. The following two chapters do the same from the responses of the educators, regional co-ordinators and facilitators in the BBP. As described in the previous chapter, the students' data was collected from the semi-structured interviews and survey questionnaires with the two sample groups of students- those who participated before 2010 and those who participated in 2010.

The semi-structured interviews

Eighty-four students were interviewed in semi-structured 'guided' conversations, mostly in small groups, from a range of schools, faiths and cultural backgrounds. Twenty-eight students who had participated in the programme before 2010 were interviewed, of which 17 were girls and 11 were boys, and 56 students who had participated in 2010 were interviewed made up of 37 girls and 19 boys.

In the interviews students were asked questions intended to gain thick descriptions of their experiences (Holloway, 1997, p. 154), and how they had been affected by their participation in the BBP. The kinds of questions asked of the students in the interviews were:

- Why did you join the Building Bridges Programme (BBP)?
- How was the programme explained to you, to encourage you to join?

- What for you was the greatest benefit of participating, or what part of the programme affected you most?
- How, if at all, is your life different because of your participation?
- What did you learn about yourself (including perhaps your attitudes, values or beliefs, or your strengths or weaknesses) through the BBP?
- What did you learn about others, particularly those of other religious or cultural backgrounds, if anything?
- What parts of the Building bridges programme were less enjoyable for you and why?
- How would you describe your attitudes toward people of other religious or cultural backgrounds?
- On a scale of 1-10, where one is feeling pretty terrified, and 10 is feeling very relaxed and calm, how comfortable do you feel mixing with people from religions or cultures that are different to you? If you are able, it would be helpful if you can give a ‘before Building Bridges’ and ‘after Building Bridges’ assessment.
- Will your actions change as a result of the Building Bridges Programme and if so in what ways?

The full list of questions asked in the student interviews is included in Appendix 1.

The data from the student interviews identified five major themes that repeatedly arose in their responses, and these are outlined in the following section. Pseudonyms were used instead of the actual names of the students to protect their identities, and their religious affiliation was only given if they self-identified with that religious faith. The five major themes and eight minor themes that emerged from the students’ data are indicated in Tables 4.1 and 4.2.

Table 4.1 Major themes identified from the student Interviews

	Major Themes	Number of references made to theme
1	It was valuable to talk with religious peers	110 references to this made by students: - 54 Girls made 74 references to this; - 30 Boys made 36 references to this.
2	I learnt about other faiths	97 references made: - 54 Girls made 66 references to this; - 30 Boys made 31 references to this.
3	I discovered the other is like me/us	85 references made: - 54 Girls made 63 references to this; - 30 Boys made 22 references to this.
4	It challenged/changed my stereotypes of the 'other'	81 references made: - 51 Girls made 51 references to this; - 30 Boys made 30 references to this.
5	I'm more comfortable mixing with different others	75 references made: - 45 Girls made 56 references to this; - 30 Boys made 19 references to this.

Table 4.2 Minor Themes from Interviews

	Minor Themes	Number of references made to theme
1	I gained an appreciative understanding of the other faith.	70 references to this by students.
2	I've become more open and accepting of different others	63 references by students
3	I made friends with someone of the 'other faith'.	58 references by students
4	I've become more confident engaging with different others	57 references by students
5	It changed my attitude to my own faith	40 references by students
6	I am more empathetic towards different others	40 references by students
7	I am more interested in other faiths/ religions	36 references by students
8	I want to tell others of the value of the BBP and/or interfaith engagement.	36 references by students

Themes were categorised either as major or minor by frequency of use, such that seventy-five references meant the theme qualified as a major theme. While this number chosen was random, and ideally all themes would be explored, there were enough strong correlations between many of the major and minor themes that most of the minor themes could be examined within a broad understanding of the major theme. For instance, the

second major theme (I learnt about other faiths) correlated with the first minor theme (I gained an appreciative understanding of the other faith), which had a more affective element than learning cognitively of the other faith. Similarly, “I’m more comfortable mixing with different others” (major theme five) correlated with “I’ve become more open and accepting of different others” and “I’ve become more confident engaging with different others” (minor themes two and four respectively); plus “I discovered the other is like me/us” (major theme three), had some points of connection with “I made friends with someone of the ‘other faith’” (minor theme three). In the light of these strong correlations, all the data was reviewed again, and the major themes were more broadly defined to incorporate some of the significant elements of the similar minor theme where it seemed most appropriate. Many of these minor themes (or slightly less frequently mentioned elements) will be included and evident in the descriptions that follow.

Theme 1: It was valuable to engage with religious peers

Students repeatedly spoke positively of the value of learning about religions through talking with peers who practise those faiths. They said that to share such things with someone their own age made their education more engaging, interesting and relevant. It also allowed them to get to know the other person directly from their own experience, rather than through the views of others. Some mentioned how it “humanised religion”, making something often discussed theoretically, have a human face and name, and a practical real-life expression. For instance, Dinah, a female student from a Jewish-based school expressed it for many:

Being able to put a face to the faith, and be like, I know a kid, makes it personal, what you know about that faith. And you learn this kid has done just like, prayed five times a day, and he also plays basketball in the other time, and so it makes that extra

connection that makes you want to remember about the faith and it makes it more personal.

Steph, a female student at a Christian (Baptist) based school said: “I now know you can never fully understand until you hear it from and get to know someone who believes and lives that faith”. A large number of students made reference to never having spoken to a person of another religious faith before, and how it helped them to learn of another faith first-hand. For instance, Peter, a student at a Protestant school shared:

I hadn't really spoken to Muslims or Jews of my age before, so that was probably the greatest benefit. You get to know them and ask them questions about their life, how they live their lives, how they practice their religion, and talk about similarities and differences as well.

Michael, a student at a Catholic school who participated in the BBP in 2008, explained that getting to know a peer revealed to him their similarities:

The first benefit was getting to know people my own age, from other faiths. I think that supersedes everything else that you get out of this programme. Because the best way to learn something is through a first-hand sort of thing, and when you actually meet someone, and then you realise that they're not that different to you, then I reckon that's the best thing people can get out of the programme.

One student from a Government school found engaging in the programme opened his eyes to the differences of religious people around him:

Before [participating in the BBP], I didn't really think that there was a difference between us. And putting us all together made me realise that there was a difference. Like, I didn't think that the Muslims were that different until they started talking about their faith and stuff, and I realised how strongly they felt about it. I thought that we left that [religious stuff] behind, but I guess not.

Richard, a student from a Christian (non-denominational) school, echoed a sentiment that often arose among many respondents, that his interfaith experience helped him break out of his own religious ‘bubble’:

I thought I need to do this just so I can sort of get out of the little bubble that I'm in at the moment. And I thought it was quite important for the society we live in at the moment, just because it's so multicultural and so important that we are connected.

Others like Shafia, a girl at an Islamic school, shared that their familial environment had not exposed them to those of other faith backgrounds:

For someone like myself who always kind of grew up in a Muslim environment where our family friends were Muslim and the school that I went to, which is a Muslim school, ever since I was pretty young, I really never had a lot of exposure to people of different faiths.

Theme 2: I learnt more about faith and religions

A majority of the students said they grew noticeably in their knowledge and understanding of faiths, both their own and others, not only through conversations with their peers but through demonstrations of their prayer practices, short readings of their sacred texts, brief explanations of their core beliefs, and visits to religious sites. This helped put the students’ dialogues about lived faith and religious practice into a wider societal context, broadening their religious literacy as they learnt how peers practised their faith and spirituality, and the relevance it had for their lives.

Their learning about the others’ faith involved discovering many broad similarities to and differences from their own belief systems or spirituality, the wide diversity of religious practices, as well as more specific details like rules about clothing or food. In addition, several mentioned the shock of discovering that all three Abrahamic faiths share the same

God. It brought a new level of respect for people of those other faiths. Some students moved from perceiving their religious perspective as *the* pathway, to *a* pathway among many. For example, Michael at a Catholic school said:

Faith has been the centre of my life, but I never took into account people of other different faiths, because I had never really met or come into contact with such people...I'm now thinking of mine as one of many different faiths...so I have my pathway, they have their own pathway, so now I know, when thinking about my own faith, its just a pathway, its not *the* pathway...It put things into perspective; into a bigger picture.

Many found that being able to ask their own personal questions of each other, promoted a greater empathetic understanding of the other person. They could not only see why the other lived the way they did, but felt something of what it might be like to walk in the other's shoes.

Several students came to realise that all religions want the same thing. One female Hindu student expressed it as "we're all kind of searching for the same thing, though coming from different directions." These insights prompted a few to ask, why then are there wars between religions? The following plea came from Reut, a Jewish girl:

I'd heard of it but it kind of really sunk in, the fact that all religions actually want the same thing. They just go about it a slightly different way. And so then you're thinking about why are there wars? Like why are all these religious wars happening at the moment when really we all want the same thing? Like why can't other people just see the simplicity behind it?

Many students spoke of how dialogue with those of other faiths helped them grow stronger in their own faith. For instance, Christine, a student at a Catholic school said her

knowledge of her faith grew through verbalising her beliefs in response to her peer's questions:

Participating in the Building Bridges Programme allowed me to see what my faith means to me...I felt it was a really good opportunity to explain my own faith journey and to delve deeper in my own faith....I also feel my knowledge in my faith has increased greatly because I have been able to verbalise what my beliefs are.

On the other hand, one student found her attempts to explain her faith to others made them less convincing to her than before. In some cases, through questions from their peers, students were challenged to gain a better understanding and integration of their faith into their lives, like this female student at a Protestant school: "Like after Building Bridges, I think I want to be more connected to my religion, not just through school and Christian Education classes and stuff."

Most students spoke of discovering the wide diversity of observance and practice that exists within each religion that they had been unaware of before. Thomas, a Catholic boy recalled:

There was a knowledge aspect of learning of other faiths, and how there's a lot of variance; there's not just one way a person practises their faith, as there is with my own faith....There's not just one Muslim way, the Jewish way, as there isn't just the Catholic way. There's different [ways].

Some of these also identified how different cultural backgrounds affect the expression or practice of a religious faith, like the difference between the practice of a Lebanese Christian and a Filipino Christian. Significantly, the program enabled some students like Jenni who identified strongly with her Christian faith, to appreciate the other's faith as valid and important as their own.

I think beforehand [before the BBP], I went in thinking that my religion was the best one and the only one. But now I've come out knowing that people just do things differently to suit them and that every other religion is just as good as mine, just as valid as mine, and I think I'm not as prejudiced towards other religions at all.

Theme 3: I discovered the religious other was like me:

Students repeatedly spoke of discovering the religious other was like them, sharing many commonalities with each other. This in turn evoked their empathy, respect and their willingness to create community with that religious other. The following perception by Karen was typical of many:

You first go in and you're sort-of taken aback by the different things that they wear and the way that they look. But when you get to know them, they're just the same as you, and you have a really fun time talking to them.

Students frequently spoke of discovering the other is just like them, a 'normal teenager', who may look different but shares many similar interests and desires for life and the world. Others noted that they lived very similar lives and were 'guided by the same moral compass'. There was recognition that whilst faith was a significant identifier for many, it was not the sole one. Indeed, there was a huge range of other factors that made up a person that were often shared in common, like one's hopes, values, and personal interests in music and sport. Two Jewish girls made the observation for instance that religion didn't define them as much as they had thought.

As they heard each other's experiences of growing up and living their faith, many students found themselves growing in empathy for the other, and wondering what it might be like to be the other. This led to many friendships being formed with students from different

backgrounds that they maintain through various forms of social media and invitations to social events, like with Daniella, a Jewish girl:

The greatest benefit of participating would be all the friendships that I made because it kind of broke down all the stereotypes and I got to really like know the other people and know like whenever you see someone, there's more to them than what it appears.

Another girl from a Muslim school concurred:

I think the part that really affected me the most from the Building Bridges programme was the people that you meet. We went in there and I think we were a group of four different schools with four different faiths put into one group and just talk and discuss and out of it we've made crazy friendships that we still have on Facebook.

These insights were significant in light of many portrayals of religious extremists and negative images of Muslims in the media. For instance, Tegan, a Christian girl said:

So just with me and Muslim people, and I would say most teenagers as well growing up with terrorism, it was really beneficial for me to see they're just like us; they believe in the same God as us, they call him a different name but we're just the same; they wear different clothes to us, sometimes they wear a head-dress, but it is more or less the same.

This translated to realising the other, including Muslims, feel similarly afraid of terrorists as they do. Yet discovering their similarities to each other in no way denied the many differences of belief they held from each other. Indeed, Habibah, a Muslim girl, recognised it was their differences that attracted them to the programme in the first place, and spurred their desire to learn about the other:

I find that differences are what unite us to come together. I pray like this and you pray like that, so we all pray but we pray in different ways; we all express

ourselves in different ways. So like learning all the details of the different religions was really because we could see how similar we are, but also how different we are at the same time.

Theme 4: My perceptions and stereotypes of the other were challenged:

A majority of students said that their perceptions and stereotypes of the other were significantly challenged and changed by engaging with them first-hand. Prior to their participation in the BBP they were aware of only being exposed to the generalisations and mostly negative stereotypes of the other put out by others and the media. With no contrary experience, they simply went along with those generalisations. However, through direct engagement with these others in the programme, they now could form their own personal perceptions and understandings that differed often significantly from the stereotypes. Fiona, a Christian girl, commented for instance:

I was having a conversation with one of the Islamic girls...and the way she was describing her affiliation with the Islamic faith was like at our school and other schools that can be affiliated with a religion, how not everyone is necessarily a follower of that religion. And she was saying to me 'I go to parties on the weekend, I work at Coles'. That struck a chord with me. That just because she went to an Islamic school didn't necessarily mean that she was a terrorist sort of thing. It sounds horrible [but] it gave me a more realistic view of people who are affiliated with other faiths.

Most students agreed that they gained a more realistic perception of those of other faiths. Some acknowledged that until then, they had been largely sheltered from those of other religious backgrounds, by their family or faith community. But for several like Jo, a Catholic girl, they emerged not only feeling neutral towards the other, but strongly positive.

So for our whole lives we've been surrounded by only Catholicism, only this and I had no contact with anyone that was Muslim, not anything. I was so sheltered and so I came in with this prejudice....[N]ow when I see someone with a headscarf I just think, cool, because they remind me of Building Bridges. And I don't even feel like neutral, I feel positive towards people that have headscarves.

Many went further, to say they would defend the other against the widespread generalisations and negative stereotypes made about people of faith in society by the media and word of mouth. Quite a few had already challenged their friends and family members by explaining how the religious other does not fit these stereotypes, nor can they all be so simply generalised. For instance Leonie, at a Christian (Baptist) school said:

When I see articles in the newspaper or any kind of media against the Jewish faith or the Muslim faith or even the Christian faith, I can react more in defence of the other religions than I did before...because I know people that are just like me but are of a different faith, I can be more defensive of them. It's just not right what they're saying, it's not like that at all, it's like this.

Others realised that most of the jokes made of other races and religions came out of ignorance; a lack of real understanding of the other, so were motivated like Chugai, this Buddhist student, to question and challenge the joke-teller:

Before if someone would tell a racist, like a xenophobic joke or something, I wouldn't really say anything, but now if someone is insulting people of other religions, because I have friend of other religions now, it hurts me a lot more than it used to and I don't stand for it anymore.

This was like Aviva, a Jewish student, who challenges stereotypes and coloured jokes now: "Because [now thru the BBP] I know people, I'm like, well, that actually offends my friend...so it's like sticking up for your friends, and I'm like actually, you know, one that's

wrong and two that's mean and it hurts.” Some found they were less willing to blindly accept what they had been taught about the other, whilst others discovered the other suffers from negative stereotyping too. This brought a sense of mutual understanding and empathy and underlined the importance of knowing the other person before judging them. They now make their own decisions about others, rather than rely solely on portrayals in the media. One boy at a Catholic school said he no longer jumps to some conclusion about the other, but first considers what it might be like in the other’s shoes, like this female student at a Catholic school, Tracey:

Its changed my attitude, because I have been able to make my own decisions and have my own thoughts based on the things I’ve learnt at Building Bridges, and this has meant that I haven’t been as judgmental as I would have been [of people] in the past, because I have a more broad view of other people’s religions. The media hasn’t affected me as much as it might have a year ago.

Students emphasised the need to talk with the other person before making an assumption or assessment of them in order to overcome ignorance that perpetuates the fear and generalisations about the other. Esther, a student from a Jewish school, said:

I’m not so quick to judge anymore. I see the person. When you’re walking on the street, obviously you’ll see the way a person dresses and you’ll immediately have a perception of how they are because of what I see in the media. Now, because of the programme, I feel I want to get to know that person and get to know their story rather than be blinded by what I’ve heard on the news.

Theme 5: I am more willing to mix with those of different backgrounds than before

All of those interviewed said they felt significantly more comfortable mixing with those of different backgrounds. They spoke of growing in open-mindedness towards the other and their religious practices, as well as greater confidence to engage with people of different religious and cultural backgrounds. The following comment by Felicity (at a Baptist school) was typical of many:

I think now, I am very open towards people of other religions. Before Building Bridges I would always have targeted people that look like [me] but now definitely I wouldn't be afraid of walking up to a girl with a head-dress and anything and making friends with her.

Students were asked to scale their level of comfort in mixing with different others on a continuum from one to ten. A low score meant they felt fairly terrified or scared whilst a high score indicated feeling quite relaxed and comfortable mixing with different strangers. Suzie, a Catholic girl, acknowledged for instance that before involvement, she was pretty afraid of mixing with those who are different, thinking: 'oh they're wearing something different on their head, oh they must be different to us', and reluctant to converse, giving herself a four. Then through the programme, she realised they're not as different as she had thought, and graded herself "definitely nine or ten. So, yeah I would be pretty relaxed and calm."

Other characteristics of this change in attitude and behaviour were a more open and accepting attitude, a greater respect for the others' religious views and practices, as well as a greater confidence to initiate conversations and engage with different others in society. Like Ellie, a student at a Christian (interdenominational) school, they were overcoming what was 'foreign' or 'strange' and fearful, by personally befriending the objects of their fear:

I think when you don't understand something or you haven't actually experienced it yet, there is an element of, you know, fear and trepidation when you come across it. And I think having realised that other religious people are just people, you know, when you see someone on the street who looks differently to you or believes something differently to you, it's less scary. It's less foreign because you've seen it before now.

A Jewish female student found the programme broadened her respect for other's cultures and gave her "a greater appreciation for multiculturalism." One student said the dialogues around faith had helped her feel more at peace with herself and her values, even though she had no religious affiliation. Several students said they learnt to view the other simply as a human being, rather than a member of a faith community. Aishah, a Muslim student, now graded herself a 10 feeling very comfortable mixing with those from different backgrounds, saying:

I don't look at their religion, that's the thing. I look at them as a human. I look at them as just any other people, despite what they believe in. It doesn't concern me whether one of them is wearing the cross, or the other one is wearing the head scarf. I just look at them as another normal human being, which I want to mix and communicate with.

Some of these students like Hannah, another Muslim girl, expressed this 'comfort' in terms of a greater freedom and willingness to relate with the other, the same as if they're talking with a friend or someone from their own community:

My attitude is open and welcoming; so if I'm talking to a Christian or talking to a Jew, it's the same as if I'm talking to a Muslim or if I'm talking to an atheist or a Buddhist. We're all Australian and we all just have to communicate on the same level, and see each other for who we really are.

Others spoke of learning the skills to help them relate to difference in a multicultural society, like Lyndel, a girl at a Christian (interdenominational) school: “[I] learnt the skills to communicate with people in other religions appropriately... so I guess it's just another step in understanding the world that I live in, and in a society that is so multi-cultural.”

Whilst acknowledging one cannot generalise too broadly from a relatively brief experience, Liz, a Christian student at an interdenominational school, found it did translate into a greater willingness to initiate relationships with those who are different to her.

I wouldn't want to make the mistake of thinking that now that I've met 20 Muslim people I know everything about all Muslims everywhere. You know, you still have to take every relationship as it comes and accept every person as an individual. But in terms of having the skills to approach someone who is different than myself or form a relationship with someone that is different from myself, I think I feel a lot more comfortable with that.

Many spoke of a growth in confidence to reveal their different backgrounds. Ariel had purposefully changed his name to avoid questions about his Jewish background, but had found such open-ness and interest in his heritage through the programme that he said: “I no longer had this fear of revealing my roots, because I witnessed their reactions as like welcoming and interested. So now, I don't try to deviate or try and mask things, its just straight out who I am sort of thing.”

Several students felt more motivated to be involved in other interfaith activities, such as helping educate others about the benefits of interfaith dialogue and engaging with those of other religious and cultural backgrounds like Judith at a Jewish school:

I think by doing it, it can also help the community and I definitely want to get involved in other interfaith things, and give myself lots of opportunities to be involved and like teach others and learn more myself, and actually like, do what

we've been learning about. So not just say that we respect everyone of different religions, and that we're happy to talk to other religions but I want to go ahead and be involved in something where I can become like good friends with people from different religions and all of that.

And some others underlined the importance of activities that 'build bridges' of understanding between different peoples.

Survey Questionnaire

As indicated in the last chapter, the survey questionnaire was chosen to collect more specific data on the components of the programme that were most and least effective, from a wider sample of participants than could be included in the interviews. This was to answer the second research question: What elements of the Building Bridges Programme have been most and least effective in promoting the educational goals of intercultural and interreligious understanding, personal and social capability, ethical behaviour and faith development for the students?

As mentioned in the research design chapter, the initial survey questionnaire was revised, and the final questionnaire was sent out to students who participated in 2010. Both questionnaires allowed students to fill out the forms anonymously, and gave them a range of multiple options for each question. In the initial questionnaire (version one), a simple range of one through five options was provided for each of the 25 questions. In the second questionnaire (version two), the options ranged through two scales. The first scale ranged through nil, little, somewhat, quite a lot, a lot and don't know, whilst the second scale ranged through nil, occasionally, sometimes, quite often, always and don't know, over the forty-three questions.

The students' survey data was grouped according to their school background, as Jewish, Catholic, Protestant and Other (including Government school), and Muslim. It was

then further divided on the basis of gender. This was because girls and boys participate for some of the programme in separate single-sex small groups, and from the 300 previous evaluations of the programme pre-2010 that had been considered in the initial stages of this research, it seemed many responses might correlate along lines of gender as well as religious affiliation. Yet, the data on one's gender and religious affiliation was clearly secondary to the primary investigation of this research project, and so was not analysed in any depth.

As already outlined, the primary research question of this thesis was how participants were affected by their involvement in the BBP, irrespective of their school, religious and cultural background and gender. The participants were defined as students, teachers, regional co-ordinators and facilitators. Research into how students and staff of different backgrounds and how girls and boys differed in the affect of the programme on their lives would have been interesting but were judged by the researcher and supervisor as beyond the bounds of this research project. The bulk of the research data was gathered from semi-structured interviews with groups of students and teachers, who were predominantly from co-educational schools and often boys and girls were interviewed together, so to separate the interview data based on gender would have been difficult and created an artificial demarcation when the students of both sexes participated in the interviews together, often adding comments to a fellow student's remarks. When the survey questionnaire data was gathered however, it was relatively easy to categorise it according to religious affiliation of school and gender, because in most cases students voluntarily provided such data as part of their responses, and questionnaires were sent in the same package from the school. Dividing the quantitative tables according to religious affiliation of school and gender was deemed to provide nuanced data on the effect of particular elements of the BBP on the student participants, but this was to still obtain data primarily to answer the main research questions. Yet, because these categories were only obtained from the survey data, and were only from

the students and not teachers, regional co-ordinators or facilitators, and because the survey questionnaire had only a secondary and complementary role to the primary qualitative data obtained from the interviews for this research project, it would not have been appropriate or possible to analyse all the data gathered for this research project according to gender or religious affiliation. These would be worthwhile research tasks for someone else in the future.

As version two of the survey questionnaire was an expanded edition of the first (and included all of the earlier questions of version one), and both surveys were integrated into the one, the data will be analysed in the form of the second version. Responses to all the questions are tabulated in table 4.3 below, and responses to thirteen of the key questions are shown in charts in Appendix 4 (Figures 4.1 to 4.13 inclusive).

The expanded questionnaire had questions grouped into five categories. The first category explored participants' level of enjoyment of particular components of the BBP. The second category examined the contribution of each component to the students' cognitive knowledge of the other participants' life and faith. The third category explored any change in behaviour as a result of the students' participation in the programme. The fourth category sought to know if pupils' understanding of themselves or those from different backgrounds had been affected by their involvement. The fifth and final category explored their attitudes towards diverse others, both those in and beyond the programme in the wider society.

Table 4.3 Student survey data results

1	To what extent did you enjoy the ice-breaker games?							
	Religious Group	Nil	Little	Somewhat	Quite-Lot	A Lot	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	2 28%	2 28%	2 28%	0 --	1 14%	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	0 --	2 9%	7 32%	8 36%	5 23%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	1 6%	3 19%	7 44%	4 25%	1 6%	0 --	16
	Muslim Female	0 --	0 --	3 25%	6 50%	3 25%	0 --	12
	Catholic Male	0 --	1 8%	1 8%	6 46%	5 38%	0 --	13
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	1 25%	1 25%	2 50%	0 --	4
	Muslim Male	0 --	1 10%	3 30%	4 40%	2 20%	0 --	10
	TOTAL	3 4%	9 11%	24 28%	29 34%	19 23%	0 --	84
	% of respondents	4	11	28	34	23	0	100
2	To what extent did you enjoy the mealtime?							
	Religious Group	Nil	Little	Somewhat	Quite-Lot	A Lot	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	0 --	0 --	2 28%	5 72%	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	1 5%	1 5%	0 --	7 32%	13 59%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	0 --	0 --	3 19%	13 81%	0 --	16
	Muslim Female	0 --	1 8%	0 --	2 17%	9 75%	0 --	12
	Catholic Male	0 --	1 8%	0 --	4 31%	7 54%	1 8%	13
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	1 25%	3 75%	0 --	4
	Muslim Male	0 --	0 --	1 10%	3 30%	6 60%	0 --	10
	TOTAL	1	3	1	22	56	1	84
	% of respondents	1	4	1	26	67	1	100
3	To what extent did you enjoy learning skills for dialogue?							
	Religious Group	Nil	Little	Somewhat	Quite-Lot	A Lot	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	0 --	3 43%	3 43%	1 14%	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	0 --	1 5%	2 9%	14 64%	5 23%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	2 12%	7 44%	3 19%	4 25%	0 --	16
	Muslim Female	0 --	0 --	1 8%	9 75%	2 17%	0 --	12
	Catholic Male	0 --	1 8%	4 31%	6 46%	1 8%	1 8%	13
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	2 50%	0 --	2 50%	0 --	4
	Muslim Male	0 --	1 10%	2 20%	3 30%	4 40%	0 --	10
	TOTAL	0	5	21	38	19	1	84
	% of respondents	0	6	25	45	23	1	100
4	To what extent did you enjoy sharing in your small group?							
	Religious Group	Nil	Little	Somewhat	Quite-Lot	A Lot	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	0 --	2 28%	0 --	5 72%	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	0 --	0 --	1 5%	9 41%	12 54%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	0 --	3 19%	2 12%	11 69%	0 --	16
	Muslim Female	0 --	1 8%	0 --	6 50%	5 42%	0 --	12
	Catholic Male	0 --	1 8%	2 17%	2 17%	7 54%	1 8%	13
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	1 25%	2 50%	1 25%	0 --	4
	Muslim Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	5 50%	5 50%	0 --	10
	TOTAL	0	2	9	26	46	1	84
	% of respondents	0	2	11	31	55	1	100

5	To what extent did you enjoy the questions you were asked in your small group?							
	Religious Group	Nil	Little	Somewhat	Quite-Lot	A Lot	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	1 14%	5 72%	0 --	1 14%	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	0 --	1 5%	4 18%	8 36%	9 41%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	0 --	4 25%	8 50%	4 25%	0 --	16
	Muslim Female	0 --	0 --	2 17%	8 67%	2 17%	0 --	12
	Catholic Male	0 --	1 8%	5 38%	4 31%	3 23%	0 --	13
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	1 25%	1 25%	2 50%	0 --	4
	Muslim Male	0 --	1 10%	3 30%	3 30%	3 30%	0 --	10
	TOTAL	0	4	24	32	24	0	84
	% of respondents	0	5	29	38	29	0	100
6	To what extent did you enjoy the host school presentations?							
	Religious Group	Nil	Little	Somewhat	Quite-Lot	A Lot	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	2 28%	0 --	3 43%	2 28%	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	0 --	0 --	8 36%	9 41%	5 23%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	3 19%	5 31%	4 25%	4 25%	0 --	16
	Muslim Female	0 --	0 --	1 8%	8 67%	3 25%	0 --	12
	Catholic Male	0 --	0 --	1 8%	6 46%	5 38%	1 8%	13
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	3 75%	1 25%	0 --	4
	Muslim Male	1 10%	0 --	0 --	8 80%	1 10%	0 --	10
	TOTAL	1	5	15	41	21	1	84
	% of respondents	1	6	18	49	25	1	100
7	To what extent did you enjoy meeting new people?							
	Religious Group	Nil	Little	Somewhat	Quite-Lot	A Lot	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %
	Jewish Female	0 --	0 --	0 --	2 28%	5 72%	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	0 --	0 --	0 --	9 41%	13 59%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	0 --	0 --	3 19%	12 75%	0 --	15
	Muslim Female	0 --	0 --	2 17%	4 33%	6 50%	0 --	12
	Catholic Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	2 15%	10 77%	1 8%	13
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	2 50%	2 50%	0 --	4
	Muslim Male	0 --	1 10%	0 --	3 30%	6 60%	0 --	10
	TOTAL	0	1	2	25	54	1	83
	% of respondents	0	1	2	30	65	1	100
8	To what extent did you enjoy visiting different schools?							
	Religious Group	Nil	Little	Somewhat	Quite-Lot	A Lot	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	0 --	0 --	2 28%	5 72%	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	0 --	0 --	0 --	7 32%	15 68%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	0 --	3 19%	7 44%	6 37%	0 --	16
	Muslim Female	0 --	0 --	0 --	4 33%	8 67%	0 --	12
	Catholic Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	2 15%	11 85%	0 --	13
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	1 25%	1 25%	2 50%	0 --	4
	Muslim Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	4 40%	6 60%	0 --	10
	TOTAL	0	0	4	27	53	0	84
	% of respondents	0	0	5	32	63	0	100

9	How much did the large gp activities increase your understanding of others?							
	Religious Group	Nil	Little	Somewhat	Quite-Lot	A Lot	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	2 33%	2 33%	2 33%	0 --	0 --	6
	Catholic Female	0 --	1 5%	8 36%	7 32%	6 27%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	2 12.5%	5 31%	7 44%	2 12.5%	0 --	16
	Muslim Female	0 --	2 16%	0 --	5 42%	5 42%	0 --	12
	Catholic Male	0 --	0 --	1 8%	6 46%	6 46%	0 --	13
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	1 25%	1 25%	2 50%	0 --	0 --	4
	Muslim Male	0 --	1 10%	4 40%	3 30%	2 20%	0 --	10
	TOTAL	0	9	21	32	21	0	83
	% of respondents	0	11	25	39	25	0	100
10	How much did the small gp sharings increase your understanding of others?							
	Religious Group	Nil	Little	Somewhat	Quite-Lot	A Lot	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	0 --	3 43%	0 --	4 57%	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	0 --	1 5%	1 5%	12 55%	8 36%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	0 --	0 --	4 25%	12 75%	0 --	16
	Muslim Female	0 --	0 --	0 --	4 33%	8 67%	0 --	12
	Catholic Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	7 54%	6 46%	0 --	13
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	3 75%	1 25%	0 --	4
	Muslim Male	1 10%	0 --	2 20%	3 30%	4 40%	0 --	10
	TOTAL	1	1	6	33	43	0	84
	% of respondents	1	1	7	39	51	0	100
11	How much did the student presentations increase your understanding of others?							
	Religious Group	Nil	Little	Somewhat	Quite-Lot	A Lot	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	1 14%	1 14%	3 43%	2 28%	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	0 --	1 5%	5 23%	8 36%	8 36%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	1 6%	0 --	7 44%	7 44%	1 6%	0 --	16
	Muslim Female	0 --	0 --	1 8%	7 58%	4 33%	0 --	12
	Catholic Male	0 --	0 --	2 15%	4 31%	6 46%	1 8%	13
	Prot/Other Male	1 25%	0 --	0 --	2 50%	1 25%	0 --	4
	Muslim Male	0 --	1 11%	2 22%	1 11%	5 56%	0 --	9
	TOTAL	2	3	18	32	27	1	83
	% of respondents	2	4	22	39	33	1	100
12	How comfortable did you feel sharing in your small group?							
	Religious Group	Nil	Little	Somewhat	Quite-Lot	A Lot	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	0 --	0 --	3 43%	4 57%	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	0 --	0 --	1 5%	12 55%	9 41%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	2 13%	1 6%	5 31%	8 50%	0 --	16
	Muslim Female	0 --	0 --	1 8%	8 67%	3 25%	0 --	12
	Catholic Male	0 --	0 --	5 38%	7 54%	1 8%	0 --	13
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	4 100%	0 --	0 --	4
	Muslim Male	0 --	0 --	4 40%	4 40%	2 20%	0 --	10
	TOTAL	0	2	12	43	27	0	84
	% of respondents	0	2	14	51	32	0	100

13	How interested in your sharing did you feel your facilitator was?							
	Religious Group	Nil	Little	Somewhat	Quite-Lot	A Lot	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	0 --	0 --	4 57%	3 43%	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	0 --	0 --	0 --	11 50%	11 50%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	0 --	2 12.5%	2 12.5%	12 75%	0 --	16
	Muslim Female	0 --	0 --	0 --	7 58%	5 42%	0 --	12
	Catholic Male	0 --	1 8%	2 15%	5 38%	5 38%	0 --	13
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	2 50%	2 50%	0 --	4
	Muslim Male	0 --	1 10%	2 20%	2 20%	5 50%	0 --	10
	TOTAL	0	2	6	33	43	0	84
	% of respondents	0	2	7	39	51	0	100
14	How open to sharing your personal exp, did you feel in small group?							
	Religious Group	Nil	Little	Somewhat	Quite-Lot	A Lot	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	0 --	2 28%	3 43%	2 28%	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	0 --	0 --	2 9%	11 50%	8 36%	1 5%	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	0 --	1 6%	8 50%	7 44%	0 --	16
	Muslim Female	0 --	1 8%	1 8%	8 67%	2 17%	0 --	12
	Catholic Male	0 --	0 --	4 33%	3 25%	5 42%	0 --	12
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	3 75%	1 25%	0 --	4
	Muslim Male	0 --	0 --	2 20%	6 60%	2 20%	0 --	10
	TOTAL	0	1	12	42	27	1	83
	% of respondents	0	1	14	51	33	1	100
15	How free did you feel to ask respectful questions of others?							
	Religious Group	Nil	Little	Somewhat	Quite-Lot	A Lot	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	0 --	2 28%	1 14%	4 57%	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	0 --	0 --	0 --	10 45%	12 55%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	1 6%	2 13%	8 50%	5 31%	0 --	16
	Muslim Female	0 --	1 8%	1 8%	8 67%	2 17%	0 --	12
	Catholic Male	1 8%	1 8%	1 8%	8 62%	1 8%	1 8%	13
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	1 25%	2 50%	1 25%	0 --	0 --	4
	Muslim Male	0 --	0 --	1 10%	6 60%	3 30%	0 --	10
	TOTAL	1	4	9	42	27	1	84
	% of respondents	1	5	11	50	32	1	100
16	How much were your initial perceptions of others changed?							
	Religious Group	Nil	Little	Somewhat	Quite-Lot	A Lot	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	0 --	2 28%	3 43%	2 28%	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	0 --	0 --	2 9%	10 45%	10 46%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	2 12.5%	4 25%	5 31%	5 31%	0 --	16
	Muslim Female	0 --	1 8%	2 17%	6 50%	3 25%	0 --	12
	Catholic Male	0 --	0 --	4 31%	2 15%	7 54%	0 --	13
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	1 25%	1 25%	2 50%	0 --	4
	Muslim Male	0 --	1 10%	2 20%	6 60%	1 10%	0 --	10
	TOTAL	0	4	17	33	30	0	84
	% of respondents	0	5	20	39	36	0	100

17	How true? I feel more comfortable around people from other backgrounds.							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	0 --	3 43%	3 43%	0 --	1 14%	7
	Catholic Female	0 --	0 --	4 18%	9 41%	9 41%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	4 20%	3 15%	11 55%	2 10%	0 --	20
	Muslim Female	1 6%	0 --	5 28%	8 44%	4 22%	0 --	18
	Jewish Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	1 100%	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	1 6%	2 12%	6 35%	6 35%	2 12%	0 --	17
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	2 25%	5 62.5%	1 12.5%	0 --	8
	Muslim Male	0 --	0 --	4 31%	6 46%	3 23%	0 --	13
	TOTAL	2	6	27	48	22	1	106
	% of respondents	2	6	25	45	21	1	100
18	How true? I seek opportunities to speak with individuals from different backgrounds							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	1 12.5%	1 12.5%	2 25%	4 50%	0 --	0 --	8
	Catholic Female	0 --	0 --	4 18%	9 41%	8 36%	0 --	21
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	1 5%	14 70%	4 20%	1 5%	0 --	20
	Muslim Female	0 --	1 6%	5 28%	7 39%	5 28%	0 --	18
	Jewish Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	1 100%	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	1 6%	2 12%	4 24%	5 29.5%	5 29.5%	0 --	17
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	2 25%	3 37.5%	2 25%	1 12.5%	0 --	8
	Muslim Male	0 --	0 --	3 23%	6 46%	4 31%	0 --	13
	TOTAL	2	7	35	37	25	0	106
	% of respondents	2	7	33	35	24	0	100
19	I have made new friends of someone from another religious or cultural background?							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	1 12.5%	1 12.5%	1 12.5%	5 62.5%	0 --	8
	Catholic Female	0 --	2 9%	1 5%	4 18%	15 68%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	2 10%	4 20%	8 40%	6 30%	0 --	20
	Muslim Female	0 --	1 6%	2 11%	11 61%	4 22%	0 --	18
	Jewish Male	0 --	1 100%	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	0 --	0 --	3 18%	7 41%	7 41%	0 --	17
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	1 12.5%	2 25%	2 25%	3 37.5%	0 --	8
	Muslim Male	0 --	2 15%	1 8%	6 46%	4 31%	0 --	13
	TOTAL	0	10	14	39	44	0	107
	% of respondents	0	9	13	36	41	0	100
20	I feel motivated to share what I've learnt re interfaith dialogue with friends & family?							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	0 --	1 14%	2 28%	4 57%	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	0 --	0 --	3 14%	7 32%	12 55%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	2 10%	4 20%	4 20%	10 50%	0 --	20
	Muslim Female	0 --	0 --	3 17%	4 22%	11 61%	0 --	18
	Jewish Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	1 100%	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	0 --	0 --	4 24%	9 53%	4 24%	0 --	17
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	5 62.5%	3 37.5%	0 --	8
	Muslim Male	0 --	1 9%	4 37%	3 27%	3 27%	0 --	11
	TOTAL	0	3	19	34	48	0	104
	% of respondents	0	3	18	33	46	0	100

21	I can demonstrate respectful dialogue skills with those who are different?							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occa- sionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	0 --	1 12.5%	2 25%	5 62.5%	0 --	8
	Catholic Female	0 --	0 --	3 14%	6 27%	12 55%	0 --	21
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	0 --	2 10%	11 55%	7 37%	0 --	20
	Muslim Female	1 6%	0 --	2 11%	5 28%	9 50%	1 6%	18
	Jewish Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	1 100%	0 --	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	0 --	2 12%	2 12%	8 47%	5 29.5%	0 --	17
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	1 12.5%	2 25%	5 62.5%	0 --	8
	Muslim Male	0 --	0 --	2 15%	5 38%	5 38%	1 8%	13
	TOTAL	1	2	13	40	48	2	106
	% of respondents	1	2	12	38	45	2	100
22	I'm more interested in learning about people from different backgrounds?							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occa- sionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	1 12.5%	1 12.5%	2 25%	3 37.5%	1 12.5%	0 --	8
	Catholic Female	1 5%	1 5%	6 27%	7 32%	7 32%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	0 --	2 11%	13 72%	3 17%	0 --	18
	Muslim Female	2 11%	2 11%	1 6%	6 33%	7 39%	0 --	18
	Jewish Male	0 --	0 --	1 100%	0 --	0 --	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	0 --	1 6%	3 19%	8 50%	4 25%	0 --	16
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	3 43%	2 28%	2 28%	0 --	7
	Muslim Male	3 23%	1 8%	4 31%	3 23%	2 15%	0 --	13
	TOTAL	7	6	22	42	26	0	103
	% of respondents	7	6	21	41	25	0	100
23	I have less understand'g of why people of diff't backgds enjoy wearing traditional clothing?							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occa- sionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	6 75%	1 12.5%	0 --	1 12.5%	0 --	0 --	8
	Catholic Female	13 59%	2 9%	4 18%	3 14%	0 --	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	11 61%	3 17%	2 11%	2 11%	0 --	0 --	18
	Muslim Female	8 44%	2 11%	3 17%	3 17%	1 6%	1 6%	18
	Jewish Male	1 100%	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	7 44%	3 19%	2 12.5%	0 --	2 12.5%	2 12.5%	16
	Prot/Other Male	4 57%	2 28%	0 --	0 --	0 --	1 14%	7
	Muslim Male	3 23%	4 31%	2 15%	2 15%	1 8%	1 8%	13
	TOTAL	53	17	13	11	4	5	103
	% of respondents	51	17	13	11	4	5	100
24	I find it harder to put myself in shoes of someone who is ethnically/religiously different to me							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occa- sionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	3 37.5%	3 37.5%	2 25%	0 --	0 --	0 --	8
	Catholic Female	11 50%	5 23%	2 9%	3 14%	1 5%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	7 39%	7 39%	3 17%	1 6%	0 --	0 --	18
	Muslim Female	3 17%	5 28%	4 22%	2 11%	3 17%	1 6%	18
	Jewish Male	1 100%	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	7 44%	3 19%	2 12.5%	1 6%	3 19%	0 --	16
	Prot/Other Male	5 72%	1 14%	0 --	1 14%	0 --	0 --	7
	Muslim Male	0 --	3 23%	2 15%	4 31%	4 31%	0 --	13
	TOTAL	37	27	15	12	11	1	103
	% of respondents	36	26	15	12	11	1	100

25	I have better appreciation for issues, concerns faced by other religious/ethnic gps							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occa- sionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	1 12.5%	0 --	2 25%	3 37.5%	2 25%	0 --	8
	Catholic Female	2 9%	1 5%	4 18%	6 27%	8 36%	1 5%	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	1 6%	2 11%	10 56%	4 22%	1 6%	18
	Muslim Female	1 6%	1 6%	4 22%	6 33%	5 28%	1 6%	18
	Jewish Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	1 100%	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	0 --	1 6%	1 6%	7 44%	6 37.5%	1 6%	16
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	1 14%	3 43%	3 43%	0 --	7
	Muslim Male	1 8%	2 17%	3 23%	2 15%	4 31%	1 8%	13
	TOTAL	5	6	17	37	33	5	103
	% of respondents	5	6	17	36	32	5	100
26	I have a better understanding of my own beliefs and values than before							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occa- sionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	0 --	3 37.5%	2 25%	3 37.5%	0 --	8
	Catholic Female	0 --	0 --	5 23%	6 27%	11 50%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	2 11%	7 39%	5 28%	1 6%	3 17%	18
	Muslim Female	0 --	2 11%	1 6%	9 50%	6 33%	0 --	18
	Jewish Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	1 100%	0 --	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	0 --	1 6%	4 25%	7 44%	4 25%	0 --	16
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	1 14%	1 14%	3 43%	2 28%	0 --	7
	Muslim Male	2 17%	4 33%	2 17%	3 25%	0 --	1 8%	12
	TOTAL	2	10	23	36	27	4	102
	% of respondents	2	10	23	35	26	4	100
27	I am less certain of the values by which I want to live							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occa- sionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	8 100%	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	8
	Catholic Female	12 55%	3 14%	1 5%	4 18%	0 --	2 9%	22
	Prot/Other Female	11 61%	3 17%	2 11%	1 6%	0 --	1 6%	18
	Muslim Female	11 61%	0 --	2 11%	2 11%	2 11%	1 6%	18
	Jewish Male	1 100%	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	3 19%	6 37.5%	3 19%	2 12.5%	2 12.5%	0 --	16
	Prot/Other Male	5 72%	1 14%	0 --	0 --	0 --	1 14%	7
	Muslim Male	4 31%	2 17%	2 17%	1 8%	1 8%	2 15%	12
	TOTAL	55	15	10	10	5	7	102
	% of respondents	54	15	10	10	5	7	100
28	I understand the skills needed to dialogue respectfully with those who are different from me							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occa- sionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	0 --	2 25%	0 --	6 75%	0 --	8
	Catholic Female	0 --	0 --	3 14%	5 23%	14 64%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	0 --	3 17%	10 56%	3 17%	2 11%	18
	Muslim Female	0 --	0 --	2 11%	7 39%	9 50%	0 --	18
	Jewish Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	1 100%	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	1 6%	0 --	3 19%	8 50%	4 25%	0 --	16
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	1 14%	3 43%	3 43%	0 --	7
	Muslim Male	0 --	1 8%	3 25%	5 42%	3 25%	0 --	12
	TOTAL	1	1	17	38	43	2	102
	% of respondents	1	1	17	37	42	2	100

29	I feel safer and less afraid of mixing with those from other cultural or religious groups							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occa- sionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	0 --	1 12.5%	3 37.5%	3 37.5%	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	1 5%	0 --	1 5%	7 32%	13 59%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	0 --	1 6%	9 50%	7 39%	1 6%	18
	Muslim Female	1 6%	3 17%	2 11%	4 22%	7 39%	1 6%	18
	Jewish Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	1 100%	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	0 --	0 --	2 12.5%	2 12.5%	12 75%	0 --	16
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	1 14%	6 86%	0 --	7
	Muslim Male	0 --	2 17%	3 23%	2 15%	6 46%	0 --	13
	TOTAL	2	5	10	28	55	2	102
	% of respondents	2	5	10	27	54	2	100
30	I am not as clear about what the differences between people of various faiths and cultures are							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occa- sionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	4 50%	2 25%	1 12.5%	1 12.5%	0 --	0 --	8
	Catholic Female	14 64%	3 14%	1 5%	2 9%	2 9%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	5 29.5%	7 41%	1 6%	2 12%	0 --	2 12%	17
	Muslim Female	6 33%	2 11%	6 33%	2 11%	1 6%	1 6%	18
	Jewish Male	0 --	1 100%	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	8 50%	4 25%	1 6%	3 19%	0 --	0 --	16
	Prot/Other Male	1 14%	4 57%	1 14%	1 14%	0 --	0 --	7
	Muslim Male	3 23%	3 23%	2 17%	2 15%	1 8%	2 17%	13
	TOTAL	41	26	13	13	4	5	102
	% of respondents	40	25	13	13	4	5	100
31	I have a poorer understanding of who I am							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occa- sionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	8 100%	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	8
	Catholic Female	16 73%	2 9%	1 5%	2 9%	0 --	1 5%	22
	Prot/Other Female	13 72%	4 22%	0 --	0 --	0 --	1 6%	18
	Muslim Female	12 67%	0 --	2 11%	2 11%	1 6%	1 6%	18
	Jewish Male	1 100%	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	8 50%	2 12.5%	1 6%	4 25%	1 6%	0 --	16
	Prot/Other Male	6 86%	1 14%	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	7
	Muslim Male	8 67%	2 17%	0 --	2 17%	0 --	0 --	12
	TOTAL	72	11	4	10	2	3	102
	% of respondents	71	11	4	10	2	3	100
32	I have a greater interest in developing a relationship with God							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occa- sionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	3 37.5%	2 25%	1 12.5%	1 12.5%	1 12.5%	8
	Catholic Female	4 18%	1 5%	4 18%	4 18%	8 36%	1 5%	22
	Prot/Other Female	4 22%	3 17%	1 6%	6 33%	2 11%	2 11%	18
	Muslim Female	0 --	0 --	1 6%	0 --	17 94%	0 --	18
	Jewish Male	0 --	0 --	1 100%	0 --	0 --	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	2 12.5%	0 --	6 37.5%	4 25%	4 25%	0 --	16
	Prot/Other Male	1 14%	1 14%	0 --	3 43%	1 14%	1 14%	7
	Muslim Male	0 --	1 8%	4 31%	1 8%	6 46%	1 8%	13
	TOTAL	11	9	19	19	39	6	103
	% of respondents	11	9	18	18	38	6	100

33	My faith has become a more important guide for how I want to live							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occa- sionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	1 12.5%	2 25%	3 37.5%	1 12.5%	1 12.5%	0 --	8
	Catholic Female	3 14%	1 5%	1 5%	8 36%	8 36%	1 5%	22
	Prot/Other Female	5 28%	2 11%	3 17%	4 22%	3 17%	1 6%	18
	Muslim Female	0 --	0 --	1 6%	2 11%	15 83%	0 --	18
	Jewish Male	0 --	1 100%	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	2 12.5%	3 19%	5 31%	3 19%	3 19%	0 --	16
	Prot/Other Male	1 14%	2 28%	2 28%	1 14%	1 14%	0 --	7
	Muslim Male	0 --	1 8%	0 --	5 38%	6 46%	1 8%	13
	TOTAL	12	12	15	24	37	3	103
	% of respondents	12	12	15	23	36	3	100
34	How important is your religious faith to your daily life							
	Religious Group	Nil	Little	Somewhat	Quite-Lot	A Lot	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	1 3.33%	1 3.33%	0 --	1 3.33%	0 --	3
	Catholic Female	0 --	4 21%	3 16%	4 21%	7 37%	1 5%	19
	Prot/Other Female	3 21%	4 29%	1 7%	3 21%	2 14%	1 7%	14
	Muslim Female	0 --	0 --	0 --	2 22%	7 78%	0 --	9
	Jewish Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --
	Catholic Male	1 17%	0 --	0 --	3 50%	2 33%	0 --	6
	Prot/Other Male	1 50%	0 --	0 --	0 --	1 50%	0 --	2
	Muslim Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	5 83%	1 17%	6
	TOTAL	5	9	5	12	25	3	59
	% of respondents	8	15	8	20	42	5	100
35	I'm less likely to be offended by statements or jokes about people from other backgrounds							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occa- sionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	3 43%	3 43%	1 14%	0 --	0 --	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	12 55%	1 5%	2 9%	4 18%	3 14%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	7 37%	4 21%	2 11%	2 11%	0 --	4 21%	19
	Muslim Female	4 22%	4 22%	5 28%	1 6%	4 22%	0 --	18
	Jewish Male	0 --	1 100%	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	1 6%	2 12%	1 6%	3 18%	8 47%	2 12%	17
	Prot/Other Male	3 37.5%	2 25%	1 12.5%	1 12.5%	1 12.5%	0 --	8
	Muslim Male	2 17%	2 17%	6 46%	1 8%	2 17%	0 --	13
	TOTAL	32	19	18	12	18	6	105
	% of respondents	30	18	17	11	17	6	100
36	I'm more aware of how society differentially treats religious, cultural gps other than my own							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occa- sionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	1 14%	1 14%	3 43%	2 28%	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	0 --	0 --	2 9%	9 41%	11 50%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	2 10%	3 15%	13 65%	2 10%	0 --	20
	Muslim Female	1 6%	0 --	4 22%	7 39%	6 33%	0 --	18
	Jewish Male	0 --	1 100%	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	1 6%	1 6%	4 24%	9 53%	2 12%	0 --	17
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	1 12.5%	5 62.5%	2 25%	0 --	8
	Muslim Male	2 25%	3 25%	3 25%	4 33%	0 --	0 --	12
	TOTAL	4	8	18	50	25	0	105
	% of respondents	4	8	17	48	24	0	100

Table 4.3 (continued). Student survey data results.

37	I feel more confident to engage in respectful dialogue w/ those from different backgrounds than before							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	1 14%	0 --	3 43%	3 43%	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	0 --	1 5%	0 --	7 32%	14 64%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	2 10%	2 10%	7 37%	9 45%	0 --	20
	Muslim Female	0 --	1 6%	3 17%	6 33%	8 44%	0 --	18
	Jewish Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	1 100%	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	0 --	0 --	2 12%	9 53%	6 35%	0 --	17
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	2 25%	5 62.5%	1 12.5%	8
	Muslim Male	0 --	2 17%	3 25%	4 33%	2 17%	1 8%	12
	TOTAL	0	7	10	38	48	2	105
	% of respondents	0	7	10	36	46	2	100
38	I have a greater awareness of gifts & challenges of living in a multi-faith/cultural society							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	1 14%	1 14%	2 28%	3 43%	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	0 --	0 --	0 --	11 50%	11 50%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	1 5%	3 15%	8 40%	7 37%	1 5%	20
	Muslim Female	0 --	1 6%	1 6%	6 33%	10 56%	0 --	18
	Jewish Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	1 100%	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	0 --	0 --	5 29.5%	5 29.5%	7 41%	0 --	17
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	2 25%	3 37.5%	3 37.5%	0 --	8
	Muslim Male	0 --	2 17%	4 31%	2 17%	5 38%	0 --	13
	TOTAL	0	5	16	37	47	1	106
	% of respondents	0	5	15	35	44	1	100
39	I want to promote our society's multicultural and multifaith diversity							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	0 --	0 --	1 14%	6 86%	0 --	7
	Catholic Female	0 --	0 --	1 5%	8 36%	13 59%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	0 --	3 15%	7 37%	10 50%	0 --	20
	Muslim Female	0 --	0 --	2 11%	7 39%	9 50%	0 --	18
	Jewish Male	0 --	0 --	1 100%	0 --	0 --	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	1 6%	1 6%	3 18%	8 47%	4 24%	0 --	17
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	1 12.5%	4 50%	3 37.5%	0 --	8
	Muslim Male	0 --	1 8%	2 17%	5 38%	5 38%	0 --	13
	TOTAL	1	2	13	40	50	0	106
	% of respondents	1	2	12	38	47	0	100
40	I am less likely to question stereotypes of people from other religions or cultures							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	3 43%	1 14%	1 14%	0 --	1 14%	1 14%	7
	Catholic Female	0 --	2 9%	1 5%	7 32%	12 55%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	9 45%	2 10%	1 5%	4 20%	3 15%	1 5%	20
	Muslim Female	3 17%	0 --	5 28%	8 44%	1 6%	1 6%	18
	Jewish Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	1 100%	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	3 18%	1 6%	2 12%	4 24%	6 35%	1 6%	17
	Prot/Other Male	4 50%	0 --	0 --	2 25%	2 25%	0 --	8
	Muslim Male	0 --	0 --	3 23%	3 23%	5 38%	2 17%	13
	TOTAL	22	6	13	28	31	6	106
	% of respondents	21	6	12	26	29	6	100

41	I feel more confident talking about my beliefs and values with others							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occa- sionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	0 --	1 17%	2 33%	3 50%	0 --	6
	Catholic Female	0 --	0 --	5 23%	3 14%	14 64%	0 --	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	0 --	5 25%	8 40%	6 30%	1 5%	20
	Muslim Female	0 --	0 --	1 6%	7 39%	10 56%	0 --	18
	Jewish Male	0 --	0 --	0 --	0 --	1 100%	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	1 6%	0 --	5 29.5%	5 29.5%	5 29.5%	1 6%	17
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	2 29%	2 29%	3 43%	0 --	7
	Muslim Male	0 --	1 8%	2 17%	3 23%	7 54%	0 --	13
	TOTAL	1	1	21	30	49	2	104
	% of respondents	1	1	20	29	47	2	100
42	I'd like to facilitate dialogues among diverse groups (like in the BBP) in the future							
	Religious Group	Not at all	Occa- sionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know	Total
		Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num %	Num
	Jewish Female	0 --	0 --	0 --	1 17%	4 66%	1 17%	6
	Catholic Female	0 --	0 --	4 18%	6 27%	11 50%	1 5%	22
	Prot/Other Female	0 --	2 10%	7 37%	4 20%	6 30%	1 5%	20
	Muslim Female	0 --	1 6%	2 11%	6 33%	9 50%	0 --	18
	Jewish Male	0 --	0 --	1 100%	0 --	0 --	0 --	1
	Catholic Male	1 6%	2 12%	3 18%	9 53%	2 12%	0 --	17
	Prot/Other Male	0 --	0 --	2 25%	3 37.5%	3 37.5%	0 --	8
	Muslim Male	0 --	1 8%	3 23%	4 31%	5 38%	0 --	13
	TOTAL	1	6	22	33	40	3	105
	% of respondents	1	6	21	31	38	3	100

So the first set of nine questions asked the degree to which the students enjoyed each particular component of the BBP. These components involved the ice-breakers, the mealtime, the skill-training, the student presentations, the sharing and questions they were asked in the small groups, meeting new people, visiting different schools and so on.

The ice-breakers. These are short interactive games or activities to get the students mixing between schools and genders in the first two or three sessions, until ‘the ice is broken’ between them. Responses to this question varied across the faith groups, with most appreciation felt by the Catholic and Muslim girls and boys and Protestant or Other boys, and

least enjoyed by the Jewish girls. Over half of all students (57%) enjoyed the breakers ‘quite a lot’ or ‘a lot’.

The meal-times. Meal-times in the programme are opportunities for students to mix and converse informally between schools and genders over food, and were greatly enjoyed by most females and males across all school backgrounds. 67% of all students said they enjoyed these times ‘a lot’, with a further 26% enjoying them ‘quite a lot’. This finding correlated with interview data that indicated they appreciated the informal and unstructured time over ‘free food’ to explore their own conversations and interests with the other participants. It may also reflect that the BBP is an extra-curricular activity that typically occurred after school in their own time, so they valued relaxed interactions that were not like their normal classes.

Meeting new people and visiting different schools. 65% of students expressed a lot of enjoyment in meeting new people through the BBP in question 7, (Appendix 4, Figure 4.3), with nearly all groups of both sexes registering in the ‘a lot’ or ‘quite a lot’ (30%) domains. This was also reflected in the interviews where most pupils expressed that they had never met a person of another faith before, and the value of engaging with a person from a different faith.

Visiting different schools was also very popular according to students across all groups, with 63% saying they enjoyed this ‘a lot’ and a further 32% ‘quite a lot’. The fact that the figures were particularly pronounced for the Catholic girls and boys may be a result of them being mostly (five out of the six schools) single-sex schools, and so the programme afforded these students an opportunity to visit and learn about schools that were either co-ed or of the other gender.

The host school presentations. The host school presentations provide a little information about the faith or background of a school and were the focus of questions 6 and

11. Question 6 asked how much they enjoyed the host school presentations. These were most appreciated ('a lot' or 'quite a lot') by the Muslim girls (92%) and boys (90%) Catholic girls (64%) and boys (84%) and Protestant boys (100%), and a more even and mixed spread with the Jewish and Protestant girls (in question 6). Question 11 sought to find out if these presentations helped participants learn more about the other's faith or values. Responses were very similar to question 6, with most insight ('a lot' or 'quite a lot') being gained by the Catholic girls (72%) and boys (77%) and Muslim girls (91%) and boys (67%) and Protestant boys (75%). This may indicate a preference by these students for factual information on the different faiths in their learning.

The degree to which the large group activities increased participants' understanding of the other participants, was explored in question 9. Results were quite strong ('quite a lot') to very strong ('a lot') for Catholic males (92%) and Muslim females (84%), but more moderate and evenly spread across the domains among the Protestant/Other females (66%), Catholic females (59%), Jewish females (57%), and the Protestant and Muslim males (both 50%). These responses are roughly congruent to those of question 6 on the host school presentations, and confirm the data from the interviews that most learning and growth of understanding of the other were the fruit of personal sharing with a peer of another background, through the informal meal and small group activities.

Skill-learning exercises. These participatory exercises teach key skills for genuine dialogue between diverse people, developmentally related to the metaphor of 'building a bridge' of trust and understanding between people from differing backgrounds. Responses from the students to the skill-learning exercises were spread between 'quite a lot' (45%) 'somewhat' (25%) and 'a lot' (23%), with most interest from the Catholic girls and boys, and the Muslim girls and boys, which may indicate for these individuals a preference for active, concrete and sensate learning.

The small groups. The students' experiences of their small group were explored particularly through questions 4, 5, 10, and then 12 through 15 inclusively. Sharing in the small group (question 4) was considered very positively, with most respondents indicating they enjoyed these 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' (86%). The small groups were perceived with slightly stronger interest among the girls than the boys, across most of the faith or school groups. For instance, 95% of the Catholic girls compared to 71% of Catholic boys (71%) enjoyed this activity 'a lot' or 'quite a lot', and similarly Protestant/Other girls (81%) to Protestant/Other boys (75%) expressed their approval. The Muslim boys (100%) shaded the girls slightly (92%) because one Muslim girl said she only enjoyed the small group 'a little'. There was no Jewish male who responded to compare figures with the high response of the Jewish females (72%). These results corroborate with the interview responses, since it is where most of the relationship building and dialogue occurs, and reflects more general studies that find, generally, girls appreciate this mode of learning about each other's experiences of life through sharing in small groups.

Question 5 related to the questions students were asked in their small groups, either from the structured personal questions or those asked by other group members. There was 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' of enjoyment for these questions by the Muslim girls (84%), Catholic girls (77%), Protestant girls (75%), and the Protestant boys (75%), with slightly lower interest with the Muslim boys (60%) and Catholic boys (54%). This may relate, particularly in the case of several Catholic and Muslim boys, to their non-English speaking background, and less comfort with being asked specific personal questions.

The small groups made 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' of contribution towards students' understanding of the other participants and their beliefs and values, across all student groups in question 10 (90% overall), although this was slightly less pronounced with the Jewish females (57%). This correlates with data from the interviews and from question 4, that found

the small groups were valued for allowing students to get to know new people and learn about their faith and cultural backgrounds and their life experiences, as well as ask their own questions of these others.

A majority of students were comfortable in their small group, either 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' in question 12 (83%), but with a slightly lower percentage among the Catholic and Muslim males. For instance, Jewish females (100%), Protestant/Other males (100%) Catholic females (95%), Muslim females (92%), Protestant/Other females (81%), Catholic males (62%) and Muslim males (60%) registered 'a lot' or 'quite a lot' of comfort in sharing in their small group. Similar levels of response were reflected in how open they were in sharing personal experiences in the small group (question 14) although marginally more spread with one or two of the girls from each category and a small number of Catholic and Muslim boys registering 'somewhat' open.

Most students (82%) felt 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' free to ask questions of other group members in question 15, especially among the females. This is illustrated with Catholic girls (100%), Muslim girls (84%), Protestant girls (81%) and Jewish girls (71%) with a more mixed response from the boys, particularly with the Protestant boys (25%) including the atheist boy at the Government school who registered 'a little', and a small number of the Catholic boys who registered in the lower domains. This corroborates with interview data where a number of the boys claimed they were not as confident in themselves as the girls to ask personal questions of others in their group.

Question 13 asked how interested in your story was your small group facilitator? This was asked to gain some feedback on the facilitator's role, energy and encouragement of the process of fostering dialogue and trust between participants. Overall, 90% of students thought their facilitator was very interested in their sharing of personal experiences. The responses indicate that almost all the females (96%), and most of the males (78%) believed

the facilitator was interested ‘quite a lot’ or ‘a lot’ in their sharing. The exceptions were three Catholic males and three Muslim males, which reflects similar results to other questions on the small group experience. It may also be a result of the girls being generally a little more forthcoming with sharing their personal narratives than the boys, so easier for the facilitator to encourage them in this, and also possibly a reflection on the actual male facilitators concerned, since both ‘a little’ responses occurred in the same region, potentially with the same person.

Students were asked in question 16, “How much did your initial perceptions change through the programme?” Again, a majority (75%) pointed out they had changed ‘quite a lot’ or ‘a lot’, with slightly lower percentage among the Muslim males (70%), Catholic males (69%) and the two Government school pupils. Interestingly, the girl from the Government school claimed her initial perceptions had only changed ‘a little’, and the boy ‘somewhat’. This may reflect the broad cultural diversity of their school and the data in their interview, that despite not having heard or shared in faith stories before, their upbringing had stressed being open-minded toward people from all different backgrounds.

Behaviour. Questions 17 to 21 explored behaviour change in the students as a result of their participation in the BBP. Most students (66%) in question 17 claimed they were ‘often’ or ‘always’ more comfortable around groups of mixed cultures and faiths. The Catholic girls (82%), Muslim girls (66%), Muslim boys (69%), Protestant/Other girls (65%) and boys (75%) and the one Jewish boy believed this was particularly so, whilst there was an even number of Jewish girls who claimed this ‘sometimes’ and ‘always’. The Catholic boys were more spread between ‘sometimes’ (35%), ‘often’ (35%) feeling more comfortable in these diverse settings. In question 18, a majority of students (59%) across all school groups said they sought opportunities to speak with those from backgrounds different from themselves,

with 33% seeking these opportunities 'sometimes'. One quarter of the Jewish girls and the Protestant/Other boys including one of the Government school males did this less often.

More than three quarters of the students who completed the survey pointed out they had made new friends with someone from another religious or cultural background through the programme according to their responses to question 19. Among those surveyed, 86 % of Catholic females, 83% of Muslim females, 82% of Catholic males, 77% of Muslim males, and 75% of Jewish females registered this was true for them 'often' or 'always'. Lower percentages were found with the Protestant/Other females (70%), their male counterparts (63%) and the lone Jewish male. This certainly correlates with the interview data that frequently found students had made new friends with someone from a different background through the programme, (this fact was referred to fifty eight times in their verbal responses such that it registered as a minor theme, see Table 4.2 (earlier in this chapter).

In question 20, students were asked how often they were motivated to share what they had learnt about dialogue with those from different religious and cultural backgrounds with their friends and family. A majority of the girls across all the school groups and the Jewish boy registered 'always', with the next largest number saying 'often'. Other boys were slightly less motivated, with the majority of them saying they 'often' were motivated, with one Muslim male saying 'occasionally' and four saying 'sometimes'. This finding on the Muslim boys may reflect the anecdotal data from teachers and principals of two Muslim schools involved in the programme that had found some of their parents expressed an ambivalence towards learning about other faiths, especially when it occurs out of school hours; they wanted their boys to concentrate more on academic achievement and become 'good Muslims'. The boys may well have experienced this resistance from their family and male friends. The Muslim girls responses reflect very little reluctance to share what they've

learnt, perhaps because it was of greater personal interest to learn about those from other religious backgrounds, and to share such personal things with their friends.

Eighty-three percent of students surveyed believed they could often or always demonstrate the skills needed to engage with those who are different, according to their responses to question 21. This question aimed to identify the degree to which students had been formed in the art of respectful dialogue and engagement with those who are different. Nearly two thirds of Jewish girls and Protestant boys (62.5%) registered they could demonstrate these skills ‘always’, but a majority of the girls and boys across all school groups said this was true for them.

Understanding. Questions 22 through 34 explored how the programme had affected the students understanding of themselves and their own faith and values, as well as their understanding of others and their faith and values. In question 22, many of the students said they were ‘often’ interested in learning about people from a different cultural or religious background to them (41%), with almost even numbers saying they were ‘always’ or ‘sometimes’ interested. This result was somewhat surprising, considering the focus on learning about others in the programme and the responses from the interviews. If students perceived the question as referring to others more generally, rather than to others such as they met in the programme, their lower interest may arise from the common experience of being over-exposed to the huge amounts of information that they get faced with via social and normal media outlets.

A number of questions in the survey, such as questions 23, 24, 27, 30, 35 and 40 used double negatives, in order to encourage students to think critically about the questions being asked and to avoid the simple repetition of answering everything as ‘often’ or ‘always’.

Questions 23, 24, and 30 related to students understanding of others. In question 23, pupils were asked to judge how accurate the following statement was of their lives since the

BBP: “I have less understanding of why people of different religious backgrounds enjoy wearing traditional clothing”. Most students (51%) across all groupings said ‘not at all’. In other words, they had a better understanding of why these people enjoy wearing their traditional clothing. This understanding was strongest among the Jewish females (75%), the Jewish male (100%), Protestant/Other females (61%), Catholic females (59%) and Protestant males (57%). A similar pattern was found in question 24, where participants generally said that they did not find it harder to put themselves in the shoes of someone who is ethnically or religiously different to them, however there was a greater spread of results for this question. Among the Muslim males, sixty-two percent said they found it ‘often’ or ‘always’ harder to put themselves in the shoes of someone different. This ‘discordant’ result may be a result of their non-English speaking background and the difficulty in interpreting the question, or because the programme, in introducing them to different others with all the complexity that this brings to understanding people, had made it more difficult for these boys to empathise with others. However, this didn’t correlate with the 40 references to ‘I am more empathetic towards different others’ in the student interviews (table 4.2, minor theme number 6). In question 25, a majority of students (68%), female and male from all school groups, ‘often’ or ‘always’ had a better appreciation for the issues and concerns faced by religious or ethnic groups other than their own. This was particularly strong among the boys, with 86% of Protestant/Other boys, 81% of Catholic boys, the Jewish boy registering that they had grown in their appreciation of these issues and concerns. This indicated they had learnt and understood something of what different religious and cultural groups experienced in their daily life and had therefore grown in intercultural and interreligious understanding.

A majority of students (65%) responded to question 30 in the negative, namely that they were clearer about the differences between people of various faiths and cultures than before. There were just a few Muslim girls (50%) and boys (54%) and Catholic boys (25%)

who answered that they were ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’ or ‘always’ less clear about the differences between people. These responses may reflect the same factors as those mentioned for question 24.

Questions 26, 27, and 31 asked students about the impact of the programme on their understanding of themselves. For question 26, a majority of all the students (61%) across all groupings said they ‘often’ or ‘always’ had a better understanding of their own beliefs and values than before they participated in the programme, but was less pronounced for the Muslim boys (50% who felt there had been little or no change to their understanding of their own faith). This overall finding correlated with many references in the student interviews that found students gained greater insight or appreciation for their own faith or values through engaging in interfaith dialogue with a peer. Students strongly confirmed that they were more certain of the values by which they wanted to live (69%) and 82% felt they had a better understanding of who they were through the BBP, across all student groups in questions 27 and 31 respectively.

Most students across all school groups said they ‘often’ (37%) or ‘always’ (42%) understood the skills needed to dialogue respectfully with those who are different from them, in response to question 28. A majority also believed they felt ‘always’ or ‘often’ safer and less afraid of mixing with those from other cultural or religious groups (54% and 27% respectively) as a result of their involvement in the programme. This certainly correlated with the interview results that found 75 references to feeling more comfortable mixing with different others, and therefore emerged as a major theme from the interviews (Table 4.1, major theme number 5, cited earlier in this chapter).

Questions 32 through 34 focused on students’ faith and relationship with God, and showed considerable variation. This area was investigated for how the BBP affected students’ faith development. To the thirty-second question: “I have a greater interest in

developing a relationship with God”, girls and boys from nearly all groups had responses that ranged from ‘not at all’ (11%) across to ‘always’ (38%), except for Muslim females who nearly all (94%) said they ‘always’ have a greater interest in developing their God relationship. Apart from these Muslim girls and to a slightly less extent the Muslim boys (who responded ‘always’ 46%), many of the other students of both genders and from other faith backgrounds said they ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’ have this greater interest. Both Government students, including the male who classified himself as an ‘atheist’, had no interest in developing a relationship with God. Similar results were found in response to question 33: “My faith has become an more important guide for how I want to live”. The only difference in the results was a more significant number of Catholic girls (72% ‘always’ or ‘often’) and Muslim boys (84 %) answered in the affirmative with the Muslim girls (94%). The responses to “How important is your religious faith to your daily life?” (Question 34) were answered by much fewer students than the other questions, perhaps because of its position at the very bottom of the page, or because of its personal nature or some not wanting to answer. The responses were more clearly demarcated, with Catholic girls (58%) and boys (83%), and Muslim girls (100%) and boys (83%) stating that this reflected their values ‘quite a lot’ or ‘a lot’ of the time in their lives. The responses from the Jewish girls and Protestant girls were more evenly spread, reflecting the global trends of relative ambivalence around religion among youth today (Engebretson, 2012b; P Hughes, 2007b; Huntley, 2006; T. Knauth, 2008; Mason et al., 2007; Parks, 2000; C. Smith & Denton, 2005; Taylor, 2007). The results from the Jewish boy, and Protestant boys was inconclusive, with only two boys answering the question, one of whom was the Government school student.

Attitudes. Questions 35 through 42 explored the impact of the BBP on students’ attitudes towards others and issues around engaging with the cultural and religious diversity in society. Questions 35 and 40 related to discrimination and stereotyping. To the question,

“I am less likely to be offended by statements or jokes that make fun of people from other cultural or religious backgrounds”; the Jewish girls (86%) and boy, Catholic girls (60%) and Protestant girls (58%) and boys (63%) mostly answered ‘not at all’ or ‘occasionally’, meaning that they would be offended by these statements or jokes. Although 44% of Muslim girls and 34% Muslim boys responded with ‘not at all’ or ‘occasionally’, many Muslim girls (28%) and Muslim boys (25%) ‘often’ or ‘always’ and a significant number of Catholic boys (65%) said ‘often’ or ‘always’. This does not accord with responses from the Muslim and Catholic students in the interviews who spoke forthrightly about wanting to defend those from other religions and cultures against jokes and stereotypes. The responses were even more spread when asked if they were “less likely to question stereotypes of people from other religions or cultures” (Question 40). Many of the Jewish girls (43%) and Protestant/Other girls (45%) including the girl from the Government school, said ‘not at all’, the Protestant boys were balanced between ‘not at all’ (50%) and ‘often’ (25%) including the boy from the Government school, or ‘always’ (25%). However, a majority of the Catholic girls (87%) and boys (59%), the Muslim girls (50%) and boys (61%) responded with ‘often’ or ‘always’. Again, this may relate to the question being asked in the negative, and students trying to understand the question from a non-English speaking background, as has been previously discussed. Also, it does not correspond with the interview data, where a majority of students said they had been challenged to see people beyond the stereotypes and wanted to critique those stereotypes put out in the public domain.

Questions 36, 38, 39, and 42 pertained to understanding and engaging with society’s diversity, as part of addressing students’ development in intercultural understanding from the programme. Most students (72%), female and male across all school groups except the single Jewish male, said they were ‘often’ or ‘always’ more aware of how society differentially treats religious or cultural groups other than their own (Question 36). Similar

results were seen for question 38 where students were asked: “I have a greater awareness of the gifts and challenges of living in a multicultural and multifaith society”. Most responded to this question with ‘often’ or ‘always’ (79%). Interestingly, the girl from the Government school answered ‘don’t know’ and the boy from the same school marked ‘sometimes’. This could identify a potential need in government schooling for more programmes that specifically address the issues and challenges of cultural and religious diversity. A clear majority of all students groups, including the two Government school pupils, said they ‘always’ or ‘often’ wanted to promote society’s multicultural and multifaith diversity in question 39 (85%). The only exception was the single Jewish male who said ‘sometimes’. With only one male Jewish student responding to the questionnaire, it is very difficult to make an assessment as to why he might have these reservations about Australia’s diversity. Question 42 asked if students would like to facilitate dialogues among small diverse cultural and religious groups, like those they met in the Building Bridges programme, in the future. This question aimed to gauge their desire to promote intercultural and interfaith understanding into the future. A majority of the girls from Jewish (83%), Muslim (83%), Catholic (77%), and Protestant/Other (50%) backgrounds said ‘always’ or ‘often’, whilst boys expressed slightly less interest, with Protestant/Other boys, including the Government school ‘atheist’ (75%), Muslim boys (69%), and Catholic boys (65%) saying ‘often’ or ‘always’, but 23% of the boys said ‘sometimes’ (including the Jewish male).

Questions 37 and 41 sought data on the impact of the programme on pupil’s level of confidence to share their own beliefs and values, as well as to engage in respectful dialogue with others. These questions pertained to assessing the effect of the programme on students’ personal and social capability. Results showed that a majority of all the students (82%), male and female across nearly all school groups felt more confident to engage in respectful dialogue with those from different backgrounds than they did before participating in the BBP

(question 37). For some of the boys from the Muslim school (42%) and the one from the Government school who said 'don't know', they were slightly less confident in engaging in such dialogues. Similar responses were found for question 41: "I feel more confident talking about my beliefs and values with others". A majority of the girls and boys from each of the Jewish, Catholic, Protestant and Muslim schools said 'often' or 'always', however forty-two percent of the Catholic boys said either 'nil', 'sometimes' or 'didn't know'. This may reflect a more general lack of self-confidence that many of these same Catholic boys exhibited also in their interviews, or the quieter reserve they had because of their non-English cultural backgrounds.

Key theories that emerged from the students' data

The purpose in using GT methodology in this research was to abstract theories about the effects upon participants of their involvement in the BBP, as a way to investigate the programme's effectiveness and its potential as a model for interfaith education more widely. The analytical tool used to identify these emergent theories was the constant comparison method of GT, as detailed in the research design chapter. To identify theory within this methodology requires lifting data to a conceptual level, beyond that of superficial observations (Suddaby, 2006). In this project, these theories developed organically as the researcher repeatedly compared interview statements, observations, incidents, and the data collected from the survey questionnaire, with the recurring themes that were arising, with his analysis of the data. Gradually, through this process of constant comparison, some conceptual structures coalesced that seemed to the researcher to be the most plausible explanation for the effects on the participants from their involvement in the BBP. Consistent with GT methodology, these theories are not statements that participants have explicitly made and are not repetitions of the themes, but appear as implicit meanings, propositions on the

effective components of the BBP, and causal factors for what occurred between participants according to the researcher (Charmaz, 2006). For an outline of the development of theories from the themes, see Table 4.4 below. These theories then contribute to a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of the BBP, and what elements of the programme were most effective in achieving a number of the general capabilities of the national curriculum, as per the first and second research questions. These theories have also been brought into dialogue with some of the literature reviewed in chapter two.

Table 4.4 Development of emergent theories

	Themes	Emergent Theories
1	It was valuable to engage with religious peers (major theme 1) and I am more interested in other faiths/ religions than before (minor theme 7)	Religion needs a human face to be relevant for teenagers
2	I learnt about other faiths, I gained an appreciative understanding of the other faith (theme 2, minor theme 1).	A practitioner demonstrates a valued, experiential understanding of religion
3	I am more interested in other faiths/ religions than before (minor theme 7)	A peer forum is needed for exploring one's own questions around faith and spirituality
4	It changed my attitude to and understanding of my own faith (major theme 2, minor theme 5)	Dialogue can enrich a person's understanding of themselves and their faith
5	I discovered the other is like me/us and it challenged/changed my stereotypes of the 'other' (major theme 3, minor theme 3)	Discovering oneself in the religious other overcomes prejudice and intolerance towards them
6	It challenged/changed my stereotypes of the 'other' and I learnt about other faiths (major themes 4 and 2).	Faith and religion are not monoliths
7	I am more empathetic towards different others; I've become more open and accepting of different others; and I want to tell others of the value of the BBP and/or interfaith engagement (minor themes 2, 6, and 8)	Hospitality towards one stranger opens one up to a more peaceful world
8	I'm more comfortable mixing with different others and I've become more confident engaging with different others (major theme 5, minor theme 4) and responses to Survey questionnaire, Qs 2.	Informal meals with the religious other enhance learning
9, 10	I've become more open and accepting of different others (minor theme 2) and responses to Survey questionnaire, Qs 7, 8, 10, 16, 19, 20.	Meet new people and visit different schools to broaden students' perspective

The following is a brief outline of the key theories that emerged from the students' data and identified in the table above. These theories are further developed in chapter seven.

Religion needs a human face to be relevant for teenagers

This study has underlined that religion and faith have greater meaning, interest and relevance for young Australians when they can meet a real person, particularly a peer, who has a name and face and lives that faith. Most of the students in this study had never engaged with a person of another faith background, so they discovered that engaging with a peer of a different religion increased their understanding and appreciation for other faiths and cultures. It therefore promoted a good intercultural and interreligious understanding. This face-to-face engagement is critical for Australia where many remain in a 'bubble', studying just one religion in a faith-based school, or no religion in a Government school. Such engagements with a peer from a background different to one's own create opportunities for perspectival transformation (Mezirow, 1991, 2000; Welton, 1995). The findings of this study correlate with that of Boys and Lee (1996) who discovered that studying another faith in the presence of a person of that faith made the experience more transformative. This is an especially pertinent issue in Australia where considerable ignorance exists about religions in this society, so few take up the currently available multifaith units in secondary school, and so students are left without any understanding nor tools to appropriately engage with this important dimension in many peoples' lives.

A practitioner demonstrates a valued, experiential understanding of religion

This study of the effect on students in the BBP has confirmed the value of learning of faith and religion through an experiential approach in education that draws on practitioners of that faith. The kind of knowledge gained in an experiential model of interfaith education from a practitioner of that faith is qualitatively different from the cognitive knowing that one

might gain from abstract discussions in class or from a textbook on religion. As Dewey and Goleman have revealed (Dewey, 1938, 1997; Goleman, 2005, 2006), learning from a practitioner within an experiential approach offers a richer learning environment than class discussions alone, since it draws on multiple forms of students' intelligence and styles of learning (D. Kolb, 1984).

A peer forum for exploring one's own questions around faith and spirituality

Students continue to have great interest and many personal questions about other religions and faiths, particularly the experiential side of what it means to live a faith (P Hughes, 2007b; Knauth et al., 2008), despite the low levels of actual religious practice among young people today (Collins, 2010; Mason et al., 2007). This research found that when given a forum to explore their faith and spirituality, participants grew in understanding of their own faith and values as well as that of others, thereby promoting their personal and social capability, and intercultural understanding. The realms of faith and spirituality ask some of the most fundamental and universal questions of human life, such as why we are here, how should we live in this globalized and diverse world, who am I and what is my role or vocation in this life? By neglecting an inclusive study of religion at most Government schools and many private schools, students are deprived of the opportunity to reflect on many of these questions at a critical stage of their personal and moral development. The Government school students in this study, whilst broadly accepting of Australia's cultural and religious diversity, were very ignorant of people's religious traditions and the role it plays in their lives, since their school and most Government schools do not study religion in any form. Such a forum could also include discussion and exposure to Indigenous spiritualities for the development of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Therefore opportunities should be provided and supported for pupils to meet and if possible personally engage with others (preferably with someone from another religion) about faith

and spirituality. This area could be beneficially supplemented by some formal study of the different religions and religious questions as in other programmes (Boys & Lee, 1996; Chapman, J. et al., 2008)

Dialogue can enrich a person's understanding of themselves and their faith:

The dialogical nature of the students' engagement provided them with a freedom to explore their own questions of each other's faith. This increased not only their interest in that other's faith and spirituality, but new aspects of their own, as found elsewhere (Buber, 1970; Weisse, 2003). Questions from outside their tradition or community often brought the student back to the essential core of their own faith and life, as other interfaith dialogue programmes have discovered (Knitter, 1995; Swearer, 1977; Swidler, Duran, & Firestone, 2007). Some of these students had never explored such questions before. This confirmed the value of using an inclusive model of interfaith education that relied on a story-telling process as was used effectively at Washington High (Traubman & Traubman, 2007), since it allowed every student to be involved, even those with no religious affiliation, as they also had life-shaping experiences to share. Such a dialogical pedagogy proved to sustain students' interest and engagement because the focus was on their personal experiences and 'interior' spiritual quest, rather than just factual descriptions about others 'out there' (Jackson, 1997; 2004; 2011; Rossiter, 2001). Students also felt sufficiently equipped by experientially learning this approach to interfaith engagement to confidently exercise these dialogical skills in other diverse settings in their lives.

Faith and religion are not monoliths

This model of interfaith education was found to uncover some of the rich diversity and complexity of different faith expressions and practices as students heard how others understand and express their faith differently within their tradition. It thereby provided

students with a real-to-life understanding of what a life of faith looks like. It's pedagogy therefore confirmed the value of Jackson's interpretive approach (2011), that was developed in part to expose students to the actual, lived experience of people of faith in their neighbourhoods, that frequently differs from the broad general descriptions in class textbooks (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2011; Jackson, 2004), and the stereotypical and often dehumanized images portrayed by the media and in the wider community.

Discovering oneself in the religious other overcomes prejudice and intolerance towards them:

When given the opportunity to meet a religious other and hear their personal stories of faith and life, most students in this research found they began to identify with the other's faith perspective and interests and to empathise with their situation, as other studies have shown (Boys & Lee, 1996; Ipgrave, 2003). This was especially significant in the light of many of the students' admissions of negative stereotypes they held of the others' religions prior to their participation in the BBP. The students' testimonies revealed that their encounters with religious peers dismantled their over-generalised, dehumanising stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes towards those of other religious backgrounds as well as reduced their ignorance about faiths. Many of their relationships resulted in new friendships and collaboration across their religious and cultural divides, a desire to promote the virtues of Australia's multicultural and multifaith society, tackle and challenge over-generalized stereotypes among their friends and families, facilitate dialogues between diverse groups after they finish school and work together for the common good of society.

Hospitality towards one stranger opens one up to a more peaceful world.

This research into the students' experience of this model of interfaith education found that as a result of their engagement in dialogue with a religious other over several sessions,

they were less fearful of mixing and engaging with diverse others in society. They had grown sufficiently in trust to feel more comfortable and confident to mix with people of different backgrounds, not just those involved in the programme. They had therefore grown in personal capability and ‘faith’, when understood as an orientation toward the whole of life that affects how one perceives, experiences and makes meaning out of their experiences (Fowler, 1981, 1995). Further, many felt strongly motivated to engage in other ‘bridge-building’ kinds of civic activities, promoting greater intercultural and interfaith engagement and thereby strengthening intercultural understanding and social cohesion in the broader society (Palmer, 1981).

Informal meals with the religious other enhance learning.

This study has confirmed that providing relaxed ‘informal’ opportunities for students to explore their own issues and interests with religious others around food enhanced their learning experience. Nearly all the students spoke highly of these opportunities for the freedom they provided, and to experientially learn how to mix and relate with the other in less formal settings.

Visit different schools to broaden perspective.

Most students valued the opportunity to visit other schools, as this broadened their perspective and appreciation for their own learning environment and the different approaches used at other schools. It also provided time in transportation to and from the other schools to emotionally prepare for their meeting and debrief together with their teacher on the session afterwards.

Meet new people

This research into the students' experience of the programme found that the simple opportunity to meet new people was highly appreciated. It drew on the pupils' natural curiosity about the other, which piqued their interest and their desire to learn.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the data from the students involved in the Building Bridges Programme and the theories that emerged from that data. This data was collected from the semi-structured interviews with eighty-four students and the survey questionnaire that was completed by one hundred and seven students. The findings were distilled into ten theories that emerged from the data that address the research questions on the effectiveness of the programme from the students' perspectives. The following chapter presents the data from the perspective of the educators involved in the BBP, along with the theories that emerge from their interviews.

Chapter Five: The Educators' Perspectives

Introduction

This chapter examines the effectiveness of the Building Bridges programme from the perspective of the educators: the Regional Co-ordinators and the teachers in the programme. It does this through extracting theory emergent from the data obtained in the interviews with these participants. The previous chapter did this from the students' perspective.

The teachers were asked a number of the same questions as the Regional Co-ordinators (RCs) of the programme. The interview questions for the educators are found in Appendix 5, and for the RCs in Appendix 6. Their responses to the questions on their concerns with and problematic issues of the BBP are grouped together at the end of this chapter. Their identification of the qualities and skills needed by teachers and facilitators in the programme are incorporated into the next chapter with the facilitators' experiences of the BBP, called Facilitating interfaith dialogue among young Australians.

Teachers

The teacher's role in Building Bridges is principally to manage the programme at their school. As mentioned in the first chapter, they are responsible to recruit and organize the students, arrange the session dates and locations, liaise with the school leadership regarding timetables, as well as organize the session when their school is hosting. In addition, teachers may also assist on the 'Creative day' or communal project by providing their skills or running activities for the students.

Whilst students are in their small groups for about forty-five minutes during a session, teachers generally share together in their own 'interfaith dialogues'. These dialogues among the teachers are informal and unstructured with no formal agenda or pre-arranged questions. They generally occur in the staff room of the host school, where they can converse over a cup of tea or coffee, either in small groups or as the whole regional group of teachers around a

large table. Despite the informal and unstructured nature of these dialogues, there is a significant level of trust between the teachers and interest in each other's lives, due to their relationships having been built up over many years. So in these times, the teachers generally pursue the topics and questions of interest to them, whether personal, religious, educational or about the programme. Personal topics range from asking into each other's lives outside of school or following up on a previous conversation. Religious topics come up when they wish to explore each other's faith background or practice or raise a question out of the host-school's presentation. Educational issues arise around the teaching of different units or from noticing something about the host-school's environment. Questions about the programme may be around how to host a session or making plans for the creative day or final session.

The teachers were interviewed in this project for several reasons. The researcher wanted to learn, how they had been affected, personally and professionally, by their participation in the programme. It was also important to understand, from their educator's perspective, what was most beneficial educationally about the programme for their school, their students' education and for encouraging social cohesion and intercultural understanding among the students. Teachers were also asked what components of the programme they perceived to most contribute to an empathetic understanding of 'the other', and their educational aims for the programme (in line with research question two). Another question related to identifying the qualities and skills they believed built bridges of trust and intercultural and interreligious understanding between diverse participants (to address research question three). The educators' perspectives were also critical to identifying the key principles and practices for effective interfaith dialogue among Australian youth (to respond to research question four).

Twenty teachers in total were interviewed from sixteen schools; four of those teachers were also regional co-ordinators in the programme. The teachers were all interviewed

individually on their school campus, generally just prior to or after the interview with the students at their school. In all but one case, the interviewer was the researcher. It had been the intention that a facilitator would conduct as many of the interviews as possible, to reduce the risk of bias of the researcher, who is also the founder and director of the BBP. However, this was logistically difficult and deemed not so critical to the data-gathering, given the researcher's comprehensive understanding of the programme and its many components, the trust built-up with most of the teachers over many years, his experience attending to the yearly feedback of students and teachers about the programme, and his training in pastoral care and spiritual direction that attuned him to the verbal and non-verbal cues of respondents that could sensitively be probed for greater clarification or depth of insight. To address and reduce the potential for bias by the researcher in interviews with the educators, the teachers were specifically asked for deficiencies, problems and concerns of the programme, and the principal and teacher at a school that had not continued with the programme were interviewed separately about their reasons for withdrawing.

The sample of teachers was selected to garner the widest possible diversity- religiously, culturally and socio-economically- and among those who had the broadest experience, namely, had been involved for at least one year with a significant number of students participating. This ensured the educators had a rich database of personal and professional experience to draw upon for their responses. This diversity also contributed to a broader and more complex range of responses, relative to the level of religiosity of each school, the educational aim for participating in the programme of each school, the composition of faith-based schools and students of both genders in their region. Names of the educators have been replaced by a code rather than a pseudonym to protect their identity.

The full set of questions asked of the teachers is included in Appendix 5.

Themes from the Teacher interviews

Personal benefits.

Relationships with a religious other. All the teachers spoke positively of their involvement in the BBP on a personal level. Most common among these benefits was the personal relationships that had developed between teachers of different faith and cultural backgrounds. The opportunity the programme provided to meet and dialogue across their differences over six sessions a year had contributed in many cases to a strong sense of collegiality, friendship and a greater understanding of each other's faith perspective. This comment from one teacher was typical of many:

I think the greatest thing that has struck me from this programme is, as students have gone off to their facilitated groups, I've had the opportunity to meet with staff from other schools and in those kinds of settings you immediately compare and contrast the different teaching experiences in those school environments. On both a personal and professional level, I've had some great discussions with some staff from other schools. In particular, I remember fondly some conversations with staff from [the] Islamic College, like the students finding in their discussions, you are struck as much by the similarities as the differences between the schools. (CCBMBM).

A number of the teachers mentioned that these relationships had grown into long-term friendships because of the regularity of meeting each other over several years. Further, some identified how these friendships had significantly affected their attitudes towards those from different religious backgrounds, and given them a greater level of understanding and empathy for those respective communities in the issues they faced.

I've also found that I've enjoyed very much meeting the other adults. The teachers involved in [our region of schools] have been a very stable group. And so it's been about five, six years that we've met each other at quite an intense level and I've found

that I've enjoyed those acquaintances and friendships that have grown out of that. And I always try and explain to the students while they're doing their thing; we've got our own at the adult level, a whole interfaith sort of event happening ourselves. So I've found personally I've enjoyed those relationships and I've learnt a lot about other people of other faiths as well. (EMSFPF)

Another teacher said it had given her considerably more confidence to talk with people of other faiths. Two teachers said the interaction with those from other religious backgrounds had prompted new questions of their own faith journey. One said: "At a personal level, it's been probably just as profound, I think, in terms of understanding other faiths, and appreciation of people of other faiths. It's sort of set me on a personal journey, really" (ECGLBM); while the other said he found: "It's just challenging to me to think about this stuff– and I guess that it's just the challenge that the programme is designed to do, is to say, 'Your experience and their experience are very similar; how do you reconcile that?' [It's] that sort of stuff. And it's just engaging with the question which has been challenging and good" (NSSRCM).

Two teachers said their involvement in the programme had been personally enriching. One of them, teaching at an Islamic school, said this in the context of negative portrayals of Muslims in the media and wider society:

On a personal level, I would say it has reaffirmed my faith in the capability of human beings, despite everything, despite all the overwhelming odds, to still come together and build bridges of harmony literally. So the odds aren't great out there and our kids face it every day and there's so much prejudice and misconceptions going on through the media and all that and to combat that I think the Building Bridges Program is doing a fantastic job. (CEPRZF).

Professional Benefits:***Enhanced understanding of faiths and role as teacher of faith***

Most of the teachers interviewed said their understanding of the other faiths had been significantly enhanced by their interfaith conversations during the sessions:

So I think that within my role as Chaplain, it's greatly enhanced my understanding of other faiths and contact with living expressions of that by meeting with people, and I imagine it's the same for the students involved too, where you – we have this sense of understanding the faith in a much more earthed and real sense because we relate with people who live the faith in a committed way, rather than just read it from a text book or have an adult speaking to us, or something like that. (ECGLBM)

Several said their experience in the programme had enriched their teaching of religion: “It's enriched my teaching of Year 10 religion, because we do a unit on world religion, and having actually been to visit some of their schools and talked with them, and seen some firsthand demonstrations of Islamic prayer positions and things like that, I can speak from a more informed perspective” (CXCBMF). Another said: “If I'm teaching a religious education class or doing comparative religions and so on, it does provide that opportunity to understand beyond the book or just the text, so to speak, [and] to be able to tell stories as well which is very good”. (EDCSCM)

One teacher said she was now identified with the new role of “interfaith teacher”, whom others sought out when having questions about other religious faith perspectives:

In our [Jewish] school, I've become known as the interfaith person now... it's really enhanced my role and reputation within the school. And I find that whenever there's something relevant about the young people and interfaith programs anywhere in the news, or articles, that people always run to me and sort of want to discuss it and so on. I think very much that I've found my own attitudes being opened up... And also I've

found that I'm much more attuned to events in the broader community that are relevant in the area of interfaith, whether it's for adults, but especially for young kids. And I've found that I've been sort of called up and people have asked for advice about my experience in that area. I've been invited to seminars or to be facilitator at other interfaith events. So I guess that has enhanced my life both professionally and personally." (EMSFPF).

A chaplain at a government school who was interviewed, found being the representative teacher for the programme at his school had raised his profile among students as someone interested and open to talk about faith and spirituality, and quite approachable if there was a 'pastoral' need:

Personally, I mean I guess it's been largely about the relationships with those particular kids, which has been great and allowed me to have good conversations with them, particularly in the taxi trips on the way back from the programme. Just in my role as the chaplain at the school and particularly as part of the wellbeing team – its been interesting how those two roles have overlapped in terms of co-ordinating the Building Bridges Programme and also some of the wellbeing issues with those particular students, which I didn't think the two are inseparable. (NSCRCM).

Co-operation /Teaching-support

For many teachers, the relationships with teachers of other religious backgrounds had afforded them opportunities to regularly consult with each other regarding resources and ideas for teaching each other's faith tradition, as this teacher at a Catholic school outlines:

We've formed a network all of our own, which steps outside the program. We find ourselves emailing each other for assistance in the jobs that we do which are very, very similar but require some different resources....You know, if I'm teaching those units, I'd be very free to ring up one of the other teachers in the network from a different

school and say, “What would be the best way to teach this? Or do you have a lesson plan that describes Jewish feast days in a comprehensive manner?” And you always get instant support. (EACMHM)

Three cases were mentioned where the relationship with teachers from other faith backgrounds had developed into a collaborative venture, where larger segments of their respective schools visited the other's school, to expose an entire year level to that faith tradition. One of these teachers said this visit had become a popular annual event for the schools concerned and enhanced his educational (Chaplain) role within the school:

So that the Year 9's now, are going to [an Islamic] College where they are going to spend about two hours there with a presentation by the students, very similar to what happened two weeks ago at the [BBP session], but there's a hundred of our students going and they're actually going to have that presentation, and following that they've been given permission to observe the prayers of the whole school....so that's a unique experience and they'll never forget that...So I think professionally, it's been enormously beneficial in ways that wouldn't have happened without the opportunities that Building Bridges provides. (ECGLBM).

Educational Benefits:

Promotes understanding and appreciation of faith and religion in society

Many of the teachers stated that the BBP provided a positive experience of religious and cultural diversity that helped students and staff prepare for Australia's future:

But I just think that we are able to present students with a very positive experience of diversity and of preparation for the future of Australia, in relation to the different faiths and how they interact. And the model that Building Bridges provides, I think, is outstanding in terms of what is achievable across the faith divide and because we are a

part of that process, we can strive to emulate that within our school. (ECGLBM). I think the reason why I continue to be involved is this fundamental value or belief that I actually think we do need to live harmoniously in a, sort of, pluralistic world. And so, I want to continue to provide my students with the opportunity to be part of a programme where they meet people they ordinarily wouldn't meet; hopefully to develop that sort of harmonious sort of world. (EDCSCM).

Whilst religion is not taught at most Australian government schools, and the place of religion in the national curriculum is currently under review by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Review Authority (ACARA), this body has stated that a goal for senior secondary students in the future curriculum is inter-religious and intercultural literacy (Australian Curriculum Assessment & Reporting Authority, 2010; Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training & Youth Affairs, 2008). Given that the current Victorian curriculum offers the four VCE 'Religion and Society' units, a number of teachers stated that BBP complements these curriculum units extremely well:

At [our school], the curriculum in year 10 is to get an overview of all the major faiths- looking at Islam and Judaism, and looking at different varieties of Christianity. So I think to have the opportunity to go to these schools that come from these various faith backgrounds- it's a great way to see that faith at work in an educational setting. So I guess it provides further definition to what they've learnt from the curriculum that they've received at [our school]. I think that's a really great benefit. (CCBMBM).

And the same connection follows for the VCE unit 'Texts and Traditions':

I know that some of our students from Building Bridges went to inform groups of Year 11 'Text and Traditions' students about how they understood Judaism in particular, because they're doing socio-historical background to the Old Testament and the New Testament. And the way that they presented themselves at class was very

much as people who were speaking with a personal knowledge of this, communicated from participation with the students from [the Jewish school]. (EACMHM).

A teacher at a religiously and culturally diverse Grammar School said involvement in the programme had enabled students of different faith backgrounds to feel more 'at home' or comfortable at the school, because their faith perspective is acknowledged and given a voice. This was said as Islamic students were at that moment praying in the school chapel. Two teachers specifically mentioned that the visits by other schools had helped 'normalise' the reality of Australia's diverse religious population for other students and staff at their respective schools. A Jewish school teacher made this observation:

I think a measure of that is when we first started this [involvement in BBP]; the sort of things kids [at our school] were saying. The excitement, but in the, ooh, this is so unusual, and to having Muslim kids at a Jewish school. When now it's: 'here they are again, the Muslim students are here, must be Building Bridges'. And it's the normalisation of that which I think is a fabulous thing that I guess has stood the test of time. (EMSFPF)

Plus a teacher at a 'monocultural' Catholic school made this comment: "I think when we hosted the creative day last year, our school got to experience what it's like to have a diversity of religious traditions represented and treated everyone really nicely. It was a really, really great day". (EACMHM). An Islamic studies teacher expressed the hope of opening their students' eyes to the world, through participating in the programme:

[My hope for our students is] for their eyes to be open to the world. Like, many of them are living in a bubble. So, just to open up their horizons to other people and other faiths that are available outside. To know that people of other faiths are just like you. Yes true, they may have different beliefs, different – but in the end, ultimately we're all humans, we all live under the same roofs and we all have similar things that we have in

common. True, we might differ on certain beliefs, or faiths or religion, but ultimately we're all the same and we're all able to work together and live in peace together.

(CEPKSM).

Another teacher at a Catholic school said it was about 'conversion', but not in terms of changing faith allegiance, but becoming clearer about their own faith perspective yet open to the other:

It's about that conversion which is a part of any person of faith. That we always used to say that the problem with students in a Catholic school was that they're hard of heart and soft in the head; that they don't know much about their religious tradition and they don't know how to be open to others. And conversion is swapping it around. So they're hard up here [in the head] and soft in the heart. They actually know where they're coming from, but they're able to be the heart of compassion towards others and the heart of love. So that's our goal for our kids in Building Bridges. That they'll become a little less unsure of themselves as Catholics and a little more sure of themselves when it comes to being open to others. So, yeah, that's sort of mainly what it's about. And they came – like, when you meet with other faith traditions; you become very clear about what you believe yourself. And I suppose that's the goal for our students too. (EACMHM).

The programme was also seen to help students without a faith or religious affiliation, to appreciate what faith and religion means for other people, as well as ask questions of themselves about their own values and beliefs, according to this chaplain at a government school:

I think it was a really interesting opportunity to take some state school kids into a context that was way beyond what they were used to just to kind of 'keep the rumour of God alive' as we say in Chaplaincy circles [and] to engage a group of kids in these sort

of questions....I think my hope for it is that they would reflect on the lives of the other kids. I was particularly interested in one of our students who, after the first session he attended said, I didn't realise that teenagers were religious; I thought we left that all behind. I thought that was a profound moment, I don't know if he did but, to know that.... So, I hope it's kind of planting the seeds that religion could be a good thing and that there might be something else out there and maybe you haven't quite stumbled upon it yet.... It's giving them the opportunity to be aware of 'other' because I don't know whether or not that question will be asked otherwise. (NSCRCM).

Improves self-confidence, interpersonal skills, and attitudes of respect (GC: Personal and Social capability, and Ethical behaviour)

Teachers noticed that this experiential interfaith programme had formed their students, partially at least, in ways beyond faith development. Educationally, they had grown in character- in self-esteem and self-confidence, interpersonal and social skills, empathy and attitudes of respect for those from different backgrounds or with different beliefs. This was an important motivation and outcome for this teacher at a Jewish school:

I just think really broadening the kids' horizons, giving them the confidence, the skills to interact with the broader world. And we very much see ourselves as inculcating Jewish identity, Jewish knowledge, sort of citizens of the future. And when you're self confident about who you are, where you come from, what you stand for, I think it's a great way then to be able to go out in to the world and meet people of other faiths, and openly and respectfully listen. And you make comparisons; similarities and the differences are very important. And I think our kids have to be very aware of the differences. I think kids really like to think that everybody's the same and I think kids pretend to be individuals but they actually want to be like each other. And I think there's a tendency for kids to down play differences and to say, "Oh, we're all the

same.” But I think it’s really important for kids to be able to stand up and say unapologetically there are differences. There are differences that we are not going to agree on and to be able to do that in a respectful manner. (EMSFPF).

Another teacher identified how trust and understanding of the other, and growing attitudes of respect were evident in the way his students talked about their interactions after the sessions:

Certainly when they talk about the excitement of realising that many of the issues that these other young people face are exactly the same as them and so on, I think it’s clear that they are building trust and understanding in those sorts of things. And I suppose the other aspect would be some of our students have given talks and written little reflections and so on, which I think is taking their experience and trying to put language to how they now understand the relationship between themselves and people of other faiths, and how the faiths generally should co-exist and interact and so on. (EDCSCM).

A values education teacher at an Islamic school saw the BBP as an opportunity to provide their students with a more balanced view of life and society, and with a capacity to engage respectfully with those who hold different values to them:

One of the aims of the school is to bring up students who are Australian Muslims but have a balanced approach to life, and Building Bridges was seen to be one of the vehicles that would provide that. [So they’re] not just seeing things in one way; as just Muslim students and just seeing the world from one angle. So we wanted [the students] to meet people and see and...go out in life, go in university and the world, become doctors and be treating people who have different values, beliefs and if they are not prepared to face the reality, then it will be difficult for them. (NAIAKM).

Another teacher at an Islamic school saw it as developing skills in her students to interact with those who are different:

I feel as a teacher we should care for the rounded personality of the students that we have in our care. And I think in today's climate of distrust or mistrust of everything, giving them or equipping them with the tools to deal with the people whom they meet with outside, you know, when they go out in society and they meet people from different groups, different ethnicities, religions and all that. But through this program, in a controlled atmosphere, we are giving them the tools to deal with them, to communicate with them and on a level of understanding. You learn sometimes agreeing to disagree, whatever, so I think in that sense I'm contributing to the students. (CEPRZF).

A number of teachers mentioned that the programme fostered a greater understanding and confidence in one's own religious tradition. For instance, an Islamic studies teacher at a different school from the previous two saw the value of encouraging students to be open to the religious other as helping form students in the values and perspectives of their faith tradition and the prophet:

I see them start learning about themselves, about their morals or maybe they had those stereotypes and they change and evolve and they become more open and confident and accepting. And I have one student who never really spoke to me or to the class, and was very shy and introverted, and never really said much about anything that she believed in. But throughout the program, I've watched her to the point that she wanted to actually do a speech when we were hosting. So to see her come out of her shell and to say something in the class is really, really rewarding. I find that really joyful to see them and that they are accepting others and that they're sharing with [Jewish] students. And they don't hold on to their negative – because our prophet never disrespected the other faiths....So by having these meetings, you see them and they change in front of

you, and become open and confident with who they are, as well as accept others for who they are...and I'm very proud of that. (EMCNSF).

Having to respond to questions from those from other religious traditions helped build confidence in one's own tradition, as this Catholic teacher explains:

Firstly, that they feel more at ease communicating with children of different religious traditions which we don't experience much in our community. And secondly, it's helped them understand who they are as Catholics. So by having to respond to those basic questions from others, which they don't [usually get asked], they take a lot for granted, I think they will say they feel a bit more special as Catholic people....When you actually have kids of other religions saying, "What is a sacrament? What is the Eucharist? Why do you go to Mass?" It makes them feel a little bit more like rising to that challenge themselves perhaps. But to understand their Catholicism is something that's special as well. (EACMHM).

A teacher at one of the most economically challenged schools found the programme had given her a new level of respect and reduced some envy of teachers at schools with more resources:

I think I have gained, having the opportunity to go to all these schools, talking to the other teachers about issues that they have in their schools, comparing with the issues we have in our schools and it always amazes me- you think other schools because they have all the facilities they don't have problems; they do have problems, but they are different kinds of problems. (CEPRZF)

Promotes social cohesion (GC: Intercultural and interreligious understanding)

A large number of teachers stated that a key aim of their participation in the BBP was to promote social cohesion and overcome the insularity of their students. Some understood this insularity as a result of being part of a close-knit religious community, others because of

a largely mono-cultural demographic in the school or their suburb, whilst others understood it as an outcome of an overly full school curriculum that limits the time students can engage with those from significantly different backgrounds.

This was the perspective of one of the teachers at a Jewish school:

I think it's really important for kids in our school, in a faith based community school, to meet kids of other faiths, Australians of other faiths. I think that our community being a very close-knit community, there's, I guess, two sides to that coin. It's wonderful as far as the kids' identity and sense of belonging and we want to continue it as a defined community. But I guess the negative side is perhaps it might be too insular and our kids don't have enough experience meeting Australians of other faiths and I think that's very important. Not just me personally, but our school does and certainly our principal supports that view. (EMSFPF).

Some students are just not exposed to other faiths or religions. One teacher at an Islamic school explained the nature of this insular or 'ghetto' reality for families of his school and the need for opening them up to the wider reality of society:

Generally, they're in ghettos. They are all surrounded by their own people; they're not exposed to the outside world. They don't mingle and you know, integrate with other people. They're generally all living together, whether it's in their own suburbs or areas and going to the same restaurants or going to the same places, going to the same school. So, in each step, they're always together. They need to spread out and see other people, see what's society's about, see what other people are about, just to open up their minds and the way they see the world, except being in their own little bubble that I called it....The reality is they come from low socio economic backgrounds and they generally wouldn't have the opportunity to mix and mingle with people from other faiths. So, really for me, that's been the main benefit for our kids: to give them that opportunity,

and to open their eyes to things that they probably wouldn't have been exposed to for a while. So, from that point of view, it's been really, really good. (CEPKSM).

This 'bubble' does not just apply to explicitly faith-based schools, but also a number of private schools (Hall, 2012) and those situated in predominantly mono-cultural suburbs: "Our students are very insular out here in [this suburb] and in all Catholic institutions, there's a lack of preparedness to sort of look outside of our own faith tradition. So I think it's good for the kids to do that". (EACMHM).

Part of promoting social cohesion is developing empathy for the other or 'the stranger', and this teacher at a Catholic school believed this was an important outcome from the BBP:

When we do things that actually challenge [the students] to think of someone else, they find it really hard to put themselves into the shoes of anyone else, and I think...other people's stories are what changes your worldview. So that when you meet a Muslim in the future, you actually think of the Muslim person you know and that that helps you to empathise with this person, which may be totally wrong, but at least it's a start and the more Muslim voices you hear and the more Jewish voices you hear, and the more other Christian voices you hear, the more it helps you to understand maybe where they're coming from and put yourself in their shoes. (CAVCVF).

Another teacher felt such interfaith programmes between peers of similar age should be rolled out in the wider society, "So it is a programme, I think, that should be reflected in other spaces than the people involved in Building Bridges. I just think that it's a model that should be affirmed by the government and had in other places; how they'd do that, I don't know". (ECGLBM).

Other teachers identified the importance of the programme raising questions about stereotypes and premises presented by the media:

One particular student made the statement that as a result of Building Bridges, when he hears something in the media, he will interrogate that; he will question the veracity of whatever viewpoint is being put forward. If that's the only goal, I think that's fantastic. I think if students are questioning the premise of what is being presented to them in the world around them, then Building Bridges has achieved a very noble goal. (CCBMBM).

A teacher at a Jewish school thought that positive relationships with Muslims could counter much of what they received through the media, both mainstream and their own religious community's news:

In the Jewish community, it's very hard to develop trust and understanding with Muslims when you read what's in the papers and I get heaps of emails and email newsletters of all sorts of horrible stuff out there and the kids are aware of a fair bit of it, maybe not as much as what I see so I'm very pleased when there's personal relationships that are positive. I don't know that it gets translated to the wider community. But then maybe these are our kids, the leaders of the future, and they can think on it. (SKDSSF).

And meeting those of other religions can reduce prejudice against others, according to this teacher at an Islamic school:

If students are not given the opportunity to understand Christian beliefs and Jewish beliefs and others, they will make judgements and passing statements and without - but if they know and studied, they've intermingled with people, then they will identify those people as just one of the Australians who tend to just have a different faith background. And as we saw in Building Bridges, students were able to see that is about different and same things. They have same dislikes and so that breaks the barriers and prejudices. (NAIAKM).

Several teachers explained that being involved in the programme had promoted the reputation of the school with parents or the wider community. Two teachers at Catholic schools thought it was imperative and integral to being 'catholic' to be engaged in interfaith dialogue:

I don't think you can be a Catholic school these days, or a Christian school without wanting to attempt interfaith dialogue. There's no way you can say that the Catholic school has a mission of peace and evangelisation, without actually trying to go outside your institution and reaching out to others. And that includes - obviously Islam and Judaism are important, but also people from a Protestant tradition, or Reform traditions so that their nuance, because, we're now all Christians, but certainly that needs to happen. (EACMHM).

Most effective components of BBP (according to the Teachers)

The teachers were asked what parts of the programme had been of the greatest benefit for their students and their school. This was to ascertain more specifically, what components had significantly contributed to an empathetic and informed understanding of 'the other' and their faith, diminished suspicion and antagonism towards those from different backgrounds and enhanced intercultural understanding and cohesion of disparate groups in society (as per research question 2).

Small group interfaith dialogues. Although the teachers do not generally attend the students' small groups, nearly all of them identified the small groups as having made the most significant contribution to an empathetic understanding of those from different religious and cultural backgrounds, due to what they heard from the students after each session. Some mentioned the growing level of trust and openness expressed by the students over the period of six sessions, and others spoke of the process where a combination of set and open

questions stimulated the students' honest reflections and explorations, opening up new understandings of others and their faith backgrounds. One teacher for instance perceived the small groups had serious dialogue with agreement and tensions, that had helped build trust and reduced narrow stereotyping:

I don't know what happens at small groups because I'm never present for them, but I know the students are very excited when they come out. So, whatever's – and they do drop a few hints, a lot of hints and they find those moments quite dynamic. And sometimes they agree, or they feel that this has been a really friendly gathering. And sometimes there is a degree of hostility between different participants and tensions in views, which I think is also part of it, otherwise, it's not a dialogue, it's just you know, a mutual admiration society.... It's nice to me when I hear students say that they met up with a group or kids from another school and socialised with them at [the shopping centre] or they then go to the movies or they're Facebook friends. To me, that's sort of the best ever understanding to know that they socialise with them. They don't tend to use the sorts of narrow stereotypes in their language or descriptions of people of different cultural and religious backgrounds because they know the truth is that people are pretty much the same underneath. The way that they entered into personal story I think, from what I heard from a few of the girls in particular, obviously they felt that they were in a protected environment within the programme and that they didn't view the other participants with any degree of suspicion...They felt that the stereotypes are broken down enough for them to be able to see through to what the purpose of this programme was. (EACMHM).

Another teacher from an Islamic school had this reflection:

One of the beauties of this program I think is the small group discussions and then they bring up these topics which everybody can identify with, whichever background they

come from. So - and those discussions have been so stimulating for some reason that they do tend to continue afterwards, you know: “what did you talk about”, and then you know they say, “I said this” or “this person said that” and “what do you think about this” and those conversations do carry on. And in the that sense I think yes, discussions do carry on and perhaps it does go to their homes as well and they would talk about “so what did you do at Building Bridges?” (CEPRZF).

Informal dinner. A second component perceived by the teachers to contribute to trust-building and social cohesion were the informal meals at each session. The meal times occur between the plenary activities (skill building) and the small groups. The meals- generally consisting of vegetarian food- are opportunities for the students to mix freely between schools and the sexes (since the small groups are single-sex groups). This component was seen to provide flexibility within an organised and structured programme for the students to pursue wider and more general discussions about their mutual interests and to organise times to meet up outside the programme if they wished.

Visiting schools. Several teachers mentioned that despite the logistical difficulty of transporting students across Melbourne, visiting different schools was a valuable part of the experience, since it took students out of their comfort zones and exposed them to the realities of other students' lives. It also gave them an opportunity to host the other students, and identify the positive aspects of studying at their school.

After school (informality). Two teachers identified that holding the BBP sessions after school (as is the case for three of the regions), added to the informality that the students appreciated, but also meant only the more committed or interested students signed up to be part of the programme. This point, that only the more committed and interested students participate needs some expansion.

Ideally, all secondary students would participate in these kinds of dialogues, learning from and growing in empathy and understanding of the other and their religious and cultural traditions, rather than just those who choose to. Unfortunately, this is not possible in most cases. Firstly, due to the emphasis on the dialogues occurring in small groups (of no greater than ten) of diverse participants, numbers from each school need to be monitored to ensure a sufficient diversity in each small group. Practically, this means that limits are placed on the numbers of students from Christian-based schools (Catholic and Protestant) relative to the numbers from other faith backgrounds, because they are generally in the majority. Typically, the regional co-ordinator at the beginning of each year encourages the teachers representing the Islamic, Jewish, and government schools, as well as those schools with a high diversity of students from different faith and cultural backgrounds, to invite as many of their students to participate as they can sufficiently cater for. A larger number of their students participating in the programme permit more students from the other schools in their region to enrol. However, most of these said schools- Jewish, Islamic and government- are restricted by not having buses available to transport more than fifteen students to the sessions. A secondary issue is that the number of students in that region who can join the programme is partially contingent on the number of small group facilitators available. In an effort to ensure the small groups contain no more than ten members, and with huge efforts in recruiting suitable small group facilitators each year, the number of student participants also needs to be monitored relative to the number of small groups available. Occasionally, a teacher fills in where there is a shortage of facilitators. In effect, this means the programme cannot be implemented across whole year levels, and requires some procedure to select students wishing to participate. The outcome of this is that with limited student places available each year, generally only those with a strong interest and time available sign up. With the particular emphases of the BBP, the only way to involve a larger cross-section of students,

including those with prejudicial views towards people of foreign backgrounds, would be to have many more facilitators, and let the dialogue focus less on religion and more around culture or personal history.

The researcher acknowledges that the programme's approach prioritises depth of relationship with a religious peer in small diverse groups over breadth of representation, but believes that a smaller number of people affected profoundly can make a greater impact for cultural and social change than a larger number of people affected only minimally.

Regional Co-ordinators

As mentioned in the first chapter, the Regional Co-ordinators (RCs) are responsible for running the Building Bridges Programme for their regional cluster of schools. Their responsibility involves liaising with the other teachers in their cluster to determine the session dates and locations and managing the sessions and overseeing the small groups to ensure they run according to the spirit and aims of the programme. They also run the plenary segments of each session. It was particularly important to interview the RCs because of their deep familiarity with the programme's components including its potential and challenges, and their regular contact and feedback from teachers and students involved.

As indicated, all four Regional Co-ordinators are trained secondary teachers. When they were interviewed, three were teaching at schools participating in the programme, and the fourth was on maternity leave. They were all interviewed individually at their school campus, except the one on leave who was interviewed at her home. The Co-ordinators were made up of two males and two females, two were teaching at Catholic schools, one at a Baptist girls school, while the fourth (on leave) had taught at an Independent Christian school and been Chaplain at a Christian girls school. Regional Co-ordinators were not selected for their religious affiliation, but by their commitment to the aims and objectives of the programme, and their availability and competence at managing the role. Initially, the first

Regional Co-ordinator was of the Jewish faith, and unsuccessful attempts were made over a period of time to appoint an Islamic woman as Co-ordinator of one of the regions. The questions that were asked in the interviews with the Regional Co-ordinators are included in Appendix 5.

Themes from the Regional Co-ordinator interviews:

Personal benefits

Relationships with a religious other. Although expressed differently, the four Regional Co-ordinators (RCs) found great personal benefit in the relationships they developed with those of other religious backgrounds. Three of the four had not had significant relationships or conversations with those from other traditions prior to their involvement in the BBP.

It was the staff from the other schools that I enjoyed that engagement with....where I could ask more mature questions to people of another faith, and them not being afraid of the questions, and them asking me questions in return. This was more at the breaks and more in the lead-ups rather than during the sessions. But I think, from a personal point of view, that's what I enjoyed about the adult interaction with the conversations. (SMCMTM).

Two RCs said that these relationships had opened up their understanding of that other faith tradition, whilst two others said it challenged their previous stereotypes of people from those communities. For instance:

I think that what it's personally affected is that some of the stereotypes that I may have had about particular religions were challenged and were needing to be challenged. And most of them were because I physically hadn't met people from particular traditions before. So my beliefs had been honed by media or by stereotypes, rather than by

meeting with people. So from a personal point of view, I'd always wanted to say hello to people of different particular faiths, but wasn't sure of how the language to go about that would be, apart from at a formal level, dealing with religious leaders at different levels. (SMCMTM).

Vocational Fulfilment (of community's charism or deep desire). Three of the four regional co-ordinators specifically mentioned that their involvement gave them a strong sense of fulfilment- living out a call or their community's charism or a deep desire for inter-religious understanding. For instance, one said her involvement was an opportunity to fulfil 'a call' she had whilst visiting Jerusalem.

I was listening to the call to prayer at dusk as the sun set over Jerusalem –we were on the Via Dolorosa, and I was weeping because of the music and because all the calls to prayer were combining and interweaving, and were bouncing off the bowl that is Jerusalem. It was incredibly moving. And I was weeping and asking the Lord: 'How can we live together in peace in this city?' At that time I was a very conservative Christian. And this voice, not audibly but in my head, spoke to me and said: 'Stop looking at the things which divide you, look at the things that bring you together, that build bridges.' For me, that was wisdom beyond me; it was really new, and I call it the voice of God. So this has given me a real chance to act upon that, and to grow in that, and to learn, but most of all to connect with people of other faiths. (CDVRSF).

Another said he valued participating in and promoting inter-religious dialogue and understanding that fulfilled part of his religious community's charism. The third said he believed that it was possible to live and work together for peace from experiences he had growing up in Nazareth in Israel, so found it inspiring and 'a buzz' to be part of making that desire and belief a reality for others.

Professional Benefits

Pastoral relationships with their students. Three of the RCs noted that the programme had enhanced their relationship with students at their school, like this RC who is now principal at the school:

I think it changes a little bit of the role I have with the students, that there is an activity that I have in common with those 10 boys from the school every year. And it's a unique connection that is not able to be replicated in any other way, that you're sharing what is effectively some essential life-learning for them. And you're with them for that, travelling to and from the places. Those would – I think I've been able to build a stronger relationship with those kids. The kids who do this program end up being many of our religious leaders within the school. (SMCMTM).

Greater credibility with the wider community. One Regional Co-ordinator found that her involvement in the programme had enhanced her credibility with those in the wider community:

Certainly within the wider community people look at you with more respect, those people I run into of other faiths or those of no faith, that seem to be the vast majority of other people I run into. That's their main concern, that Christians aren't insular. When I talk to people about my own faith, and mention [the BBP], they are much more open to my journey, because I am involved in something which is broader. (CDVRSF).

Educational Benefits. The RCs identified several educational benefits the students and teachers gained from participation in the BBP, such as promoting faith development and the Australian curriculum general capability goals, namely intercultural and interreligious understanding, personal and social capability, critical and creative thinking and ethical

behaviour. They also all referred to benefits for the whole school from participating in the programme.

Students re-engage in faith and spirituality (faith development). All four RCs said they found great satisfaction in seeing their students re-engage positively and excitedly in issues around faith and spirituality through their participation in the BBP. One RC shared an experience from her transporting the students back after a session, of how the interactions with students from other faith backgrounds prompted new unexplored questions of faith:

I am just thinking of a conversation when I was driving the girls to and from the event in the minibus. That's when we'd have our really good conversations about stuff. And I remember at the end of one [session] one of the girls said, 'Oh those Muslim girls they really knew what they believed. And the Catholics too. And they were really strong in it. I don't know what I think about these things, and it makes me think that maybe I should know. That really challenged me...what spirituality (that's not the word she used) or what faith do I have? And what's my identity? Wow, you couldn't get that in the classroom. (CDVRSF).

One RC noted that the students' involvement in the programme had ignited a fresh interest in faith even for agnostic students, such that they were now keen to ask questions and learn more from those of different faiths even at their own school:

So most of our students are coming from agnostic backgrounds, some are openly atheist, and most have chosen to come to a Baptist school for reasons other than the religious side of the school. So we don't have any Jewish students that I am aware of and we have just one Islamic girl in year 11, but she doesn't practice. But its been interesting to reflect on those girls that come from a Hindu or Buddhist perspective and how accepting the others are of them, especially now they've met Islamic kids and

Jewish kids, and really wanting to know and ask those sort of questions because they are interested. (ESBTKM)

Another mentioned he thought it was a valuable thing to see young people enjoying themselves in a structured environment where religion was a legitimate part of the discussion. Two RCs found the programme had a marked effect on students who had been less interested in spirituality:

I think especially for kids at [our Protestant-based school] who aren't as exposed to faith issues, school is about the only place where they're exposed to faith- and their peers are incredibly important in that journey. And that's where you get the problems with year 11s because they're more influenced by the media; they become more savvy, a bit more cynical. And that's all part of their developing their worldviews and wrestling with who they are; their identity. So I suppose it's excellent for them to be challenged by other peers. One session of Building Bridges is worth 10 Christian studies lessons, just because it makes them examine their own faith. While Christian studies might try and do that, I'm not as powerful as a peer. Another kid's faith journey, sharing that, is ten times more powerful than me. (CDVRSF).

It's really enhanced the professional relationship that I've had with the students, some of whom I specifically targeted as kids who were not as engaged in some of the spiritual programmes within the school. And I've got an incredible amount of enjoyment and satisfaction seeing those girls get so much out of the programme. (NCOAHF).

This co-ordinator also noted that these factors were not insignificant for the students in year ten, since this mid year 'can be a bit of hump year'. She said they're not those with the excitement of years seven and eight, nor looking to their Victorian Certificate of Education [VCE] achievement, and so: 'to get something that is special for year 10 students and special

in a very exciting way, is something I would continue to promote'. (NCOAHF). An interesting comment alongside this was made to a facilitator: "A lot of the kids said it was the first time in their life when they had a forum to actually talk about spirituality" (NBUPCF).

One Regional Co-ordinator (and one teacher) of a Catholic background were convinced that the programme also promoted genuine faith. They said that one's Catholic faith (and the researcher would add Christian faith) was more authentic when it was in dialogue with those of other faith traditions. This implies that faith by its very nature, is open to the other and grows by dialogical engagement with those others, not by self-isolation or solitary introspection. This is the comment made by him:

I feel that we are at our most authentically Catholic when we're in dialogue with people, and ... from a Catholic Christian point of view, we're following the person of Jesus...For the Christian and then for the Catholics, the following of the example of Jesus is where we're going to be finding ourselves at our most real. And he was very comfortable speaking to people who belonged to all sorts of different traditions and circumstances in life, and statuses in life...And it's the clichéd 'what would Jesus do?' sort of slogan that really does apply when you're looking at how he was able to engage with people of all sorts of different beliefs and of practices, and seemed to be able to find a way to remain himself. And I think that that's, sort of, what I mean by being at our most authentic. The word 'Catholic', as I mentioned before, means universal, and that ultimately, that universal nature of the religion is what I think we become most authentic with when we engage with others who are not of the Catholic tradition. (SMCMTM).

This correlates with the understandings of faith development and dialogue of Martin Buber (1937, 1970; Kramer & Gawlick, 2003), James Fowler (1981, 1995, 1984) and Luke Timothy Johnson (1990), articulated in the first chapter.

Complements and energises the religion and ethics curriculum. Three of the RCs said the programme significantly complemented the school curriculum around religious education (RE), ethics and Christian studies. For instance, one teacher who taught a number of RE units, found the programme had added value to the students' learning in several units across different year levels:

Our girls study Religion in Society at year 10 in second semester, and it has complemented that class inordinately. The girls have gone back and really been ambassadors within their classes speaking about the nature of the religions and the students they that have met on a personal level about the organization and that type of thing. So its really been terrific...In my year 12 ethics class I've certainly talked about the different ethical standpoints of different denominations, and I've been able to talk about my experience visiting an Islamic school....In my year 10 RE class, we've certainly talked a lot about the interfaith issues in religion in society. The first two outcomes in that VCE – about world religions and religions in Australia, and it has been terrific to be able to question and call on girls who have been [involved] in the Building Bridges Programme, and also to talk from my own point of view about the programme in the school...In my year 8 class I talk about the commonalities in the Jewish and Islamic faiths when I teach the Hebrew Scriptures. I've definitely used the work. And even to the point of taking in the certificates that the students were presented with [from the BBP] and showing some of the students all the schools around Melbourne that were involved....So it is certainly a great platform for academic offerings within the school, right from the junior levels up to year 12. (NCOAHF).

Two other RCs spoke of the power and energy of the experiential learning involved in the programme.

Professionally, as an educator, as a teacher- it's a practical way of bridging those gaps, and actually providing a practical real-life interaction for the girls that I teach. I teach an interfaith programme at a year 10 level, so all the girls get to hear about Hinduism and Buddhism, Judaism and Islam and Christianity...Its all great in theory and on YouTube and on television, but when you actually have a real-life conversation with an Islamic person and bring those conversations back to the class, that's professionally really rewarding...and to hear the girls talk about their interactions through the programme back in the classroom it then impacts on the girls who haven't been a part of the programme....When the girls come back from a Building Bridges session and come back into (Religious Education) class, and we might be dealing with Judaism as an issue at the time, and then they start talking about the discussion they had with a Jewish girl the night before, you can just see all the girls go like- wow! Its switch on- you're touching on some amazing energy! Lets forget about what [I] have to say or what the video is about. To me that is real education, that's real life learning, as opposed to any test I could possibly give. (ESBTKM).

Promotes ethical behaviour- attitudes of respect, empathy and inclusion in the students. All the RCs spoke of how the programme challenged stereotypes and taught respect for the other, those from diverse backgrounds.

To see the girls have those prejudices and barriers broken down is something that I would continue to want happen for the students in our school. I think they have enjoyed meeting the students of the Islamic school, that's only natural because they are a different denomination, but the girls have seen similarities as well when they have found out about the different components of the religion. (NCOAHF).

One of the RCs mentioned a remarkable example of students from one of the Islamic schools sending a card of condolence to a boy from a Catholic school in the programme whose father had just died:

One of the boys lost his father during the time of the programme...But the students, certainly from [the] Islamic College, presented a card to him and let him know that he and his family were in their prayers and to do that is a trust; ...and that that made a massive impact into his understanding of what some of the roles of the programme would be, that fundamentally, here was a group of people who didn't share his same beliefs about what might be occurring to his father now, but that that was secondary to them offering him support and encouragement. (SMCMTM).

This RC, who is now a principal at his school spoke of shifting the culture of the school from 'tolerance' to 'respect', as a result of their involvement in the BBP: "One practical benefit is that the word 'tolerate' was taken out of the vocabulary of inter-faith dialogue here at the school....It's not to be a 'tolerant' school; it's to be a respectful school". (SMCMTM).

Promotes intercultural and interreligious understanding (GC 7). All the RCs spoke of how the BBP helped students to interact with those from different cultural and religious backgrounds- particularly when many of them were in homogeneous groups at school- and overcome negative or overly-generalized stereotypes of the other, as an important formation component of the programme:

I think the students benefit because they make some friendships that last beyond the programme...[and] they are having stereotypes challenged and defeated because they can no longer say that all Muslims are like this, or all Jewish people are like that, or all Christians are like this. So I think the benefit for them is that they're passing that onto their own families and their own children, and they'll hopefully be keener to challenge those stereotypes when they're brought up. (SMCMTM).

I'd certainly say that the level of understanding has certainly been advanced from our girls. They understand that it is a choice for a girl to wear a hijab. They understand that at [a Catholic boys school] they have regular chapel services just like we do; they understand that during Ramadan people don't starve to death, they have a big meal in the morning. So I think the understanding is terrific. And living in a multicultural city like Melbourne, when the students go about their daily routines, and they see people around the place who are identifiably of a different religion, they do have that level of understanding...I think a few of the students, have been quite outspoken within their families and they've challenged some perceptions and I think they've pretty much enjoyed doing that; I think they've loved doing that...Whilst they're in an intensely homogenous group here, this program has allowed the students to have a different experience and I think that's been great. (NCOAHF).

But again, that common theme, let's smash these stereotypes that we have. Seeing those barriers come down; seeing things click with kids. Their worldviews are really shaped and changed, and I think it's an ideal age to have this happen to them. (CDVRSF).

Promotes the school as inclusive of diverse cultures and faiths. In addition, three of the four RCs explained that participation in the BBP had raised the standing of the school in the wider community. It was perceived as a positive thing that their school was inclusive of diverse perspectives of life:

[W]hen we have tours, potential parents coming in [to see] whether they want to send their girls here, our registrar makes a point of bring the prospective parents to that display, a Building Bridges poster, and she makes a point to discuss the programme with these prospective parents...More often than not, these parents will be inspired by the fact that we are not just going down one track, that we're not solely fundamentalist

Christian, we are actually very open to the truths that are out there, and we're open to our girls experiencing a wider perspective on life rather than just our particular view on our particular faith, and that's well respected by most of the parents that come through. (ESBTKM).

I think from a professional point of view, it's helped make the term 'Catholic' feel more real about our college when we're actually engaging with people that are beyond our tradition. So the word 'universal' feels more real, I would believe, professionally within our school. And I think that the Building Bridges program would've helped build that, not solely, but it would've been a part of that...[and] a benefit for our school, is that we become more known in our local area amongst students in a wider area of places. And I think that people get to see some of our culture present from a school point of view in areas that we wouldn't be able to be. So I think why that's a benefit for us is that it forces us from self-isolation, which a school can easily do when it just looks at itself and it just looks at the way it thinks and operates. We get feedback from other schools about the way they find us, the way they experience us; whether that be positive or, you know, areas of improvement, that's always healthy. And I think a benefit to any school is to be open to the feedback from others....I think that, from a school point of view, it's something that we're very proud to be a part of, and would seek to tell people about that when asked, or talk about that at different public events. (SMCMTM).

Effective components of the BBP. The Regional Co-ordinators identified four main components of the programme, apart from those covered in the educational benefits above, that enabled it to be effective as an inter-religious and intercultural education programme.

Small-groups for trust-building. All four RCs identified that the programme had effectively built trust between the students particularly seen through the small group interactions. One expressed it this way:

I think within the sessions there was an atmosphere of building trust in the small discussion groups. I only lead two small group discussions, but I observed the girls and boys speaking openly [and] listening intently, and I observed heads together and a few laughs occasionally. And I think the students really enjoyed that level of trust.
(NCOAHF).

Another RC saw the small groups as 'sacrosanct', crucial to the effectiveness of the programme such that other things could be left out, in order to ensure sufficient small group time:

But the key elements of the programme- such as the questions that they ask in the small groups and the key theme that we are following in the progression of ideas in the building of the bridge metaphor, so we always start with that idea and the small groups are sacrosanct. The theme that we follow is always an important part of every session, but everything else that fits around that is flexible, as far as I'm concerned anyway.
(ESBTKM).

Others mentioned this was evident in how students were willing to share so personally with those from other backgrounds, and how their friendships and connections continued beyond the six sessions to invitations to each other's parties and in a couple of cases religious events.

Practical exposure- visiting other schools and seeing faith demonstrated. One RC spoke positively of the visits to the other schools, and the experience of hosting a Building Bridges session at her own school:

Visiting the other schools has been a great benefit, its good for the students to see how the schools operate: it might be like walking through corridor or visiting the mosque at the Islamic school, or it could be just perhaps seeing how the other teachers interact with their students. That's been great. It was terrific for us to be able to host the creative day here at [our school] because the whole school community saw what was going on. (NCOAHF).

Another spoke of the power of practical demonstrations of faith, like visiting a synagogue and seeing the Torah explained, and hearing the Islamic prayers sung live:

I still get a real buzz out of the programme. My highlight is just to see the Islamic kids praying in the [Jewish school] staff room- it just blows me away every time I see it! ...This year it was very special- they actually explained it to everyone that was there- all the Jewish kids and the Jewish staff who were there, they were taking it on to a totally different degree to my girls...This year the time we had at [the Islamic school] was just brilliant- best one we've had [there]- it was just superb to get an Imam to sing prayers in front of everyone, it was just awe inspiring. (ESBTKM).

Balanced structure and timing. One of the RCs specifically mentioned that the programme was well structured and balanced with the time commitment required of teachers. For her this was important in balancing her many commitments as a RE teacher at a large girls school:

I think the program is well structured and has enough of an academic foundation to be an authentic program. Its been running for a few years and is very much backed-up by a review process that goes on. (I've seen that happen last year and this year, in terms of the time taken to listen to what people's reflections on what their experiences are). (NCOAHF).

Modelling of religious co-existence. Two RCs mentioned that the programme provided a good model of religious co-existence:

I think that Australia is a country where we can demonstrate religious co-existence....I think that Australia is in a unique position to be an example to the world, and I think that this generation want to take that responsibility seriously. So I think the reason I want to be involved is because I think it can play a part in a future that's positive for our country. (SMCMTM).

To me [the BBP] is an example of where the world can potentially be, and growing up in the Middle-East, I know all about the conflicts, I've lived the conflicts, I've been through two wars, and had a window blow up from a bomb that went off a kilometre away from where we were living. I can see where the hatred is. And I can see both sides, and to see it coming together in this context is just so heart-warming. (ESBTKM).

Concerns of the Building Bridges Programme. The RCs and teachers were asked what concerns they had, if any, for students who enter the programme each year. There were very few concerns raised by the RCs and teachers overall; they were limited to one or two each. Most of the teachers said they had no concerns, because they perceived the students were in a safe, structured learning environment.

Challenging 'the comfortable'. One of the RC's main concerns was that many who could benefit most, or those who perhaps needed their attitudes or perspectives challenged the most, did not actually volunteer for the BBP.

I think my concern would be that, for most of those who volunteer to be a part of the programme, they already have that desire within them, to listen and to respect others. And it's some of the people who may very well benefit more than most from the experience don't end up volunteering for it. So a concern for the students who enter the

programme is that they're not going to be stretched as much as someone who needs it more. (SMCMTM3).

Not just a 'social gathering'. This same RC was concerned that those who did participate might only engage superficially, treating it as a social event rather than an opportunity to be challenged in their faith perspective.

A concern for those who do [participate] is that they might miss the opportunity and just see it as a social gathering where they've got humanity in common...just another friend to add to a Facebook group, rather than going deeper...I think it's a concern of any programme when people are put together. (SMCMTM).

Four other teachers mentioned this as a concern. One needed to raise this with her students when a girl from her school and a boy at another from the programme started dating each other. Another teacher was a chaplain at a government school who wondered if his students only engaged at a social level because they were not used to wrestling with questions about identity, values and beliefs. He said his concern was:

That the students see it as only social. And even then, I don't know if that's such a big deal. But it'd be easy for kids to just rock along and go; whoa we get to meet with an all girls school huh, sweet and that's it, that's all the meaning there is for it. My concern is that they're not at a level of reflective thinking that they can engage with the questions that are being asked. (NSSRCM).

The third teacher thought some follow-up reinforcement of what they were learning about each other's faiths was needed to help her students see it as more than a social opportunity:

My concern would be that they would use it as just an excursion or social; they have their fun, they come back and they don't work on it or it's not reinforced at some level.

We have to have some kind of follow up program, a touching base maybe, or they will abandon all the good work that's done during those four or five days. (CEPRZF).

Ensuring it's a positive learning experience. Two other RCs said their sole concern was that it would be a positive experience for the students, with one of the RCs explicitly thinking of this for the Muslim students because they suffer from so much negative media coverage already. Both of these RCs acknowledged their hope was hard to ensure because the programme involves human beings, but they also said that their fear had yet to be realised. The fourth RC's only concern was that those who wished to join could participate. He taught at a school that had so many girls wanting to be involved they had to set up a selection procedure (that required girls to write 500 words why they wanted to be involved) and had two groups participate in separate regions each year.

One teacher at a Jewish school was concerned that one of her students was put out by being asked a question about political events in Israel by one of the other students. The teacher felt such difficult questions couldn't be tackled in one year of the programme, where the focus was to be on understanding the faith of each other. She did suggest this may be something that could be addressed if students had a second year in the programme, and time to wrestle with these questions:

I've only had one concern that was brought up by the student herself, not by me. She was Israeli born, has got an Israeli name and one of the kids in one of the sessions started asking her about the politics in Israel. Now this girl might have been born in Israel but she's lived most of her life here and was very put out and didn't quite know what to say or do. My answer to her was, "You go and tell this kid we're all Australians here and the politics of Israel has got nothing to do with my faith," you know, that's sort of a different topic altogether. But what Building Bridges is about, as

far as I could see, is we're Australians here together in society together and it's about us understanding each other and I said, "Don't talk politics."

But it occurred to me that that's one of the more difficult topics that maybe somewhere along the way, if we had Building Bridges advanced – you know, like if we had a second year where the same kids kept going maybe we would tackle those more difficult questions. I don't think our kids or the leaders are prepared at this stage to deal with the more hot topics and of which Israel is probably one. If we went into abortion and things like that or divorce I'm sure that we'd get reactions from some of the other faiths as well, but I just think that's not where Building Bridges is at and as I said, unless we did a lot more sessions where the kids got to know each other really well and were a little bit more advanced, then maybe [we could tackle] the difficult questions. (SKDSSF).

Issues affecting the effectiveness of the Building Bridges Programme

The Regional Co-ordinators identified five problematic issues as challenges or vulnerabilities affecting the effectiveness of the Building Bridges Programme, and the teachers identified three more.

Ensuring sufficient diversity of schools and genders. Three of the four RCs identified this as a key problematic issue, since the programme relies on face-to-face engagement with those from diverse backgrounds. The key factor here was recruitment, and more particularly ensuring there was sufficient representation of non-Christian based (Islamic, Jewish and Government) schools of both genders involved. This difficulty was outlined well by these two RCs:

[An issue] is getting a gender and religious balance. And so we are really at the mercy of each organising school to help provide that. So this year, for instance, there are no

Jewish boys in the programme; and last year, there were no Muslim boys. This year, we have six or seven Muslim boys, but no Jewish boys. So getting the balance for inter-faith dialogue. So we just adjusted and made a significant more amount of the time a large group activity, so people are hearing the Islamic voice. Otherwise, the boys would find it difficult to get an Islamic perspective if there's no Islamic boys there. (SMCMTM).

It would have been terrific to have a Jewish school [involved], but obviously that is a difficulty in our region, and that another private school around the corner dropped out- those sort of things, you have to accommodate the program where schools decide they don't want to be involved. If the Islamic school hadn't been involved this year I don't think it would have been so good.... I would like to work hard to ensure that we don't have those [absences] in the future in terms of the schools included. (NCOAHF).

Over the period that the programme has run, five Islamic Colleges have been involved, three Jewish schools and two Government schools. The Jewish school the first Regional Co-ordinator refers to has been fully committed since 2006, but is a small institution and can only recruit a relatively small numbers of students each year. The Islamic College he mentioned has fully participated for five years, but is also quite small, so struggles to recruit sufficient students, particularly boys, to contribute a good diversity in the small groups. The second Regional Co-ordinator quoted above is involved in the northern suburbs of Melbourne where there are no Jewish schools.

Regarding the other two Jewish schools, one has been strongly committed with a large intake of students involved since 2005. The other began with a strong presence in 2004, but with staff changes in 2009-10 has since had fewer students involved. They continue to be committed to the programme but with numbers of students varying between five and ten.

The involvement of the five Islamic Colleges has been characterised by considerable fluctuation and unpredictability. A second Islamic College participated fully for five years, before withdrawing to just accommodate a single visit each year from the other schools. Their reason for withdrawing was their desire to focus more on teaching the core values shared by the three monotheistic faiths, rather than an experiential education programme open to a wide array of faiths and practices, and to students without a religious tradition. A third Islamic school participated for one year and then withdrew, due to a change in staff and responsibilities for that part of the curriculum that the programme fitted into. They accommodated a visit by a region of schools in 2011 and plan to fully rejoin the programme at a later date. A fourth Islamic school that has participated fully for four years was absent for most of the sessions in one year because of a change in the representative teacher. This new teacher was inexperienced and had difficulty recruiting any students. However, they do remain fully committed to the BBP. The fifth Islamic school has been fully involved for seven years, but almost withdrew twice. On the first occasion, the Principal of the school told the BBP director he had reservations about the programme because of a small comment made by a RC about Iran at which he took offense, and a misunderstanding of the commitment involved by the students. On the second occasion, they almost withdrew because of staff changes, but another teacher was able to fill in at the last minute. Interestingly, what convinced the principal more than anything else was the very strong support and appeals made by their students, including his own granddaughter for remaining in the programme.

All attempts to attract more Government schools into the programme, and thereby increase the diversity of schools and students, have met with varying resistance, mostly from the staff rather than the students. Invitations have been given to fifteen state schools in Melbourne to join the BBP, only two have accepted. In several cases, the difficulty is

attracting staff and students to an extra-curricular activity outside of school hours. In another instance, a very popular high achieving, culturally diverse school had too many extra-curricular activities to commit to another one like Building Bridges. One school was reluctant to put their students in groups 'alongside more elite private schools'. Another school, in a highly diverse religious neighbourhood, explicitly said 'we don't talk about religion here'. And in several other cases, teachers who had expressed initial interest did not return messages to follow through with the programme at their school.

Recruiting mostly 'the converted' students. As mentioned earlier under 'concerns', one RC felt that because the programme primarily drew those who were quite open-minded already, the impact of the programme on the wider community of students was more limited than if a wider cross-section were involved. However this was not true in all cases. One RC specifically recruited students who were less interested in religion and the 'other', with positive results:

Also my girls were quite diverse- I had some girls who were studious, quiet and quite reverent in regard to their attitude to their religion, and I had some girls who hadn't really thought about this sort of thing, some of them were pretty naughty in class, and being able to build that group as a cohesive group through those sessions and those debriefing times is important too. And I think it was terrific to have that variety of students within the group. It brought a really good component to the group that perhaps you wouldn't have been there if you had just the girls who had put their hand up to be in a serious programme. I tapped a few kids on the shoulder. I don't care what their motivation was for being in the program but certainly after getting involved in the program they were very, very happy that they were involved in it. (NCOAHF).

Ensuring sufficient 'voice' and support from their school/Principal. Two of the RCs spoke of the problems created when the representative teachers did not have a sufficient voice within their schools to fulfil their commitment to the programme:

The other difficult aspect is [if] the teacher who's nominated...doesn't have that gravity to pull people together, and then isn't given the support at the school to do that. And so we had a number of times where we set dates, but then something seemed to override from the school point of view, and the person who was in charge didn't have the voice to be able to go and say, "We've made a commitment to be somewhere. We're expected to be there."...And then if that person isn't of considerable gravity or even isn't of considerable voice within the school, it can just get swamped by every other programme and, in fact, be dropped down the list of importance. (SMCMTM).

This highlights the level of commitment required, particularly for the Regional Co-ordinator, and the importance of the support from one's school. One RC identified this in her responses:

So the school has to be supportive for taking me out a few afternoons, and the other staff have to be supportive of taking the girls out for a few afternoons, and then a full day. That could have been a problem but its not, because our principal is very supportive of interfaith dialogue. (NCOAHF).

Maintaining experienced and quality facilitators. The programme recruits small group facilitators who are generally young adult youth leaders, rather than teachers from the schools, primarily to allow the students to feel safe and not inhibited in what they might share in the small group. But three of the RCs and one of the teachers mentioned the difficulty of maintaining good facilitators who lead well, and who faithfully and regularly turn up when sessions are held.

The other issue was facilitators. I don't really have any control over that as a regional co-ordinator but it is frustrating when you know you've got a set of facilitators but then they let you down at the last minute. Therefore I've had to step in, and enjoyed being a facilitator for three of the five sessions, I really enjoyed it- but three of my girls were in that group and they were potentially inhibited in what they wanted to say, that was a bit of a frustration, [it's] not an ideal situation to have a facilitator as a teacher.

(ESBTKM).

I think finding and keeping good facilitators has been a problem for our region....In our region for the last couple of years, [the facilitators] might not have been at every session, and so that continuity [is lost]– and it's falling to staff members to do that, which changes the dynamic of maybe what some of the discussion would be.

(SMCMTM).

The fourth RC did not find it a problem to have teachers step in to facilitate the small groups because she felt the students could distinguish the roles of their teacher in calls from when she was with Building Bridges:

I think...travelling there together, and being out of a school environment I think that really freed [our students] up. Some of those girls are in my RE class, and I've taught some of them English before and...in the BBP my approach is somewhat more flexible perhaps, and I think the girls respond to that. So once we get into that bus, I'm the Building Bridges person and I'll still talk to them about not having done their homework and things like that. But I wouldn't see [being their teacher and small group facilitator] as a problem at all, because its also a mixed group...[So] if you needed to use teachers and there were some students who were from that teacher's school within the small group, I think any sort of difficulties would be minimal and that the benefits

of having an experienced teacher would outweigh any reticence that a child might have to being fairly open. So I think [our students] make that distinction. (NCOAHF).

One of the teachers also identified the quality of facilitation in the small group was sometimes not as good, and therefore became an issue:

I think there's been a variety in the quality of the facilitators. And again, feedback from the students, it seems like it's very dependent on who the facilitator is. And obviously kids have enjoyed it when there's been a more – I don't know, dynamic or naturally more talented, or someone who has great, more personality. But I think that makes a difference. (EMSFPF).

Asking relevant, appropriate questions for the diversity of students. Two RCs and one teacher noted that their students found some of the questions a bit repetitive, requiring a higher-order of thinking. She recommended some more concrete questions be added to ease the relationship building of the students.

The repetitive nature of some of the questions in the small group sessions I think frustrated the students a little bit. I don't think it was a major problem, but if we can sharpen those questions, and have some quite specific questions based on the students common experience and then go to high-level questions, that would be good. Probably by session 5 at the Buddhist temple- the students felt that we had gone a bit round in circles- 'Didn't we talk about this last time?'. Whilst I didn't get any negativity, I did have that sense. And I was facilitating a group, and [so] I did talk to them about their subject selection for year 11, and that really lightened things up. I still think that it was along the same lines of the sharing, listening to others talking about the nature of their school and some good things came out of that. But that would be my feedback on what we can do better for next year. (NCOAHF).

The teacher, a chaplain at a government school elaborated further on his earlier concern, that students at his school and probably other government schools were not as familiar with thinking reflectively on faith, values and identity, so the programme needed to consider how to include them in more.

My concern is that [our students are] not at a level of reflective thinking that they can engage with the questions that are being asked. Whereas I assume from a culture [of a religious-based school] they're used to thinking reflectively in pastoral care classes or religious education classes or something like that where they're being asked about their values and beliefs and who are you? I have a concern that our kids aren't asked those questions often and so when they come to this programme they kind of don't know how to answer the questions and they feel like it's the same questions being asked every week, because they don't realise the subtleties and the difference....But, I think the programme needs to be aware that some kids just don't get it because they haven't had to get it before. (NSSRCM).

Balancing educational aims and students' desires. Three teachers mentioned this as an issue. One teacher at a Jewish-based school identified this tension in balancing an educational programme with the students' own wishes for greater freedom, as one she had had to address in conversations with her students.

I think from the point of view of the kids, there's a fine line between a programme that has all its guidelines and its goals and a facilitator trying to achieve those and therefore directing each group, versus the kids who want to chat and set their own agenda, and I think that's a difficulty. I don't know about for me personally but this has been the students that I take for along for the programme. I think one of the ways that has worked that's tried to resolve that tension is the dinners; the informal time enables them to chat and do what they like. But I know they still very much would like to have more

free rein during the group sessions. So I found that a little bit hard to explain to them; it's not just go and have a chat. There are set goals, it is a programme; there's thinking behind it. So that's been a bit of an issue for me. (EMSFPF).

Two other teachers, one at a Jewish-based school and one at a Muslim-based school preferred to have more 'content' on the different faiths included in the sessions. The latter mentioning that it was the issue of learning more about the people of different faiths rather than the faiths themselves that had led their school to withdraw from the programme. The BBP currently gives the host schools opportunity to identify the key elements of the faith represented at the school and have these discussed by the full student group at the beginning of each session in an attempt to partially at least address this issue.

Logistics- transport and calendar issues. Seven of the teachers interviewed mentioned the difficulty of transporting the students to and from sessions as a problematic issue for them. This was typically due to there being no mini-bus or van available for them to use, and therefore requiring either taxis, other teachers or parents to transport the students to the different venues. Associated with this was the long distances to some of the schools, although they strongly believed that the visits were an important and valuable part of the programme. Three of the teachers also identified finding suitable dates for sessions among seven or eight different busy school schedules was a tough challenge.

Theories emergent from the Educators' Data.

As explained in the previous chapter, this research project used GT methodology to abstract theories about the effects upon participants of their involvement in the BBP, as a way to investigate the programme's effectiveness and its potential as a model for interfaith education more widely. The constant comparison method of GT, was the analytical tool used to identify these emergent theories as detailed in the research design chapter. In this chapter,

these theories developed organically as the researcher compared interview statements between educators, observations, with the recurring themes that were arising, with his analysis of the data. For an outline of the development of theories from the themes, see Table 5.1 below. These theories then contribute to the investigation of the effectiveness of the BBP, and the components that were most effective in achieving a number of the general capabilities of the national curriculum, as per the first and second research questions.

Table 5.1 Development of emergent theories from Educators

	Themes	Emergent Theories
1	Benefits of BBP included: Ongoing relationships with a religious other, Co-operation /Teaching-support	Sustained relationships with a religious peer foster co-operative joint ventures
2	BBP led students to re-engage in faith and spirituality; complemented and energised the religion and ethics curriculum; and promoted intercultural and interreligious understanding, and appreciation of faith and religion in society.	Experiential interfaith education energises the curriculum on religion.
3	The most effective components of BBP were the group interfaith dialogues, the informal dinner, Visiting different schools, and the after school (informality); Issues- Balancing educational aims and students' desires.	A balance between formal and informal activities improves effectiveness
4	Professional benefit for teachers was the pastoral relationships with their students; the enhanced understanding of faiths and role as teacher of faith, and gave the educator and school greater credibility with the wider community	Involvement enhances pastoral and spiritual relationships between educators and students
5	Effective components of BBP- Small-groups for trust-building, Practical exposure- visiting other schools and seeing faith demonstrated, Balanced structure and timing, Modelling of religious co-existence; and issues- ensuring sufficient diversity of schools and genders	Maintaining diversity is critical for the success of the programme
6	Issues- Maintaining experienced and quality facilitators, who can ask relevant, appropriate questions for the diversity of students, and ensure its not just a 'social gathering'.	Experienced and quality facilitators are essential for effective outcomes
7	BBP promotes the school as inclusive of diverse cultures and faiths, and deepens intercultural and interreligious	Interfaith involvement promotes the schools as inclusive

	understanding.	
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The following is a summary of the key theories that emerged from the educator's data, collected from the interviews, as identified in the table.

Sustained relationships with a religious peer foster co-operative ventures.

The educators clearly indicated that maintaining a relationship with a teacher from a different religious and cultural background improved their teaching and understanding of those from different backgrounds, provided them with better resources to teach faiths and in many cases evolved into strong partnerships between larger sectors of their respective schools. This brought many more students into the learning experience of interfaith education.

Experiential interfaith education energises the curriculum on religion.

Giving students a first hand experience of religious and cultural diversity resulted in a greater interest in faith, spirituality, religion and ethics, according to most of the educators.

A balance between formal and informal activities improves effectiveness.

The educators were convinced that the programme's combination of structured educational activities and informality around the mealtimes contributed both to good educational outcomes for the schools and to generating strong interest for the students.

Maintaining diversity is critical for the success of the programme.

To ensure there is sufficient religious and/or cultural diversity between the students was seen as critical by the educators to ensure schools and students stay interested and involved. Many of the teachers were even prepared to visit new schools or those that struggled to attract sufficient numbers, in order to ensure they participated in the BBP.

Involvement enhanced pastoral relationships between educators and students.

Educators spoke positively of their stronger pastoral and formational role with their students as they engaged in the programme, particularly through the travel to and from sessions.

Experienced and quality facilitators are essential for effective outcomes.

The facilitator's role within the small groups in the programme was recognised as crucial for the success of the programme. It is through the dialogues in small groups that much of the intercultural and interreligious understanding takes place, together with promoting personal and social capability, and creative and critical thinking with the students. Hence, the educators felt strongly that the facilitators need to be well trained, and bring good experience and quality to their role.

Interfaith involvement promotes the schools as inclusive.

It emerged from a number of the educators' data that the wider community perceived their schools positively, because they were involved in interfaith education. Parents and others in the respective municipalities appreciated that these schools were educating their children to better understand those from other religious and cultural backgrounds, and not just taking a narrow perspective.

Conclusion.

This chapter outlined the perspectives of the educators on the effectiveness of the BBP. It presented data from the semi-structured interviews with them, and identified several themes and theories that emerged from this data. The next chapter presents the data from the facilitators, together with some of the responses from the educators, to identify the important issues in facilitating interfaith education with young people.

Chapter Six: Facilitating Interfaith Dialogue Among Australian Youth:

Introduction

The previous chapter examined the effectiveness of the BBP from the perspective of the educators. This chapter takes a narrower focus to identify the characteristics for facilitating interfaith dialogue and experiential interfaith education among Australian young people. These qualities and skills are drawn from theories that emerged from the interviews with the facilitators and educators who are involved in facilitating interfaith dialogue within the Building Bridges Programme. This chapter therefore specifically addresses the third research question, regarding the characteristics needed to facilitate interfaith dialogue and empathetic understanding between diverse participants.

Facilitators in the Building Bridges Programme

Each of the three groups, facilitators, teachers and regional co-ordinators (RCs) were asked to identify the key qualities and skills for facilitators in the BBP. Since teachers and RCs were also involved in facilitating the interfaith educational experience and at times the dialogue in small and large groups, both groups were also asked for the qualities and skills required for teachers in the programme. The RCs were additionally requested to identify the qualities and skills needed by the regional co-ordinators of the programme, as those who facilitated the whole interfaith educational programme in their region. Theory extracted from the data emergent from their responses in the interviews is outlined in this chapter.

The facilitator's role within the BBP is to oversee a small group and facilitate the dialogue between the students from diverse backgrounds in an environment of safety, hospitality, inclusiveness and respect. The groups are all single-sex and keep the same members over the five afternoon sessions. Small groups are led by a person of the same sex as their constituents as far as possible. The size of groups varies, but is not intended to

exceed ten participants. There are about four questions provided for the small groups in the handbook for each session, however if trust is building between the participants, students may ask their own questions of others in their group, if done respectfully and appropriately. Each small group session lasts for about forty-five minutes out of the entire two-hours.

The BBP seeks to have young adults facilitate the small groups because they are perceived to be young enough to be almost a peer with similar interests as the students, yet old enough to effectively manage the teenagers in a small group. They are assumed to have that extra bit of life experience to justify the students' respect in them as a facilitator. It is also perceived to be a good opportunity for these young adults to further their own learning in the art of facilitating interfaith dialogue for their own faith formation and growth. The attributes that are sought when facilitators are being recruited each year are:

- A youth leader with leadership experience;
- An ability to build rapport with 15-16 year olds;
- An openness to a wide range of religious traditions and faith practices, and preferably to have a faith themselves;
- To be approximately aged between 18-30 years; and
- To be available for all 5 x 2 hour afternoon sessions and to participate in a two hour Building Bridges facilitator training session.

In the past nine years, facilitators have been from quite a range of faiths: 20 Protestant Christians, 5 Catholic Christians, 17 Jews, 4 Muslims, 1 Mormon, 1 Buddhist, 1 Sikh, and 1 Bahai. Seven of these facilitators were graduates (or former students) of the programme. They were mostly recruited from youth organisations with an interest in faith among young people such as the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY); InterAction; youth movements connected to the different faith traditions; Interfaith Networks of the various municipalities of Melbourne, and graduates from the programme through their school's representative teacher.

Facilitators receive an honorarium for each session they attend, currently at \$ 30 per session, to help cover their transport and time.

Fifteen facilitators were interviewed in all, nine females and six males. Of the nine females all were practising their faith: four were Catholic Christians, two were Protestant Christians, two were Jews, and one was a Buddhist. The six males, again all practising a faith were made up of two Muslims, three Protestant Christians and one Jew. Four of these facilitators were also teachers in schools participating in the BBP: two females at different Catholic schools, one male at a Government school and one male at an Islamic College. Two of the facilitators interviewed were graduates of the programme, or had gone through the programme as students. The table below outlines the details of these facilitators, including their occupation and years of experience facilitating in the BBP.

Table 6.1 Facilitator details

No	Gender	Faith Tradition	Occupation	Years of Facilitating in BBP	Where interviewed
1	Female	Jewish	Student	2 (+ she was a Graduate of BBP)	Her home
2	Female	Jewish	Student	1	WellSpring
3	Female	Buddhist	Employed	2	Workplace
4	Female	Catholic Christian	Teacher	2	School
5	Female	Catholic Christian	Teacher	1	School
6	Female	Catholic Christian	Student	1	Researcher's home (RH)
7	Female	Catholic Christian	Student	1	WellSpring
8	Female	Protestant Christian	Employed	3	Her home
9	Female	Protestant Christian	Employed	2	# 8's home
10	Male	Protestant Christian	Employed	3	# 8's home
11	Male	Protestant Christian	Teacher	2	School
12	Male	Protestant Christian	Employed	1	RH
13	Male	Jewish	Student	2	RH
14	Male	Muslim	Teacher	4	School
15	Male	Muslim	Student	1 (+ Graduate of the BBP)	WellSpring

The interviews were all held at locations and times that best suited the facilitators.

Three facilitators were interviewed together at one of their homes after sharing a meal

together, two were interviewed together at the WellSpring Centre in Ashburton (the host organisation of the BBP), and the remaining nine were interviewed individually. The four teachers were interviewed on their school campuses. One facilitator was interviewed at her workplace during lunch, another one at her own home after university classes, two more were interviewed at the researcher's home and the final facilitator was interviewed at the WellSpring Centre.

The questions asked of the facilitators are contained in Appendix 7.

Themes that emerged from the Facilitator interviews:

Personal Benefits

Formation into a more open-minded, tolerant person towards others. Many of the facilitators said they had found that their involvement in the programme, and being exposed to young people from such a wide range of backgrounds had formed them to be more open-minded or tolerant or broadened their perspective on life. The following two responses were typical:

Personally, I feel that it's made me a more tolerant person...I feel like when I talk about, or when I learn about these things like Islam or Christianity, I have a basis of having spoken to a person who actually comes from that faith and that's made me a more open minded person and a person who realises that, particularly in the realm of religiosity, that everyone experiences faith in a different way. (JLCF).

I think that Building Bridges, in a lot of ways, has allowed me to build relationships with people from different faiths and cultures in that really positive environment, and its broadened my own respect of people, in a sense. Even though it was something I had been working towards beforehand, it was a way of putting it into practice...[and] I've seen my own perspective get broadened, through the time I've been involved. I think this has been a way that my own perspective on faith and on

culture and what I value has grown, and I have become more open minded, accepting, and appreciating that other people are just other people. We all have a lot in common. (PMSF).

Privilege of learning of other faiths from the stories of a practitioner. Many of the facilitators spoke of the honour of learning of other faiths from actual practitioners of those faiths. This young Buddhist facilitator shared that she found the most rewarding aspect of the programme to be “where you really hear people’s personal experiences of their religion”:

Learning the facts about a religion makes a lot more sense when you hear how it applies to individual people’s lives, and that’s what the small groups brings out...I’ve learnt a lot about different religions that I had never come into contact with before, particularly Islam. I’ve never really had a close relationship with anyone from that faith, nor talked about it that much with others, so its great to hear those experiences from those kids and their religious ceremonies and festivals– how its part of their life. I also learnt a lot from the kids from the Jewish schools. I got a beautiful sense of community that came from hearing about their school and their lives that was very interesting. (BPCF).

Two other facilitators were touched by the richness of the students’ stories and the trust given. The first, a Jewish male and the second a Catholic female:

There was one story from this year when one of the students in the group was kind of telling me his life story: that he was born in Afghanistan and had fled and had come in as refugees and had sort of worked on the weekends at his father’s store. I was just really impressed by his tenacity. I mean he was so young but he had so much wisdom. He was just kind of so articulate and I was just really, really impressed by him...I was really glad that I had the opportunity to meet him and he certainly had an impact. (JDBM).

But sometimes it made me feel quite privileged to be able to share in their experiences. So a lot of the time I was really astonished at their quite deep, personal sharing, and really amazed at their experiences. I felt honoured to have that trust from them. (CASF).

Facilitators also mentioned that listening to the stories of faith from the students had taught them of the wide range of faith practices, especially in each of the three Abrahamic religions.

Personal growth (including personal and skill development). In addition to the formational learning already mentioned, four facilitators spoke of having grown personally through their participation in the programme. They referred to things like interpersonal and group-work skills, as well as facing their own prejudices and life-challenges. One mentioned the challenge of creating a safe space for a group of diverse youth stretched him in new ways:

I felt like it gave me a really good opportunity to develop. I was very worried starting out that I wouldn't be able to control the group, that I wouldn't be able to create a safe space and make the participants feel safe and feel like they could say whatever they wanted to. And I think with their help I was able to do that. And that was kind of a valuable learning lesson I guess, just to be able to show myself that that was something that I was capable of. (JDBM).

Another found her involvement surfaced some of her prejudices, giving her the invitation to face them and become more understanding of those who differ from her:

I am fairly open-minded and respectful of other people, and open to other cultures and faiths, [but] just being aware or challenged that I carry my own baggage. Realising that I hold some prejudices in the sense of coming from a Christian perspective, and asking: 'what does that mean', and 'how do I listen to someone else's story of their faith without putting my views or my judgments on that?' I think that's a constant challenge

– how do I relate to people who are different to me, and how do we show people what we believe as well, but in a way that isn't arrogant or imposing. It was very good for me to be involved in this programme because I've grown through it, and I think my prejudices have lessened. (PMBF).

Experience first-hand the building of trust and peace between different faiths

Two Jewish facilitators, one female and the other male, valued the fact that the programme gave students an opportunity to learn to trust and engage with those who had been cast as 'the enemy'.

I think facilitating is just an extremely rewarding experience because when I'm facilitating I feel like the students are going to become more tolerant and more able to transfer to the rest of the world a more tolerant view because of the experience they've had and that is a very important value to me in particular. Tolerance, understanding, talking, discussion as opposed to like violence. So giving them those skills and giving them that opportunity, yeah for me, it's rewarding because it's very parallel to my life view. (JLCF).

I mean, one of the main motivating factors for me was the opportunity to meet Muslim students because I was interested in the Middle East crisis, I felt that it was really important for particularly Jews and Muslims to be able to meet each other, and I guess to put a human face to other people who were unfortunately often cast as the enemy...It's been really rewarding occasionally to see the students let down their guard a bit and sort of maybe leave behind those pre-learned answers, kind of politically correct courtesies that they often engage with, and just speak to each other honestly and ask each other sometimes difficult questions and give each other honest answers, and just engage on a real and sort of quite personal level. That's been quite rewarding. (JDBM).

Two other facilitators appreciated that it was a very practical programme that was actually making a difference, namely, building bridges of understanding and cohesion in a very multicultural society: “You hear a lot of talk about multiculturalism and there needs to be more of this or more of that, but this is actually happening here. So I was very proud to tell my friends and family what I was involved in” (PCSM) and “I can see [the BBP] playing a really important role in enabling our multicultural society to get along peacefully and I think that becomes increasingly important with increased immigration and population”. (BPCF).

For another facilitator, it was seeing the connections being made between the students that she found most benefit from:

I think for me it was seeing those connections that the students made with each other, usually quite quickly. Like by the second session, they were already facebook friends but also seeing the small light-bulb moments that they have, in terms of recognizing something about someone else’s faith or...when they come to a point of acceptance and understanding of another faith. (PMBF).

Another female facilitator spoke more specifically about how those connections are made within a session, and how the students’ sharing of their own personal struggles can evoke empathy and compassion in those from different backgrounds:

There is the session each year where we talk about the hard times in life. And it always amazes me how willing the students are to share something very deep from their lives – like devastating family breakdowns or a parent having a heart attack or cancer or things like that. And they’ve been willing to share that with the group, and seeing the group come around them in those sessions, and show such compassion and caring; in this group who only see each other once every month or so, but they get to that point of actually supporting each other. And I think they’re breaking down those barriers each

time they do that. In caring for other people regardless of what those other people believe or what culture they're from, and I think that's amazing to see, especially for 16 or 15 year old kids, you know. I think that says a lot about the programme. (PMSF).

Qualities and skills for Facilitating interfaith dialogue

Facilitators were asked, together with the RCs and teachers, to identify the qualities and skills required by facilitators of the small groups in the BBP. Qualities are understood as character traits, parts of one's personality that they cannot but express in their interactions and facilitation, whereas skills are the abilities that have been learned or acquired from training and practice. The facilitators generally found it easier to identify the skills rather than the qualities, as the former are more distinct or quantifiable and nameable. A typical response was "Definitely a non-judgemental attitude, an approach that sees all religious traditions as valid, and each as equal or as valuable as the other; listening skills, being able to sit with silence; those would be the most important". The qualities and skills identified by the facilitators and educators have been grouped separately for the purpose of clarity.

Although expressed quite differently by the facilitators and educators, the following qualities emerged from the interview data.

Qualities for facilitating a BBP interfaith dialogue group:

Safe, trustworthy presence:

Respondents spoke of the need for the facilitator to be a 'safe' or trustworthy person. Safe in this context refers to being able to guard the confidences of the group members and figuratively 'hold' whatever they share in a protected environment free from ridicule or criticism. Presence refers to being fully present, not distracted or mentally preoccupied by outside things, but aware and fully attentive to the other group members (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). So a safe or trustworthy person meant someone who is approachable, open to a

wide breadth of views and experiences, non-judgemental, and is willing to trust the group with their own personal story. Many of the facilitators spoke of having a non-judgemental attitude toward the participants in their group: “I want to create an environment where everyone feels confident enough to speak about whatever it is on their mind [and] I would practise that by having a non-judgemental attitude myself”. (BPCF).

Another spoke about how she helped create this safe space by sharing some of her own story:

I think the most important element is to make it safe, because if that’s not the case, then, you’re not going to get anyone to share anything of any significance. And I find one of the easiest ways of making it safe is to share something yourself. At least initially, and that will get them thinking about a topic. So I think having a few of my own stories up my sleeve, is a really good way, because it means you can still leave the silences, but it puts it out there that you’re willing to share something in the group as well. Cause I think if you’re there and you don’t give anything personal, they [think], why should they then? (PMSF).

A facilitator who was also a teacher at a Catholic school mentioned that when she shared in a group, it helped to set the level of depth of sharing for the students, and she added “they rise to it, they really do!” A male facilitator spoke of allowing an open space where whatever is shared is “honoured”, which the researcher understood as an attentive and active listening without interruption, until it was time to move to the next person. This proved helpful in creating that safety and respect: “I think giving people the space to explain their point of view, helping clarify their point of view if need be, and so honouring that is important. And that creates that safe, respectful environment”. (PACM).

The safety created is important in the group so that students can share as honestly and as openly about their personal experiences as they feel comfortable. But this takes time and

the facilitator needs the capacity and even the spiritual maturity to nurture that, without pushing or rushing too quickly, as this female Buddhist facilitator expresses:

I remember reading before the group that the questions were quite deep, so [I thought] okay; this is going to be a reflective, serious kind of session. I learnt after that that you should never go in with any expectations of how the group is going to go because I think the kids instantly know when you are trying to get something out of them...and it has to be so natural. You can only go deeper if it happens naturally. You can't push it. You can't expect it just to happen. It has to be done so sensitively. If you just sit down at the beginning and [ask] 'Do you want to talk about this deep issue?' there's going to be complete silence. (BPCF).

This 'safety' allows the students to build trust and even empathise with each other, as was evident in this facilitator's experience, who needed to hold the space and silence for some painful emotions in her group:

So one of the girls was talking about her grandfather's death, and the way that that had impacted her, and, it certainly felt like she hadn't actually had an opportunity to express all of that before. And I was always impressed at how sensitive the other girls were, and how respectful they were of what was being shared. So it was never, oh you poor thing, or, that must have been horrible, it was just respectful silence, which was greatly appreciated by me anyway. (CASF).

Self-understanding

Self-understanding was a distillation of a number of traits identified by the respondents, including having a reasonable awareness of their personality, their strengths and weaknesses, some self-confidence as well as appreciating their own relative position and power in the group as facilitator. This Jewish facilitator had discovered that her style and best approach was alongside, like a companion, to the students:

You've got to have the confidence to be able to create an atmosphere where people want to share and I feel that I learnt about myself that I could make a group feel comfortable... My experience is that I need to part of it with them and on their level, even where I sit. I will sit on the same level, you know, with them and I'll laugh and share stories with them as well. Like for me it's important for me to facilitate the discussion as well as being part of the group because I feel it makes everyone more comfortable. (JLCF).

A second facilitator spoke of the need to have faced one's fear and the issues that arise when confronted with the radically different other prior to leading a religiously and culturally diverse group, otherwise one can not be effectively present to the students when they might be struggling with these same fears or similar issues:

I think anyone who's thinking about facilitating needs to really have a good look at themselves before they do, because often religious prejudice and racial prejudice as well is a very subtle thing. And someone might say of course I'm not racist, but actually they might feel uncomfortable in this [diverse] situation. Because I know, growing up I didn't mix with people from other faith groups, and it can be very confronting to meet people from other faith groups who at first glance seem so different from you. I think the students, at least at the beginning, are probably going through that same sort of suspicion, or a bit of concern, so I think it's important that the facilitator isn't going through that process at the same time. The facilitator needs to already be above that to kind of manage any tension that might arise around that between the participants. (JDBM).

A third facilitator spoke of the value of being able to laugh at oneself, that comes from a healthy understanding of oneself, that is comfortable with and non-defensive with oneself. Self-understanding also involved having a sufficiently robust self-esteem, such that the

facilitator could be firm enough with the students to protect the aims of the group, but also flexible enough to adapt when the situation required it. It was an art more than a science, requiring one's intuition according to this facilitator:

I think being switched on, to know when to let them go and when to jump in, and having that open-mindedness is good...Not being the one who is speaking all the time- but knowing when the group needs that bit of silence, and you have to read the 'vibe'. I suppose being a bit intuitive with how you facilitate helps. You have the questions and all that, but its up to how you facilitate that determines how well the groups work. (PMSF).

Whilst this involves some group management skills, it also requires some healthy self-esteem to be done wisely and well. One of the teachers at a Jewish school endeavoured to express this quality, able to be firm and flexible in these terms:

But there's something about an inner strength that they have to display, and be able to cross that fine line between being a fun person to be with, and encouraging; on the other hand they've got to be able to manage the kids, when they just want to chat and do whatever they like and they're not listening to each other. You've got to be able to, in a gentle manner, to get things back on track. And some people are good at it naturally, some people can learn it, most can't. (EMSFPF).

Further to this capacity, one teacher at a Catholic school (CAVCVF), believed a facilitator needs to "have enough knowledge and confidence to be able to run a conversation on those questions that are a bit harder, without causing animosity and division and mucking up the programme". A Jewish male facilitator felt having an awareness and understanding of himself as both a committed Jew in a mixed religious group and as a facilitator holding some power within the group was important to facilitate an interfaith group well:

For me the most important thing has been a kind of self-awareness and certain sort of reflexive scepticism about my own position. I'm conscious of having a certain degree of power over the proceedings. On one hand as a facilitator, and on the other hand a member of the Jewish contingent. And of course it's never possible to leave your ethnic and religious heritage at the door because you know obviously I'm a big Jew, but I do try to present myself as very neutral and as not sort of affiliating with the Jewish students any more than I affiliate with the Muslim students, with the students from various Christian denominations. I'm not sure how successful I am at that, but it's something that I'm conscious of, that I try to do. I want these three or four mini faith groups to interact between themselves and not to feel like their balance is somehow affected by my own position. (JDBM).

Genuine interest in young people's lives and stories

Facilitators need to have a genuine interest in the lives of the young people of their group, not only to build a rapport with them but also to assure all the students that they do want to hear their stories and life experiences.

Usually, I tried to make sure that I approached each of the boys [from my group] separately before the small group time started, just to introduce myself, find out a bit more about them, so that at least they know that, I see them as an individual and I've made some kind of connection with them to begin with. And so when we get to the small group, there's a greater sense of, well, all right, he's taken the time to know me, I'm happy to play along with the 'games' he wants us to get into...And I suppose it's your attitude in terms of how you're listening and responding to them when they're talking; that it's not just we're doing this because it's a question that's on this list of things to do, but that there is something worthwhile in that. (PACM).

Another of the facilitators spoke of this interest being expressed through building friendships with the group members, as a way of building rapport and trust among them:

I fostered friendships [with the students] because, I think, that especially for girls, it's very difficult to have that level of trust if you don't have some rapport with somebody [and] I realised that I'm able to build up a good rapport with teenagers and that I easily related to them and that they felt that they could relate to me as well. So by the end of it, it was very much like a group of friends chatting, which was really nice. (CASF).

Committed to the values of the BBP/Interfaith dialogue:

Most of the facilitators acknowledged that it was important that facilitators have a good understanding of the aims and purpose of the program. This was expressed differently by them, but included things like being open-minded, respectful, inclusive, not controlling or pushy, a role model and committed to full participation and attendance. When asked about the required qualities or skills, this facilitator replied: "I think someone who's pretty open-minded and respectful of other cultures and other faiths, and you need to be fairly warm as well. I think you need to appear at least, as being approachable, and trustworthy and not to be dogmatic". (PMBF).

One of the RCs said that facilitators need to be role models for the students, around the values of the programme. Another teacher at a Jewish school said facilitators: "I guess, first of all, need to be people who are committed to the goals of the program." A Catholic school teacher described this commitment as a capacity to encourage ongoing dialogue yet without constraining it too much by the facilitator's own religious filter or agenda:

The skill the facilitator should have is sort of an ability to manage that flow of information in a way that encourages respect and compassion. So you'd have to have a very open minded person to make a good facilitator. So, I suppose, you can't push any of your own agenda with a group like that. You might be a devout Catholic, but, if you

don't have those skills of being able to foster dialogue and you're sort of a little bit more filtering through your own experience and values- which I suppose we all do - then you're going to miss out on half the story and you might be a bit of a put off to others. So, I think the facilitators have to be those people who are really committed to keeping the dialogue moving. (EACMHM).

Being an interfaith programme that aims to build understanding between people of different faiths and cultural backgrounds, the issue of 'faith' for the facilitator arose. Some respondents felt it was critical that a facilitator has some faith, like this RC: "I think it would be very difficult for a person who's an atheist to play a reasonable contribution in the discussion. If you have rejected the notion of faith within your own life, I would find it difficult to be a facilitator in a group that's trying to encourage a discussion of that." (SMCMTM). Others thought it was preferable for a facilitator to have a faith, because it provided an understanding of a faith perspective or context to the students' comments, as this facilitator describes:

While it's probably not essential, it helps a lot if the facilitator has their own faith connection or religious background...Just because it makes it easier when students are expressing their own beliefs or religious experiences, easier to understand what they're saying, where they're coming from, and you can almost, not pre-empt, but lead the student along a particular point or to reach a particular conclusion if you know a little bit about different religions and what makes up the foundation of a religion, how traditions work. I think it all helps. (JATF).

Whilst two or three of the forty past facilitators have said they were non-practising, none have had no faith background or interest.

Skills required to facilitate a BBP interfaith dialogue group:

The facilitators and educators identified six main skills for facilitating a small interfaith dialogue group with adolescents.

Listening skills

All the facilitators and RCs, as well as most of the teachers recognised that good listening skills were crucial for facilitating the small dialogue groups in the programme. These listening skills involve active and attentive listening to the verbal and non-verbal cues, asking open-ended questions and giving appropriate feedback. One facilitator identified many of the elements of these listening skills that she practiced in her group:

I want to create an environment where everyone feels confident enough to speak about whatever it is on their mind. I would practise that by...validating people's experiences. And saying that there's no stupid questions, and you can't say anything wrong. And using communication skills like asking open questions, and making sure that I don't dictate where the conversation goes too much but where they want it to go- to interest them. So making sure I never slip into the role of teaching, but that I am just there as a facilitator to help the conversation flow. (BPCF).

One of the facilitators, who is also a teacher at a Catholic school recognised the similarity between the skills needed for facilitating a BBP and her training in counselling:

Facilitating implies skills of listening, mediating, even a bit of the same skills you need in counselling. I find that in the groups, when something deep comes up it's important how the facilitator handles that...So its about listening and supporting rather than coming in with one's own assumptions or perspective straight away. Then if you are doing that respectfully the [students] follow the tone that is set by the facilitator. (SMMF).

Another critical listening skill that the facilitators regularly mentioned was helping students to use ‘I statements’ rather than speak in generalities for their whole religious or cultural community. One facilitator shared that bringing her group back to their personal experiences helped break down the stereotypes that could easily have developed about the other:

Sometimes the students generalized about a culture; asking ‘we do this, what do you believe?’ -creating a general blanket rule rather than personalizing it. So I tried to bring people back to using ‘I statements’, talking about their own practice rather than a general statement to challenge the stereotypes as well. (PMBF).

The RCs and many of the teachers spoke of the need for these listening skills in a variety of ways. For instance, they included “the ability to respond respectfully when students do respond to a question or to a prompt and to keep the conversation or discussion going”. This RC admitted that “it sounds very easy to just think that you sit the students down into a circle with five questions to have a bit of a chat, but its not easy at all. To run it effectively and to run it well, you have to be a very, very skilled facilitator. They need support and training for that, and some tricks up their sleeve.” (NCOAHF). She then elaborated on what some of these ‘tricks’ up her sleeve were.

Probing skills

By probing is meant the skill to help a student unpack their experience further, perhaps to reveal more of what it really felt like for the participant, or to help them name the significance of the experience in their life, or simply to clarify some integral detail to their story. Probing skills build on the listening skills just discussed.

The facilitators have found that the nature of much of the dialogue in the BBP small groups, namely sharing personal experiences that have shaped their lives and faith and spirituality is new territory for most of the students. On the one hand, those who attend faith-

based schools may have learnt the ‘official’ doctrines and practices of their religious tradition, but not be familiar with talking about how they experience these, or live these out in their daily lives. Students from non-religious backgrounds on the other hand, may feel they don’t have much to contribute because they don’t have a religious tradition or spirituality. In such cases, the facilitator needs to be able to probe a little into the students sharing or stories, to bring out the richness of their personal experiences or help them appreciate an experience as ‘sacred’ even if its not ‘officially religious’. This facilitator explains how she probed with her students:

A lot of the time the students from different religious groups will like, parrot something they might have learnt in religious studies. So to try and facilitate the deeper sharing or where their connection comes from, I will ask them about it and say, “What’s your experience with that?” or, you know, “how do you feel towards that particular element of your religion?” Just trying to strike the balance between letting the person inform the other students about what their religion is about and having them share what their experience is within that context. And as well, to always stipulate that it doesn’t have to always be about religion, that it can be just about their personal life experience. Like when we talk about a special place I will stipulate that special place doesn’t have to be necessarily a religious place of worship, just somewhere where they go to feel spiritual or at home or somewhere where they’re comfortable. (JLCF).

Another used ‘minimal encouragers’ to probe, that often led to some profound insight: Some people felt a bit worried about sharing something in case it wasn’t relevant. So I used those minimal encouragers like “Oh yes, tell me more....that’s really interesting”, just to make sure they understood that whatever they wanted to share was relevant and was to the point. Even if it starts off seeming like a small example often what the kids are trying to get at is something more emotional that they can’t quite yet express, so if

you keep drawing out through little questions, then eventually you can get to a much more profound point that they were making. (BPCF).

Two others used questions- a combination of direct and open-ended questions or even asking a question for the sake of the other members of the group.

It can take either direct or open-ended questions to get the kids to draw out their stories and gain a bit more understanding for the rest of the group from their stories. I think being reminded that what we want is personal stories and that facilitating is about asking open-ended questions, so people can come at it from whatever angle they're coming from is important. (PMSF).

One of the RCs perceived this skill to be very important for a facilitator:

I think the ability to draw out some difficult topics and concepts for kids would be important. To not let them give just one-word answers, but to want to engage with them in a way that builds that trust level that they can share. It's at that facilitators' level that the discussion is going to be at its most fragile and precious, so I think that the skill that they would need to bring is to draw out from reluctant kids some things that could genuinely benefit the group, and be respected in a safe environment. That's what I would think is their most important role. (SMCMTM).

The RCs and teachers believed that facilitators needed to be "enthusiastic and encourage the kids to want to share in a safe way" (SMCMTM).

Comfortable with silence and holding the high or painful emotions

The capacity to be comfortable with silence and painful emotions could be considered a quality, but is included as a skill because with the right training and life experience, the researcher believed it could be learnt. To grow, it does require the personal qualities of self-understanding and being a safe trustworthy presence, because the capability to first know and value the role that silence and painful emotions have for one's own health, is what best

equips a person to be not be afraid or intimidated when silence or these strong emotions are expressed by members of one's group.

One facilitator, who is a practising Buddhist, spoke of the importance of silence for her group facilitation:

There were challenges- sometimes the questions for discussion would be quite deep, and yet the atmosphere wasn't always ready for those questions. They might have just come from a particularly entertaining pre-discussion group and everyone is quite wired and making jokes and you just can't suddenly sit down and talk about their deepest religious experience. So sometimes it would go off to a slow start, and you would feel the atmosphere in the room slowly change gear. It's the challenge when people aren't talkative, and there's lots of silence, and learning to be more comfortable with silence. Often I would feel okay I'm leaving this silence too long, I probably should say something, and as I'm about to, someone would come out with this incredible thing that they wanted to share. I've realised you can leave silence for quite a while. (BPCF).

Another facilitator shared the challenge of 'holding' her group when one member got upset and tearful:

Having to deal with high emotions running, it's definitely a very big challenge. I found my first group, when people got emotional, particularly girls, and they can cry sometimes and like it could put an awkward atmosphere in the group, especially when its maybe only the second [session] and not everyone knows each other. So how I respond to it is- I say that I really appreciate that they told us something so personal to them because I feel that it takes courage to open up to a group of strangers. I also don't go immediately to the next thing, because I think that silence in a group is sometimes very useful. So I'll let someone come and comfort her and like I've seen you know, even if it's not her friend sitting next to her, someone from another school will like put

her arm around her. So after high emotional situations I also like to have maybe two or three seconds of silence and then I'll ask if she's okay and then move on or see if she wants to share more. (JLCF).

Model the process/create a safe environment for all

Most of the respondents said it was crucial to create a safe, hospitable environment for the participants to feel comfortable and confident enough to share their personal life experiences and stories. These two facilitators explain how they did that through reminding of the guidelines and maintaining confidentiality:

The most important element is to facilitate a comfortable environment, a comfortable atmosphere, one where they feel that information will be kept confidential. I practise that by reminding them every week...so setting the foundations at the very beginning of what the tone of the discussion is going to be. The fact that you come in and you need to be respectful to everyone. Just stipulating the fact that we're here to listen to what everyone has to say and we're here to make everyone feel welcome to share and confident to share and that it will be confidential. Particularly at the beginning, just reminding them about the type of atmosphere we want in the group and to try and make it as safe and respectful as possible. (JLCF).

Talking about some guidelines about what sort of group they want the programme to be; and sometimes needing to revisit that, and just encouraging students to share and it's going to be heard and not be broadcast to everyone else. And also to thank the students for sharing that, as a sign of respect...I think encouraging students to take ownership of the group as well. So not always being so directive perhaps; leaving the conversation open and allowing the silences and letting the conversations flow, and encouraging them to ask questions of each other. (PMBF).

Group management

This skill involves handling inappropriate behaviour, managing the energy of the group, and having a ‘few tricks up one’s sleeve’ to manage difficulties.

I found the biggest challenge with the girls was they usually went off topic a little bit, because they are happy to talk about anything. So I found I would usually let that go for a minute or so, and then I or inevitably one of the girls, would recognize it’s a bit off topic, so let’s try to refocus on the general gist of what we were talking about as opposed to the random tangent. But letting them go off tangent is helpful for a little while because the trivial things are also important for them to know about. And it helps them relax a bit more and allows them to be more comfortable. (PMSF).

Another dimension to this skill was balancing the needs of an individual with those of the group:

One girl brought up quite a tragic thing that happened in her life and she became quite teary. So trying to balance her needs, but also being aware that there was a whole group, and I didn’t want to take up the whole group time by dealing with this girl’s problem. So I tried to bring it back to a group topic, and then afterwards I just followed it up with the girl, if you need more time to talk about this...I tried to reflect what she was feeling, to acknowledge that she was upset and that it was perfectly understandable for her to be upset, and then I asked a more general question open to the group, about whether anyone else wanted to add to the topic. I just remember it as a real challenge how to switch between roles like that, and I’m sure that’s a common problem of juggling the needs of an individual against the group. (BPCF).

Some facilitators spoke of this in terms of the need to manage inappropriate behaviour, such as one girl from a Christian school requesting to try on a Muslim girl’s hijab whilst in the group, or simply ensuring that one member doesn’t dominate the sharing to the detriment

of the other members of the group. Each of the RCs spoke of the need for facilitators to have good group management skills. One of the Regional Co-ordinators, who had also been a facilitator in the programme, was strongly of the opinion that facilitators should be assertive, particularly when needing to challenge students' behaviour.

If there's a group that's a little bit unruly or distracted [then the facilitator needs to] bring them back on track in a friendly way, and give them some boundaries as well...Last year some of the boys groups didn't want to delve very much, being a bit silly. Part of that's just the energy that is in the group that is really hard to shift or change, but that's what a facilitator needs to work on, so if it means sitting on somebody and saying to them that what they're doing is inappropriate, then that needs to be done as well. So the facilitators need to have a little bit of backbone. If the facilitators are all affirming and it's all wonderful, but if you've got a couple of kids who are behaving a bit silly, well then that's really impacting on the rest of the group, and that's not fair. (CDVRSF).

Another RC expressed it as 'an ability to settle and ensure students are focused on the task' "You need really good management skills. So if students are disengaged, you need to be able to re-engage them. You just need to learn those through experience, talk about them but the more you do them, the better you get at it". (NCOAHF).

Faith knowledge

Many of the facilitators mentioned the value of having some general awareness of key elements and practices of the various faith traditions, to assist a student whenever they need it or if they struggle to explain some aspect of their religious tradition or festivals, so that the others in the group can benefit.

I think knowledge of the religions involved is essential. Obviously not extremely in depth but I think it just helps in terms of knowing where each student stands, just

having some kind of basic knowledge about what each of the religions is about. I feel that that's helped me be a better facilitator and its funny because I feel like a lot of that knowledge might have come from me myself being a participant. (JLCF).

One of the RCs concurred because she felt it equips them to ask deeper questions of the students:

I think facilitators need to have knowledge of the religious denominations of the members in their group, because it equips them to sometimes ask deeper level questions. While its not the aim of Building Bridges to have a test at the end on all the religions and to have all the right answers, if you're clued up on the different seasons that are followed within that religion, or the different rituals that they have, I think it can allow you to question at a higher level; to invite students to talk more about particular aspects of their faith. (NCOAHF).

Conclusion.

This chapter examined the characteristics needed to facilitate interfaith dialogue and education with young Australians. In particular, it identified the four qualities and six skills considered essential that emerged from the interviews with facilitators and educators responsible for facilitating interfaith education in the Building Bridges Programme. The final chapter presents the findings of this investigation into the effectiveness of the programme including answering the four research questions.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

Introduction

This project investigated the effectiveness of the Building Bridges Programme in promoting faith, interreligious and intercultural understanding, personal and social capability, critical and creative thinking, and ethical behaviour among participants (especially secondary students) from different backgrounds. This research was done firstly to identify how well this model of interfaith education, that had run continuously for nine years, had achieved its aims of building trust, understanding and co-operation between participants from different religious, cultural and social backgrounds. Secondly, it was undertaken to assess the degree to which the BBP could be a viable and effective model for the study of religion and faith within the new Australian curriculum for secondary schools. The inspiration and motivation for this programme and inquiry came from the researcher's conviction that faith and faith traditions (or religions), despite appalling instances of religiously-inspired violence throughout history, are valuable resources for promoting intercultural and interreligious understanding and peace between peoples from different backgrounds. If students and educators could participate in genuine interfaith dialogue, including with those from Indigenous spiritualities, it was thought that potentially at least, they could discover and critically engage with some of the rich wisdom of each faith tradition and take steps towards greater reconciliation with all, for the benefit of the entire Australian society.

This investigation was carried out in the context of Melbourne, Australia, a city which is characterised by growing religious and cultural diversity, as well as increasing instances of religiously targeted intercultural conflict, prejudice, and abuse directed especially towards those from Middle-Eastern and Indian backgrounds. This research was also situated in the Australian educational context where religion in secondary schools is typically taught either

from one religious perspective alone (as in faith-based schools), or not at all (as in most Government schools). This perpetuates the divisions between religiously based and Government schools, and exacerbates the widespread ignorance, and the uninformed negative perceptions that exist among students about the religious other. By measuring the effectiveness of the BBP in promoting faith (or one's capacity for meaning making) and the general capabilities identified for the Australian curriculum, an assessment could then be made on how well the programme addressed these critical educational needs in Australia.

This chapter outlines the conclusions of this study including answering the four research questions, recommendations for this model and other programmes of interfaith education, the significance, delimitations and limitations of this investigation, and suggestions for further research.

Research Question (RQ) One: The Effectiveness of the BBP at Promoting Faith and the General Capabilities

This research into the BBP found that it was effective at promoting faith, intercultural and interreligious understanding, personal and social capability, creative and critical thinking and ethical behaviour (General Capabilities of the Australian curriculum), for many if not most of the participants involved.

Personal dialogue with a peer from a different religious or cultural background promoted intercultural and interreligious understanding as well as faith, understood as having expanded participants' capacity to make meaning of their experiences. This was evident in comments from students and educators who discovered more about the others' faith and culture as well as their own, and the commonalities and differences they shared through asking and responding to each other's questions. This is consistent with effective experiential education practice that stresses the need for direct experience that is personally engaging to participants (Chapman, S., 2008). The dialogues in this sense developed the

important inter-subjective dimension of inter-religious competency in students (Altmeyer, 2010). The participants also learnt and appreciated the wide range of religious and cultural practices and expressions in different traditions. This compares favourably with the findings from research into Generation Y, that dialogical approaches that take the views and beliefs of youth seriously are more effective (Hughes, 2007b). For many of the educators, this personal dialogue with a peer from a different religious background over a period of years developed into collegial co-operations, partnerships and the sharing of wisdom and resources with each other. Similar findings were found with educators in the Jewish-Christian Colloquium (Boys & Lee, 1996).

Facilitating dialogue around the topic of faith promoted faith development (both cognitive and affective) and personal capability in the participants. Students spoke of being challenged to think and reflect on what they believed and why, in response to questions from others in their small group that they had never been asked before. These conversations around faith also helped students value their faith background, clarify their own beliefs, and broaden their faith perspective to appreciate another's faith journey as different but equally valid. This is consistent with findings by Weisse (2003) and Collins (2010) who found such dialogue fostered better understandings of one's own beliefs, and that exposure to other traditions expands one's options of making authentic meaning of one's life (Taylor, 2007).

Providing the time, space, and food on different school campuses for engaging with people from different backgrounds promoted social capability in the participants. This was evident from students' comments that they had grown in confidence to mix with and share what they believed and valued with strangers, had discovered the other was like them, had grown in empathy for these people and even, in many cases, had developed friendships with these others from different backgrounds. Participants therefore had moved from a denial or

defensive posture of ethnocentrism to one that was more open to acceptance of the other's perspective (Bennett, 1993).

The engagement with real practitioners of different faith traditions and cultures promoted ethical behaviour by the participants as it challenged their fears, suspicions, over-generalized stereotypes and prejudices about those different from them, and gave them the confidence to practise skills of respectful dialogue with those diverse others. This was revealed in the students' willingness to interrogate stereotypes of various religious others presented by the media and their community, manage competing values and beliefs, become more respectful of others' traditions, dress-codes and religious practices, and more empathetic of the others' socio-cultural situation as they heard and appreciated the other's perspective. Facilitators also mentioned becoming more open-minded and understanding of people through engaging with those from diverse backgrounds. Participants therefore changed their limiting frames of reference (Mezirow, 2000), and were challenged to critique their assumptions, and explore alternative viewpoints in order to find a more suitable way to live that was more consistent with their new reality (Cranton, 2002).

The practice of dialogue in small groups promoted critical and creative thinking in the participants through empowerment to consider and ask their own questions of those different from them, reflect upon and synthesise their responses, and make decisions about how to live co-operatively with those who are different. Facilitators spoke of learning to think creatively as they practised fostering respectful and honest dialogue among the members of their small groups. This is consistent with good experiential education that affirms critical reflection upon one's experience and learning is necessary for strong and effective outcomes (Nazzari, et al., 2005).

The excitement and immediacy of experiential interfaith education promoted creative thinking as students spoke of wanting to promote cultural and religious diversity in their

wider community as a result of their participation, thereby demonstrating that they felt capable of transferring their knowledge and experience into new contexts.

Therefore it can be claimed that the Building Bridges Programme is an effective model of interfaith education for promoting faith and those four capabilities sought for all Australian students at schools across the nation. These four capabilities include intercultural and interreligious understanding, personal and social capability, ethical behaviour and critical and creative thinking.

RQ Two: The Most and Least Effective Components of the BBP

This research found the seven most effective components of the BBP for promoting faith and the general capabilities were the small group dialogues, the balance of structured and unstructured personal questions in the small groups, the informal meal times, the provision of ‘new’ experiences through visits to different schools, the young adult facilitators with good self-understanding and training who led the small groups, the development of pastoral relationships between the teachers and the students, and the ongoing long-term relationships between the teachers from different schools.

The small group dialogues around faith and life were effective because they were the primary place where the relationships, trust and understanding were generated, the fears diminished and the stereotypes critiqued. Having a balance between structured questions aimed at probing participants’ experiences of faith and life, and opportunities to ask personal questions of each other, ensured that educational objectives as well as personal interest were achieved. The informal meal times offered participants the freedom to mix and engage with a wider group of students around their own interests, and experientially learn how to feel comfortable among those who are different from them. Providing the students with new experiences through visiting different schools and sacred sites, and meeting ‘new’ people

added interest and appeal for the students, and gave them helpful insights into the physical learning environment of those with whom they were engaging. When the facilitators of the small groups were young adults with good self-awareness, interest in students' lives and demonstrated appropriate group management skills, the students found their small group environment sufficiently safe and hospitable to share their faith and life experiences comfortably, and thereby build bridges of trust and understanding with those from different backgrounds from them. Students and educators valued the bonds and pastoral support that were created and nurtured by teachers because of their participation in the BBP, especially through the preparatory conversations and debriefing with the students that occurred on the trips to and from the sessions. The long-term, ongoing relationships that had developed between the teachers at different schools within their region was appreciated by them, since it often grew into genuine friendships, but also developed into opportunities for partnerships, the sharing of teaching resources and wider collaborations between their schools.

The components of the BBP that were least effective were: the inability to involve more students who held prejudicial or negative views of the religious other; unreliable small group facilitators; host-school presentations that were more entertaining than informing; the provision of no focal activity to engage the teachers during the students' small group sessions; insufficient numbers of small group questions involving concrete thinking; development of parental interest and support; and the transportation needs of many schools.

Since the programme is extra-curricular and generally occurs outside of school hours, very few students who hold prejudicial and antagonistic views of religion participate, meaning their views and attitudes continue unchallenged. When facilitators were unreliable, not attending at least four of the required sessions in their region, they undermined the trust and understanding being forged between the members of their group and themselves. Host-school presentations that devolved into an entertaining show or competition with other

schools rather than a brief outline of key elements of the faith tradition or culture of the school did little to build genuine understanding between the students from their diverse backgrounds. While students met in their small groups, teachers were given no formal agenda or focal activity, so either engaged in conversation or dialogue with one of the other teachers over supper, or caught up on marking students' papers. This seemed like an underutilised opportunity for building relationships between educators from their different backgrounds. Several students struggled with the more abstract and reflective questions asked in the small groups, which diminished some of their interest and contribution to the group dialogues. A few parents, when not provided with a clear explanation for why their child was involved in this extra-curricular programme, held back their support from their child's participation. Several schools were physically hampered by not having a bus or van to transport students at the time of sessions, so required multiple taxis or teachers to drive them. This resulted in long waiting periods, frequent late arrivals and anxiety to parents awaiting their return.

Therefore the programme should continue largely in its current form, but work to address the identified concerns.

RQ Three: Characteristics Needed to Facilitate Effective Interfaith Dialogue

This third question examined both the qualities of those facilitating the dialogues and issues of the environment needed for effective dialogue. The research identified that the most effective facilitators of interfaith dialogue have good self-awareness with emotional and social intelligence, openness to change their perspectives and sufficient group management skills to appropriately guide a productive dialogue in their small group. They are committed to the aims and process of interfaith dialogue and to the members of their group. Preferably they would themselves be people of a faith, and have some background understanding of the

different faiths and cultures represented in their small group. This research confirmed the value of having young adults facilitating the small groups, but highlighted the need for them to be suitably experienced and trained for this crucial role.

Facilitators need good self-awareness in order to know and face their own fears and prejudices, to listen respectfully without distracting the group with their own story or agenda and to maintain a balanced, realistic perspective of their role within the group. This also involves being cognizant of their ‘power’ within the group as a facilitator, and to use this influence wisely and appropriately. This is consistent with requirements for facilitators in Palmer’s “Circles of Trust” groups (2004). Emotional intelligence enables facilitators to name and accept their own honest emotional responses, be comfortable with themselves and the silences that arise, and to sufficiently hold another’s painful experience and tears if need be, without it reactivating their own past wounds or desire to rescue the other (Goleman, 2005). A facilitator with good social intelligence is open to and interested in the members of his or her small group, has sufficient confidence to listen, inquire and share non-defensively and reasonable awareness of when to speak and when to listen (Goleman, 2006). This is called ‘empathic perspective taking’ in Wang’s scale of ethnographic empathy (2003). With these qualities present, members of their group are more likely to find the emotional space safe, hospitable, respectful and engaging for personal stories to be shared and fruitful dialogue to occur. Facilitators need to be sufficiently open to the participants’ experiences to be affected and even changed by their participation. The intention is that they be genuinely present as a subject or an ‘I’ with each small group member, creating the potential for I-Thou encounters in this dialogue, as described by Martin Buber (Buber, 1937, 1970). Group management skills are also needed in order to facilitate effective dialogue among young people. These involve listening and probing skills to explore and depth the storyteller’s experience, and skills to manage the overly dominant or excessively quiet or the disruptive

members of the group. If these are not practised when necessary, the dialogue is easily hijacked and members fail to hear all the stories and gain a genuine understanding of the other participants.

Furthermore, facilitators need to be committed to the aims and goals of the programme, partly as a means to keep them accountable, but also to ensure they remain respectful of the participants and the dialogical process. There were no known breaches of the latter, but sometimes facilitators were absent from sessions with little or no forewarning. To be a person of faith was found to be an advantage for facilitating interfaith dialogue, as it gave the facilitator an empathetic understanding of those with a faith tradition and some awareness of the students' spirituality or 'inner landscape' that was to be explored (Palmer, 2004). However sensitivity was needed to discern how much or how little of their own faith experience was appropriate to share in the group in order to encourage the students' participation, but also not dominate the dialogues. Finally, it was recognised that the best method of forming facilitators for the small groups was through doing it, practise in other words, initially in the training sessions with appropriate role plays, and then through the actual leading of a small group, with regular opportunities for debriefing with a mentor or lead facilitator afterwards.

In terms of the environment needed for facilitating experiential interfaith dialogue, this inquiry identified that the environment should be hospitable, preferably with food and informal spaces for mixing and interacting, and smaller rooms or classrooms that provided some confidentiality for the small group dialogues. Participants particularly appreciated having the dialogues at different school campuses, to experience first-hand the learning environment of their peers. While students often questioned the separation of the sexes into different small groups in the first and second sessions of the programme, by the final sessions each year and during all the student interviews and survey questionnaire, only one student out

of eighty-four thought this requirement needed to be changed. Overall, the clear majority recognised the value of the dialogues occurring in single-sex small groups.

Therefore it is argued that schools actively promote opportunities for experiential interfaith dialogue in small groups facilitated by trained, self-aware and skilled adults as a means to develop faith and understanding of diverse perspectives as well as to address ignorance and intolerance towards those from different backgrounds.

RQ Four: Challenges for Facilitating Interfaith Education Among Young Australians

This research identified seven key challenges for educators wanting to facilitate effective experiential interfaith education among Australian young people.

Educators need to balance the cognitive and conceptual with the affective and experiential dimensions of knowing for students to understand and appreciate the differences between religions and cultural traditions. The experiential, dialogical approach in the BBP appeals to adolescents' peer-to-peer experiential learning but easily leads to overly simplistic generalizations or inaccurate portrayals of various cultures and religions. Their presentations need to be complemented by important facts and details about those traditions so that fuller and more balanced perspectives are given, and students have more data with which to critically engage with those cultures and faith traditions. This correlates with similar findings in Europe (Knauth, 2008), and the high value placed on this complementary approach in the Jewish-Christian Colloquium (Boys & Lee, 1996).

Similarly, there is a need to balance the more structured elements and questions of an experiential education programme with the informal, unstructured 'social' time that allows students to explore their own interests with their peers. Several pupils wanted the latter without the former, but the teachers would not have involved them if the formal educational aims and elements of the programme were neglected. Balancing both of these ensures that

the educational objectives of participation from the school's point of view and the needs and interests of the students are jointly met.

Ensuring there is sufficient cultural and religious diversity among the students is critical for experiential interfaith education to provide rich stories for dialogue and to achieve strong positive outcomes. With high levels of diversity at most Government schools and increasing diversity at Catholic and some Independent schools, the potential for this model of dialogue around difference is very good in Australia. However, note should be taken from this research that even with diversity within a single school, students value visiting different schools and meeting 'new' people.

A further challenge is to engage those students who hold more intolerant and prejudicial views of those who are different from them. Often such perspectives are formed out of ignorance or stereotypes projected by the media, without any direct personal experience of relating to these others. Involving them would challenge their perceptions and views. Consideration should be given as to how they might be encouraged to participate. One teacher spoke specifically to several such students urging them to sign up, and this resulted not only in their involvement but profound changes in their attitudes and views.

Educators need to consider how they address problematic issues when they arise, such as the political conflict between Israel and Palestine, acts of terrorism by religious extremists, and negative media presentations of religious people or communities. In the BBP, teachers and facilitators insisted that the focus remain on each one's personal story and experience not on politics or bigger global issues, but dialogue around faith, if it is to be honest, open and worthwhile, needs a process for dealing with such issues at an appropriate level for the participants.

Safe, non-judgemental and respectful facilitation of the small groups is crucial to ensure the dialogues are open and that trust is built between the participants. Therefore,

careful thought must be given to who facilitates these dialogues and how, as Palmer has argued for similar groups (2004). In this programme, young adults from outside the schools rather than teachers usually facilitated the groups, so students could feel confident that they could share their experiences and stories without any effect on their grades or relationship with their teachers. When teachers had to take over groups because the designated facilitators were absent, some of these teachers felt there was no negative impact and others perceived the students from their school felt more inhibited in their sharing. This finding extends research into experiential education in the areas of facilitating learning environments and the role of teachers in that facilitation process (Chapman, S., 2008).

Finally, this study confirmed that to successfully facilitate interfaith education, educators require sufficient logistical and administrative support from their school to ensure they have appropriate access to the students who volunteer, adequate means to transport the participants, and adequate priority with the school's timetable. Otherwise the school's involvement is characterised by irregular student attendance and late arrivals that disrupt the small groups, and these in turn undermine the trust, understanding, and relationships that are being formed between the students.

Therefore it is claimed that, cognisant of these challenges, educators will find that experiential interfaith education, combined with some formal study of religion, effectively tackles religious and cultural intolerance and prejudice and promotes ethical attitudes and behaviour towards greater social cohesion and harmony.

Recommendations

In light of this investigation, the researcher makes the following recommendations for the Building Bridges Programme. Firstly, that there be some formal study component on the different faith traditions as part of the students' preparation for each session, in order to

complement the learning from their peers' experiences in the small groups. This would involve not just factual information on various religious beliefs, but descriptions and multimedia material about the cultural expressions and practices of different faith traditions. It is reinforced by the value of such study found in other interfaith programmes (Boys & Lee, 1996). Secondly, that teachers actively explore interschool partnerships, to allow larger segments of their student population (such as whole year groups) to experience an immersion in a different school amongst peers from a different faith and cultural background. Such an immersion would ideally involve some formal orientation and input about the faith or culture of the school, and some structured dialogues and unstructured interactions between the students of the different schools over two or three hours. This would ensure students with more intolerant attitudes or who hold prejudicial views are engaged in such learning experiences. Another recommendation is for a marketing strategy to be envisioned and implemented to recruit more Indigenous students and Government schools from ethnically and religiously diverse communities across the States and Territories into the programme. Students at Government schools generally receive no study of religion and so are less aware of the role faith plays in many peoples' lives, leading to ignorance and oftentimes prejudice towards the religious other. To incorporate more Government schools would ensure both a good diversity of students are involved in the dialogues, but that more students of an indifferent or intolerant perspective are engaged in such intercultural and interreligious education. To involve Indigenous students would encourage better understanding and appreciation of their spirituality and important cultural values for the sake of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous Australians. A fourth recommendation is that teachers have one question or theme to personally respond to, during each of the students' small group sessions. This would better utilise their time as well as their diverse faith and cultural perspectives. It could be facilitated by one of the teachers in rotation, and occur in a

relaxed atmosphere over supper. Questions could explore each other's religious or cultural festivals, personal experiences of one's religious community or changes in one's faith, or how one deals with extremists in one's own tradition. To address the transportation issues, it is recommended that schools consider hiring a larger-size bus together that could transport all the visiting students to the session and share the cost between the respective schools.

This research confirmed the need to maintain experienced and quality facilitators for the small groups, so recommends that they receive ongoing formation in the art and skills of facilitation, through additional training sessions. One of these sessions should occur about the middle of the year and address issues and questions that have arisen over the first few sessions, and promote their self-awareness and group management skills. The second session should occur at the end of the year as a means to debrief and reflect upon what they have learnt through their facilitation, and assist them to integrate their learning into their wider faith or life journey. As part of this quality control, students and facilitators should be invited to provide evaluations of their group's facilitation that form part of the end of year reflections.

Finally, as a means to address some of the more problematic issues around politics and extremists, consideration should be given to an 'advanced Building Bridges dialogue group' for approved graduates of the programme. This would allow students who have developed sufficient trust and relationships with those from other traditions to engage in discussion and reflection on some of these more problematic issues that exist between and in various religious and cultural communities. To ensure the dialogue remains respectful and educational, it could operate along the lines of a Socratic Circle model (Chapman, J., et al., 2008), namely with an inner circle engaging in the dialogue and an outer circle that observes and critiques on the process, then at some appropriate point, they reverse roles.

Beyond the BBP, the researcher recommends that the Government and Department of Education support experiential interfaith and intercultural education programmes for students across different year levels in Australia. With the growing religious and cultural diversity across the nation, and the corresponding increases in religious and racial prejudice and abuse, the study of faith and cultural traditions need to be thoroughly integrated into the school curriculum. There are a number of such programmes that could be supported. Secondly, parents of the students and teachers beyond the field of religious education could be specifically encouraged to engage in experiential interfaith and intercultural education. Most of the parents and many of these teachers do not get the opportunity to dialogue with those from other religious traditions, and so can maintain out-dated stereotypes and poorly informed perceptions of those from different backgrounds. To engage with actual practitioners of those religious and cultural traditions would not only inform and deepen their own understanding, but also increase their respect for such people.

Why this research is significant.

The fact that there are so few interfaith education programmes operating in Australia with no extant research into their effectiveness makes this research into one model particularly significant. This study also contributes to the small but growing literature of inquiry into different interfaith education programmes being trialled in Europe and the United States (Boys & Lee, 1996; Gross, 2010; Halsall & Roebben, 2006; Jackson, 2004; Knauth et al., 2008; McKenna et al., 2008; Patel & Brodeur, 2006; Traubman & Traubman, 2007; Weisse, 2003). While the BBP bears some similarities and differences with the programmes cited here and in the literature review, it is unique in Australia for its combination of personal dialogue with a peer of a different religious perspective sharing life and faith experiences, with some formal faith content, school visitations and informal interaction over a meal. The

fact that schools continue to commit to the programme, and many graduates choose to become small group facilitators, testify to the importance and popularity of the programme, and the value for research into its effectiveness for other interfaith programmes.

Considering that the whole topic of the study of religion in Australian schools is currently being reviewed and vigorously debated in community and parent forums, makes this study into one model of interfaith education all the more relevant and timely. In light of this, this project's assessment of the BBP's effectiveness against the newly released general capabilities of the new national curriculum adds to its significance both for this debate and the future of education on religion in Australia. Finally, this research is also significant because its findings are drawn from the actual participants' responses, especially the students, rather than from just the educators or those who may have a vested interest in the programme's future.

Delimitations.

The delimitations of this study define the boundaries of this inquiry, as determined by the researcher's decisions made throughout the development of this project. In deciding to investigate the BBP, the researcher narrowed the focus from assessing and/or comparing a range of models of interfaith education to just one, and restricted the scope of the study to the city of Melbourne where the programme operates.

The researcher, who had also been the director of the programme, chose the research questions, which meant these questions focused more on the big issues of facilitating the overall programme rather than narrowing it down to one school or faith tradition. So for instance, the researcher did not investigate what schools currently taught with regard to religion, as this would have taken the project outside the constraints of the inquiry, complicated the findings and had little relevance for the final assessment. The decision to

investigate the programme with just two samples of participants, (those involved prior to 2010 and those who participated in 2010) rather than undertake a longitudinal study with a smaller sample of students was taken for practical reasons, since attempting to contact participants who had left school and often were then hard to trace was judged to be too problematic and not feasible.

As mentioned in chapter three, the researcher chose to analyse the data from both genders together rather than separate the females from the males, primarily because most of the participants in this study came from co-educational schools and were interviewed together.

Initially the questions asked how effective the programme was at enhancing empathetic understanding and social cohesion among the participants, but when the General Capabilities document from the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) was released in January 2012, the researcher decided to amend these in order to measure the programme's effectiveness against these criteria. This decision was made to bring greater clarity to the measures of effectiveness appropriate to students at years 10 and 11, as well as to assess the programme as a viable model for the study of religion in schools for the new national curriculum. In choosing to measure the effectiveness of the programme against the promotion of faith and the general capabilities document of ACARA, the research project became bound by these constraints and how they might be assessed, rather than by measuring its effectiveness against other criteria, such as academic knowledge of different faiths or cultures or numbers of friends from different religious backgrounds on students' social media pages. Furthermore, the question of how students at the schools understood "faith", or "spirituality" and whether they distinguished either from "religion" although potentially fascinating was not explored, as this area had already been extensively studied in recent research within Australia and overseas (Hughes, 2007b; Mason, et al., 2007; Savage, 2006).

Since qualitative research methods such as semi-structured interviews were adopted, the assessment findings came in the form of participants' statements. This decision was deemed to provide more accurate details and thick descriptions from the participants themselves as well as more data for a theory to emerge on the programme's effectiveness, rather than statistical data or other quantitative measures. The decision to not return to the student samples to contrast the theories emerging from the data was made because it was too problematic logistically and practically. The selection of just sixteen out of the possible twenty-five schools for interview respondents further limited the scope of the project, but was based on the conviction that involving more students from similar schools to those chosen, would not significantly alter the data from the participants' sample.

Limitations.

This research project was limited to the students, educators, facilitators and Regional Co-ordinators participating in the programme in 2010 and several student graduates from previous years. It therefore did not involve the current director (who is also the researcher), former facilitators with years of experience, parents of the students, faith leaders, or Government ministers and funders of the programme. This decision was made because the investigation focused on how the participants themselves understood the impact of the programme on their lives and how they constructed meaning out of their experiences of dialogue, rather than researching the opinions of these others. The range of schools available in 2010 also limited this study, particularly the fact that no Indigenous students and only one Government school participated in this inquiry, rather than a larger sample. These factors limit the capacity to draw descriptive and inferential conclusions from this sample's data about the effectiveness of the programme if implemented among Indigenous students, or within single schools or in regional or rural areas or overseas. However, despite these

limitations, this research clearly indicates the value of experiential interfaith education with peers from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds for promoting understanding and respect with those who are different.

Recommendations for further research.

This study into the effectiveness of the BBP in Melbourne raised many new insights about experiential interfaith education, as well as new questions and interesting possibilities for further research in this critical and relevant new field. For instance, valuable new insights into the effect of more regular interactions and dialogue between students from different backgrounds would be gained from an investigation into the effect of the BBP within just one or two diverse schools, such as one Government school paired with one Catholic school. Research into the effect of an experiential interfaith programme such as the BBP on a few students in a longitudinal study, as they continue to dialogue and engage with each other over a number of years, would also yield interesting data on the impact on students' understanding of themselves and the other from ongoing relationships with those from a different religious or cultural background. An examination of the differences between how females and males engaged with the religious other, and those components of the BBP that were most influential on each gender would also provide rich contrasting insights into how boys and girls differ in their engagement with those from different backgrounds. To study the effect of implementing the programme in adapted forms in other settings would also be of considerable research interest. For instance, investigating the impact of the BBP in another city or regional centre in Australia or overseas, would yield valuable comparative data to that produced in this Melbourne study. Another relevant inquiry would examine how an adapted form of the programme could be implemented into two or three primary schools and would provide critical insights into how younger pupils engage in dialogue with those from different

backgrounds and the effect such interactions have on their understanding of others and their self-understanding.

Conclusion

This research investigated the effectiveness of the Building Bridges Programme to promote faith, interreligious and intercultural understanding, personal and social capability, critical and creative thinking, and ethical behaviour among participants (especially secondary students) from different backgrounds. The findings of this study have strongly endorsed the value and effectiveness of this model of experiential interfaith education that draws on dialogue between peers from different backgrounds and schools. Such a model has demonstrated the power of face-to-face encounters with diversity that transform participants' perspectives and understandings of themselves and others. This dialogical programme offers an effective and easily transferrable model to promote participants' faith and thereby equip them with resources for making meaning of their lives, dramatically improving their understanding of different religious and cultural traditions, challenge their negative perceptions and prejudicial attitudes towards religious others, and develop their capacity to engage as confident and competent global citizens within the rich diversity of Australia's cosmopolitan society in the twenty-first century. The participants have clearly changed in their understandings, attitudes and behaviour through their involvement in this programme. Will other schools take up the invitation to similarly engage in such experiential interfaith education programmes, so that their students too can become global citizens who lead our diverse society towards a more cohesive, harmonious and sustainable future?

Appendix 1: Student Interview Questions**Building Bridges Programme: Student Interview.**

(ACU Ph.D Student Researcher: Tim McCowan).

Name..... School.....Year in BBP..... .. Date.....

1. How was Building Bridges explained or ‘marketed’ to you, to get you to join in?
2. Why did you join the Building Bridges Programme (BBP)?
3. What for you was the greatest benefit of participating? Or what part of the programme affected you most?
4. How, if at all, is your life different because of your participation? Or have you noticed any change to your attitudes, perceptions, values, beliefs, or actions as a result of participating, and if so, how?
5. What did you learn about yourself? Ie.. Was there anything you learnt about yourself, your attitudes, values or beliefs or your strengths or weaknesses through the BBP?
6. What did you learn about others, particularly those of other religious or cultural backgrounds, if anything?
7. What parts of the Building bridges program were less enjoyable for you and why? And do you have any suggestions for resolving these or improving the programme?

8. How would you describe your attitudes toward people of other religious or cultural backgrounds? If you are able, it would be helpful if you can give a 'before Building Bridges' and 'after Building bridges' description.
9. On a scale of 1-10, where one is feeling pretty terrified, and 10 is very relaxed and calm, how comfortable do you feel mixing with people from another religions or cultures?
10. Will your actions change as a result of the Building Bridges Programme and if so in what ways?

Appendix 2: Student Survey Questionnaire

Building Bridges Questionnaire- 2010 Survey

This is a questionnaire to learn more about your personal experience of the Building Bridges Programme.

All the statements concern either your feelings, attitudes, beliefs or behaviour as *a direct result of you participating in the Building bridges programme*. Please read the statements carefully. Place a cross in the box that most accurately reflects your position, at this time, on each statement. Note, some statements are written in the negative. If you have any questions or are confused by a statement, ask your teacher for clarification.

	Statement: As a result of participating in the Building Bridges Programme...	1 Not at all	2 A little	3 Some -what	4 Quite a lot	5 A lot	6 Don't know
To what extent did you enjoy:							
1	• The ice-breaker games (bingo, 10 things in common etc..)?						
2	• The meal time (food and informal conversations)?						
3	• Learning skills for dialogue (establishing ground rules, emphasizing experience over information, active listening skills, dealing with differences, working together)?						
4	• Sharing in your small group?						
5	• The questions you were asked in your small group?						
6	• The host school presentations						
7	• Meeting new people?						
8	• Visiting different schools?						
A	• Other? Please elaborate.....						
B	How many of the six sessions did you attend?	1	2	3	4	5	

How much did the following elements of the programme increase your understanding of other participants, their values and beliefs:

		Not at all	A little	Some-what	Quite a lot	A lot	Don't know
9	• The large group activities?						
10	• The small group sharings?						
11	• Student presentations about their school or their values?						
C	• Other ? Please elaborate.....						
12	How comfortable did you feel sharing in your small group?						
13	How interested in your sharing of experiences, did you feel your small group facilitator was?						
14	How open to sharing your personal experiences, did you feel in your small group?						
15	How free did you feel to ask respectful questions of others in your small group?						
16	How much were your initial perceptions of others changed as you heard their personal experiences?						
	BEHAVIOUR: How much are the following statements 'true' or accurate statements for you? If not true at all, place a cross in 'not at all'; if occasionally true, cross 'occasionally'; if sometimes, a cross in 'sometimes'; if frequently, 'often'; if always, cross 'always'.	Not at all	occasionally	sometimes	often	always	Don't know
17	I feel more comfortable when I am around a significant number of people from another cultural or religious background						
18	I seek opportunities to speak with individuals from different cultural or religious backgrounds about their life experiences.						
19	I have made new friends of another religious or cultural background						
20	I feel motivated to share what I have learnt about dialogue with those from other religious and cultural backgrounds among my friends and family						
21	I can demonstrate the skills needed to engage in respectful dialogue with those who are different						

	UNDERSTANDING: How much are the following statements 'true' or accurate statements for you? If they are not true at all, place a cross in 'not at all'; if occasionally true, then cross 'occasionally' etc.... If you're unsure, cross 'don't know'.	Not at all	occasionally	Sometimes	Often	always	Don't know
22	I am more interested in learning about people from a different cultural or religious background than my own						
23	I have less understanding of why people of different religious backgrounds enjoy wearing traditional clothing						
24	I find it harder to put myself in the shoes of someone who is ethnically or religiously different to me						
25	I have a better appreciation for the issues and concerns faced by religious or ethnic groups other than my own						
26	I have a better understanding of my own beliefs and values than before						
27	I am less certain of the values by which I want to live						
28	I understand the skills needed to dialogue respectfully with those who are different from me						
29	I feel safer and less afraid of mixing with those from other cultural or religious groups						
30	I am not as clear about what the differences between people of various faiths and cultures are.						
31	I have a poorer understanding of who I am						
32	I have a greater interest in developing a relationship with God.						
33	My faith has become a more important guide for how I want to live						
34	How important is your religious faith to your daily life	Not at all	a little	somewhat	quite a lot	a lot	Don't know

	ATTITUDES: How much are the following 'true' or accurate statements for you?	Not at all	occasionally	sometimes	often	always	Don't know
35	I am less likely to be offended by statements or jokes that make fun of people from other cultural or religious backgrounds						
36	I am more aware of how society differentially treats religious or cultural groups other than my own						
37	I feel more confident to engage in respectful dialogue with those from different backgrounds than before						
38	I have a greater awareness of the gifts and challenges of living in a multicultural and multifaith society						
39	I want to promote our society's multicultural and multifaith diversity						
40	I am less likely to question stereotypes of people from other religions or cultures						
41	I feel more confident talking about my beliefs and values with others						
42	I would like to facilitate dialogues among small diverse cultural and religious groups (like those I met in the Building Bridges programme) in the future.						

Name:.....(optional) Age.....Sex.....School.....Year participated in BB.....

Can you say a little more about yourself?

E1	Were you born in Australia?	Yes	No
E2	If one or both of your parents were born overseas, which country/ies were they born in? If Australia, say 'NA' (not applicable)	
E3	Which religion or faith, if any, do you most identify with?	
E4	If English is not the main language spoken at your home, what language is spoken most?	

If you would like to say anything more about the BB programme, feel free to write it here:.....

.....Date.....

Thank you again for your participation.

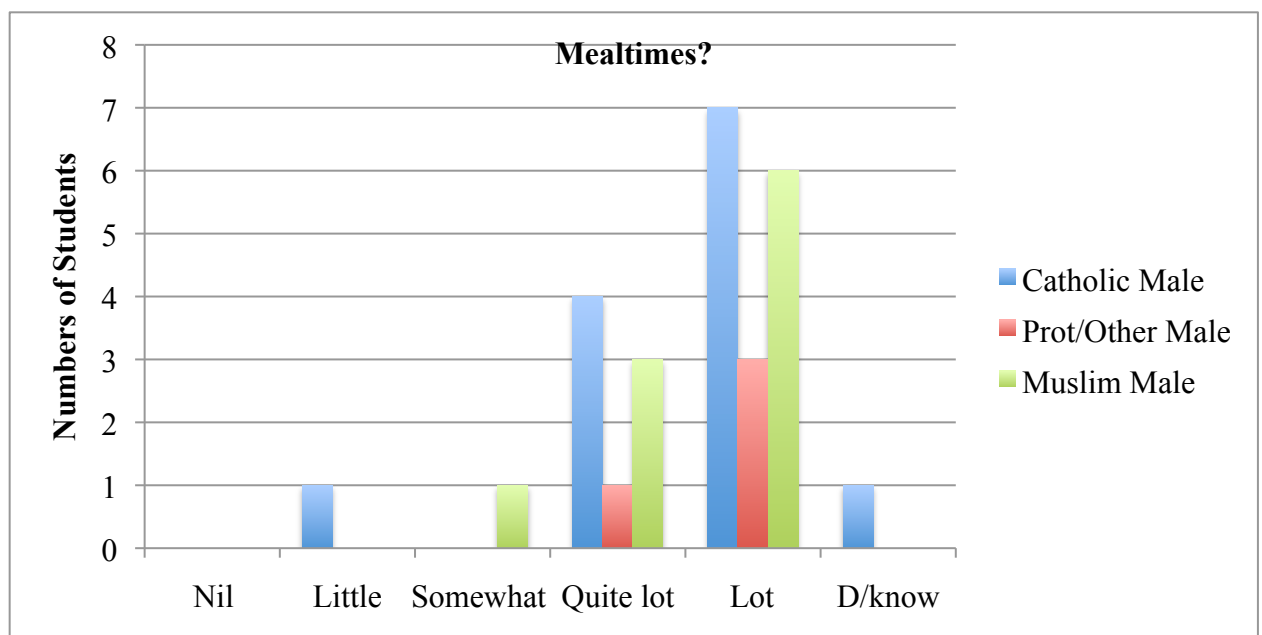
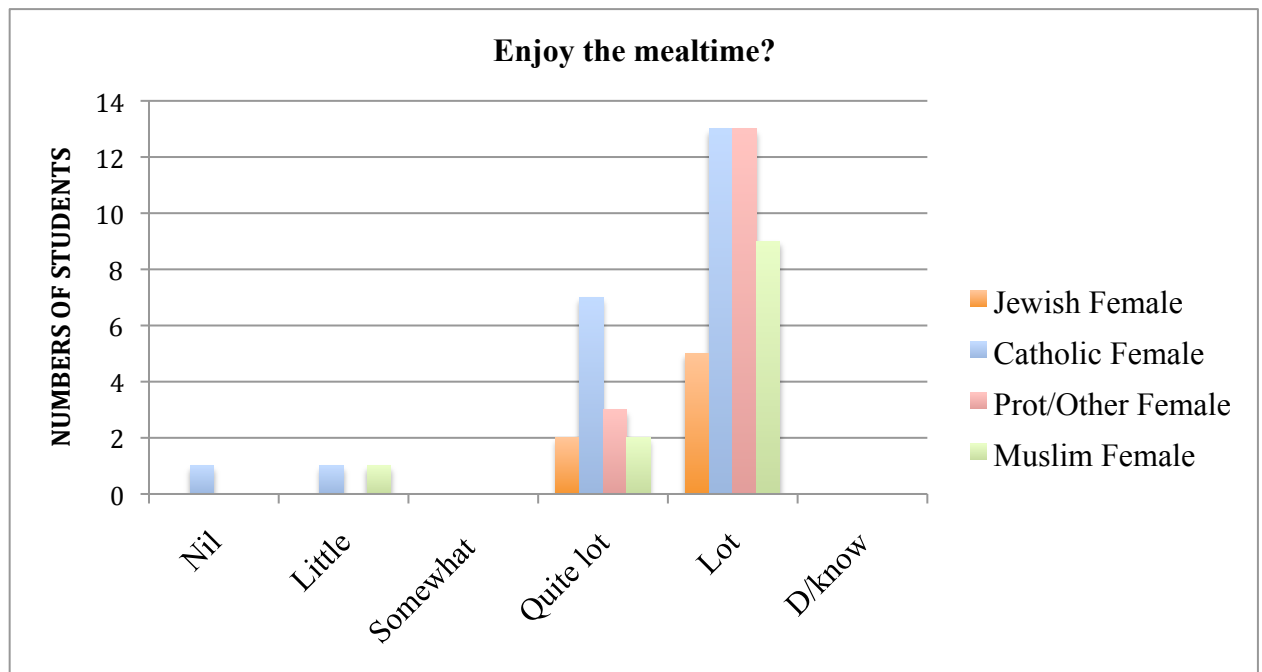
Appendix 3. Charts of student results to some of the Survey Questions**Figure 3.2 Question 2: How much did you enjoy the mealtimes?**

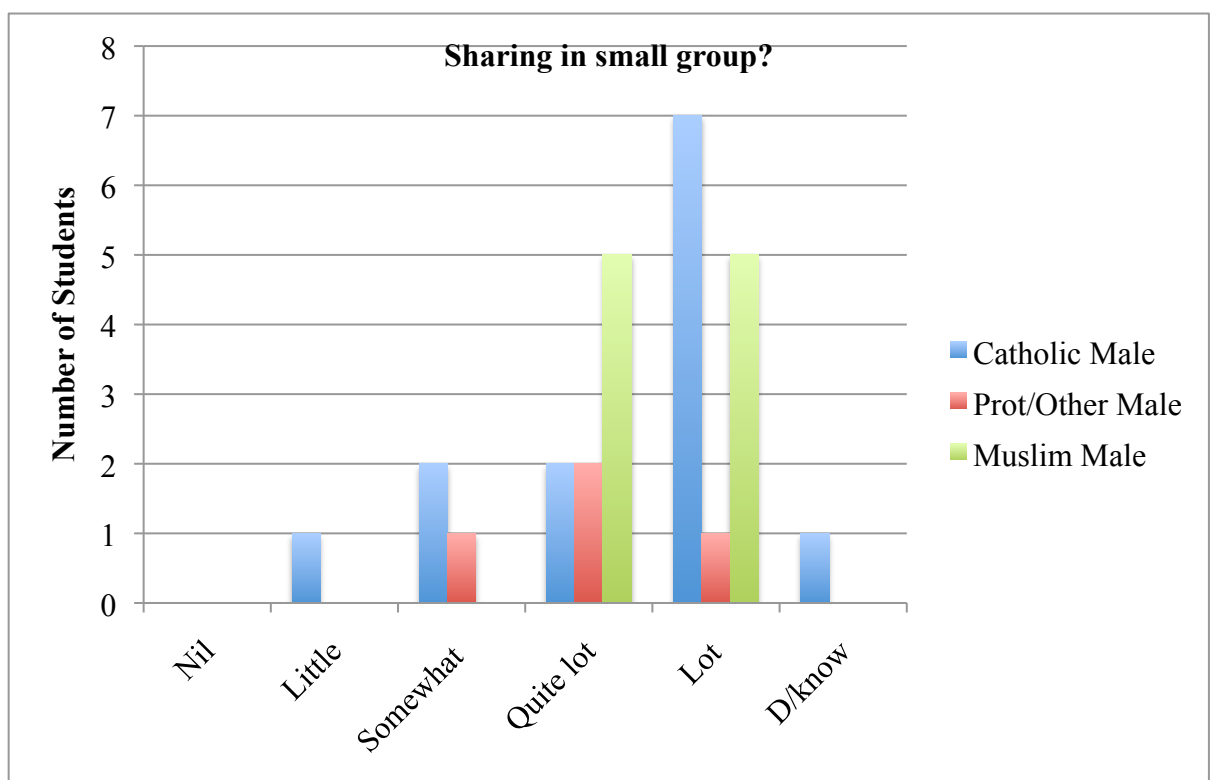
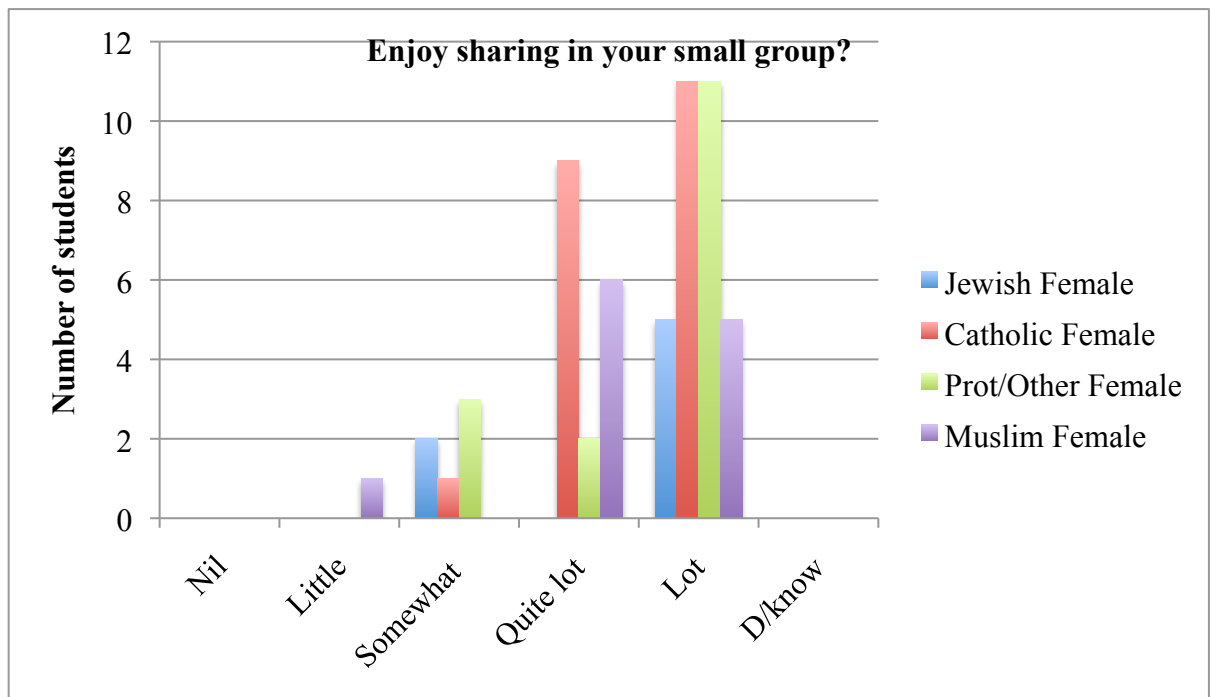
Figure 3.3 Q 4: How much did you enjoy sharing in your small group?

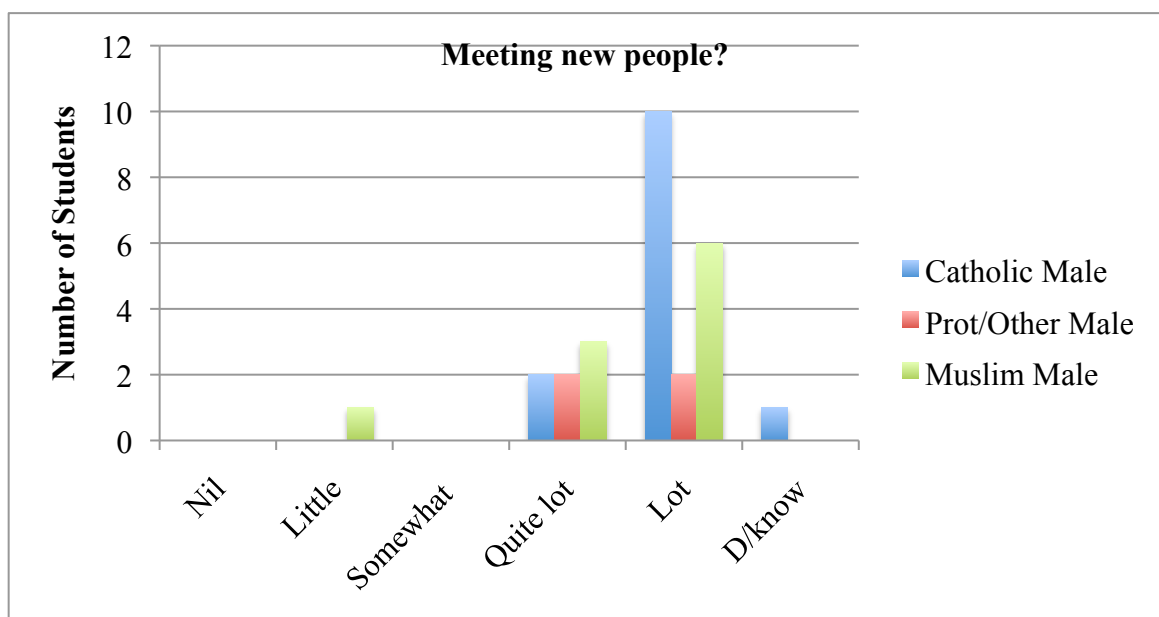
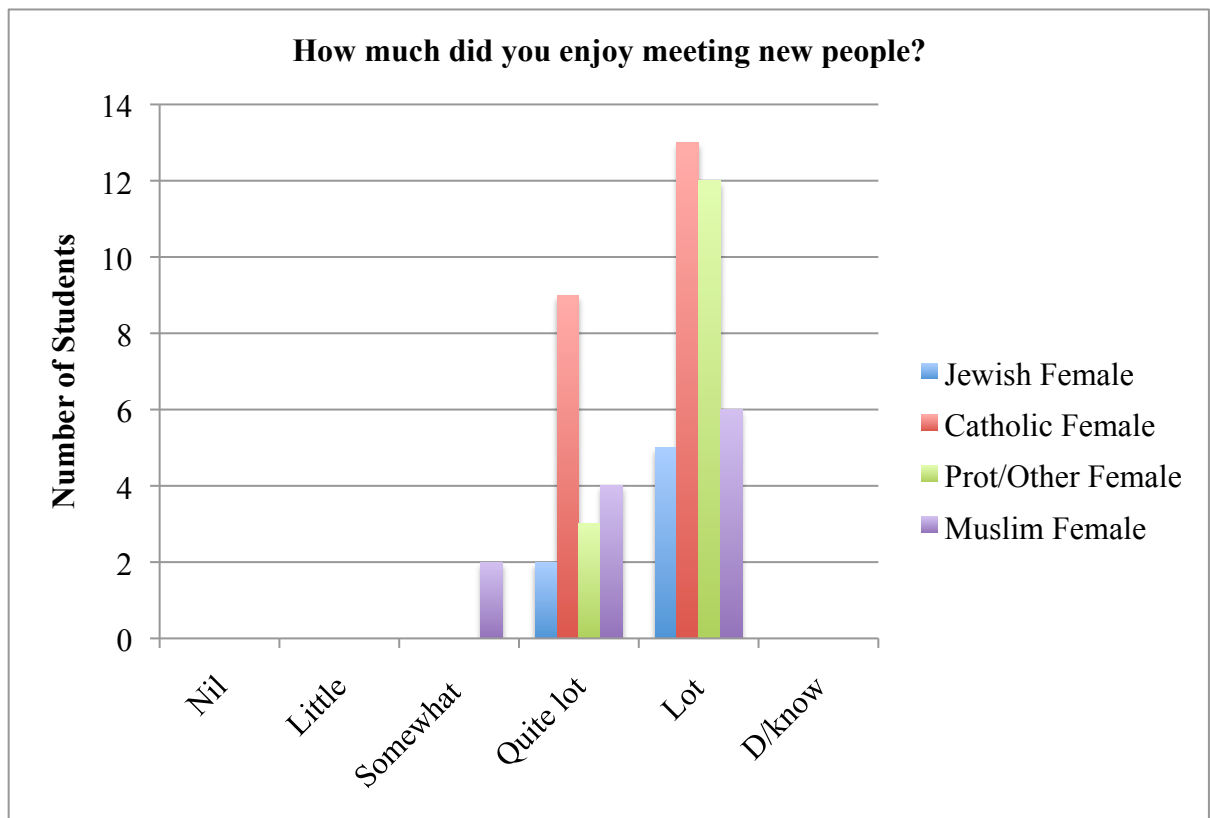
Figure 3.4 Q 7: How much did you enjoy meeting new people?

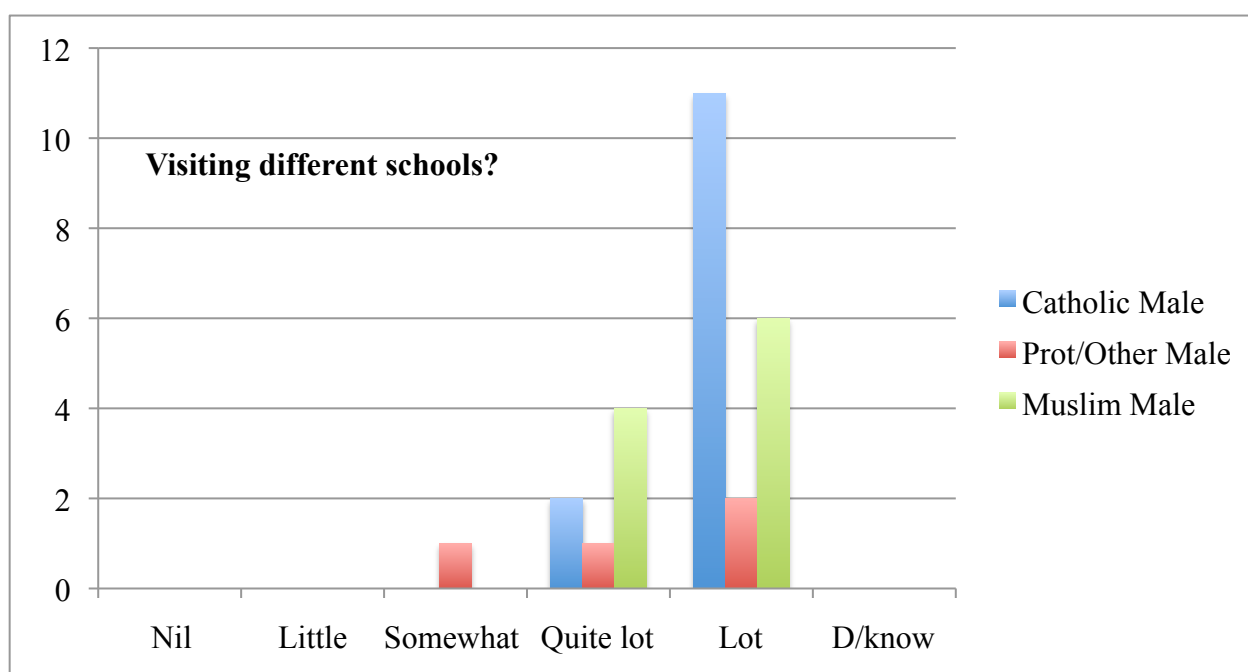
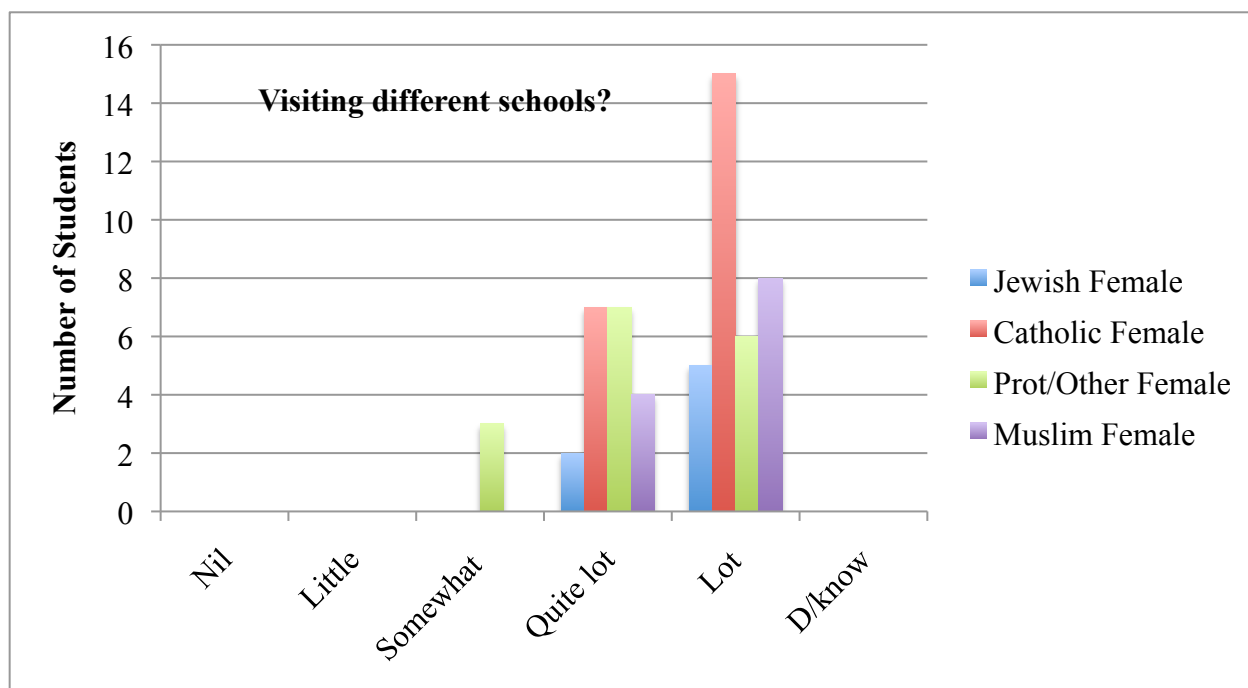
Figure 3.5 Q 8: How much did you enjoy visiting different schools?

Figure 3.6 Q 11: How much did the student presentations help your understanding of the other?

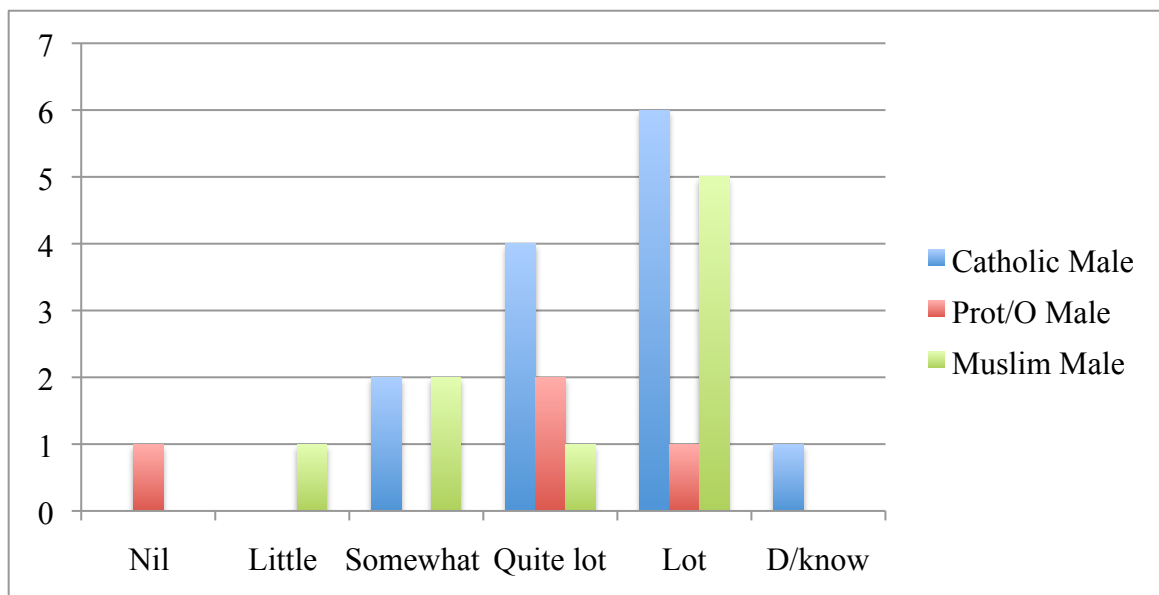
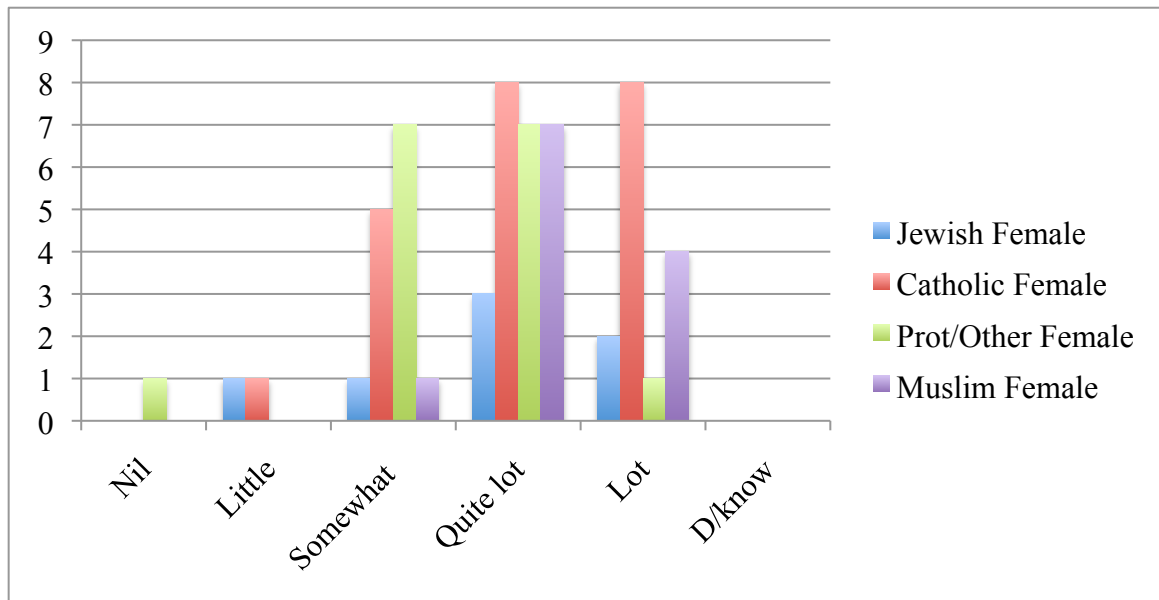


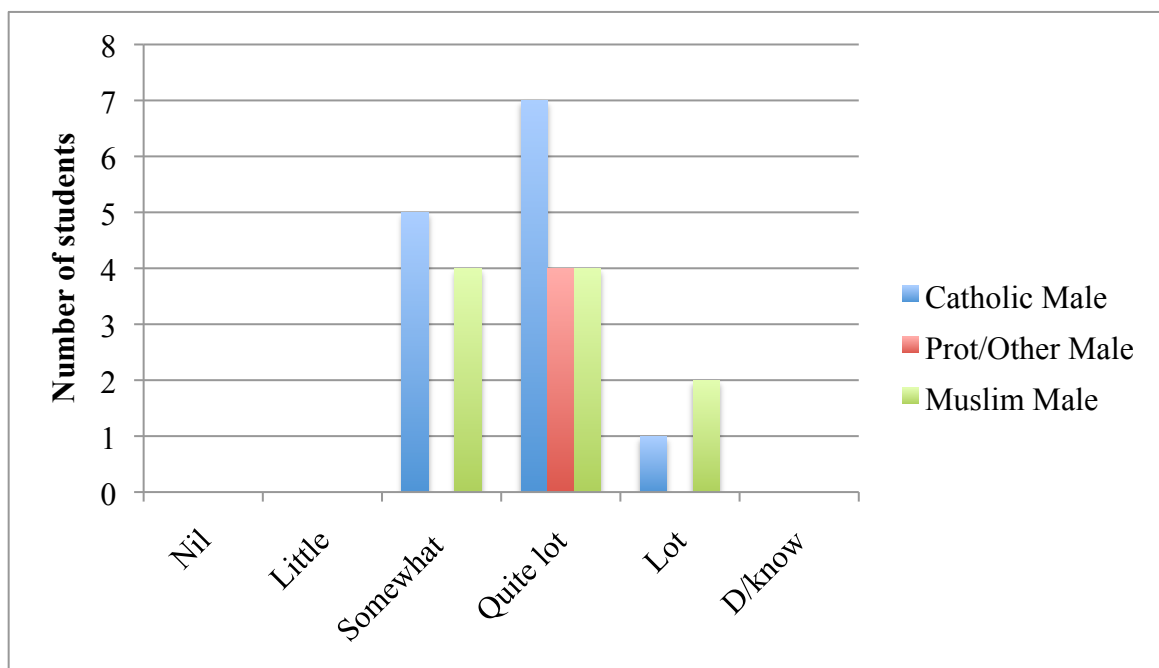
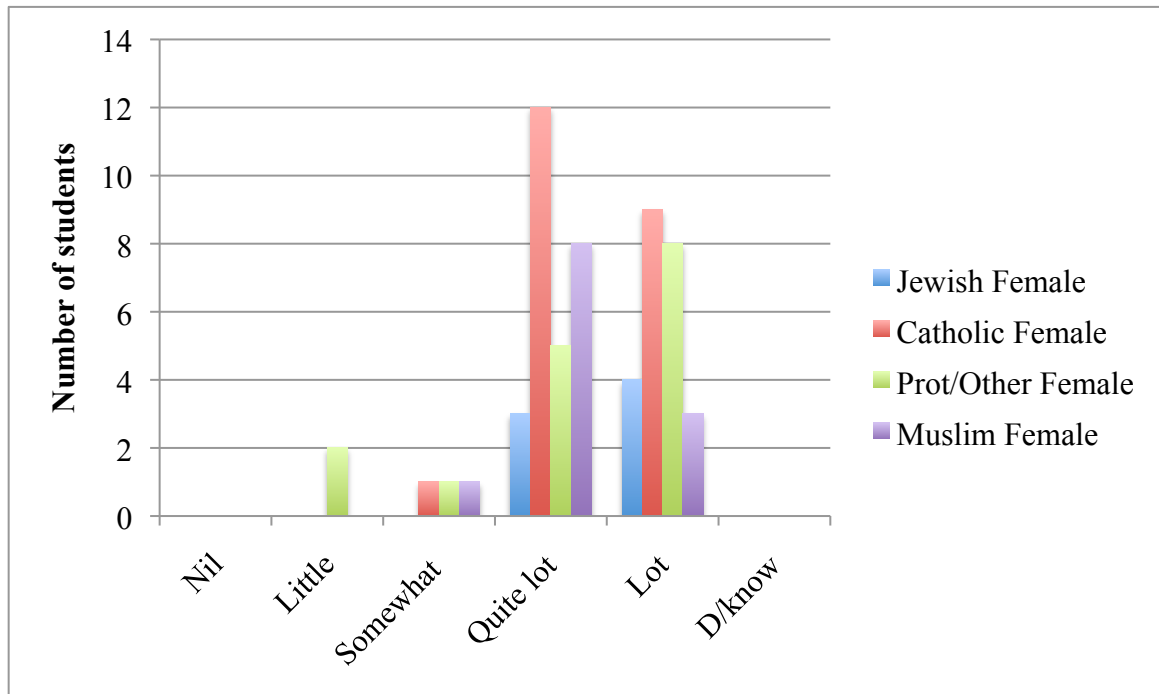
Figure 3.7 Q 12: How comfortable did you feel to share in your small group?

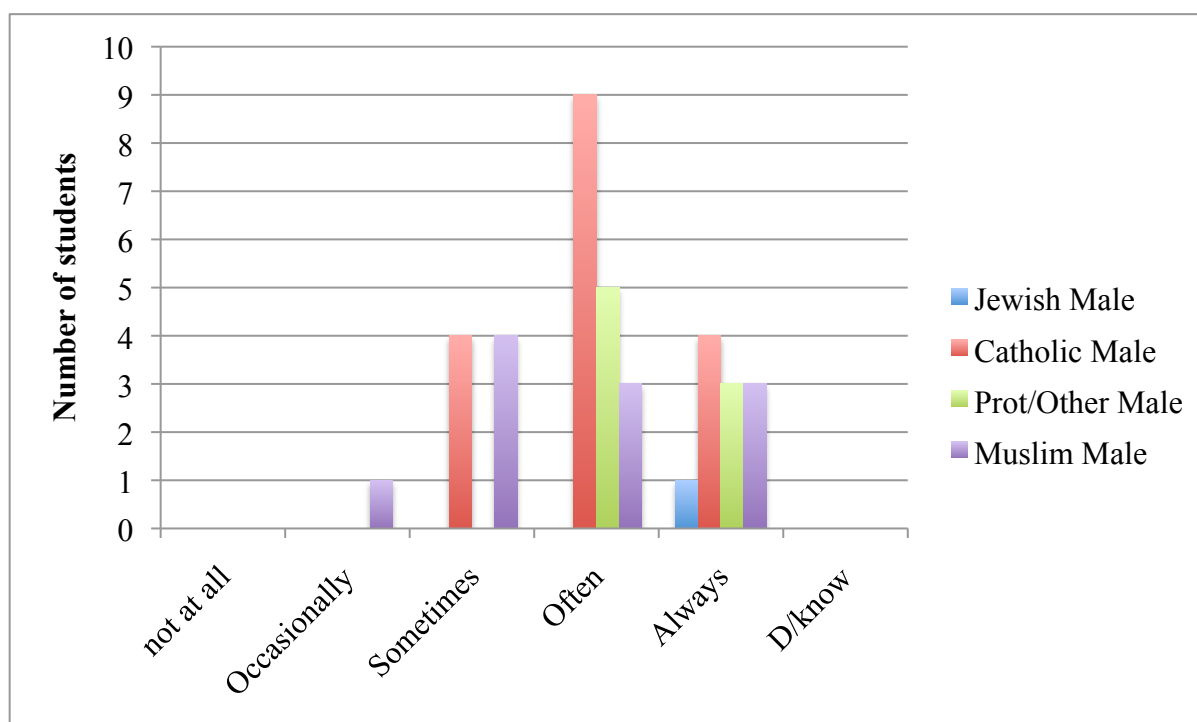
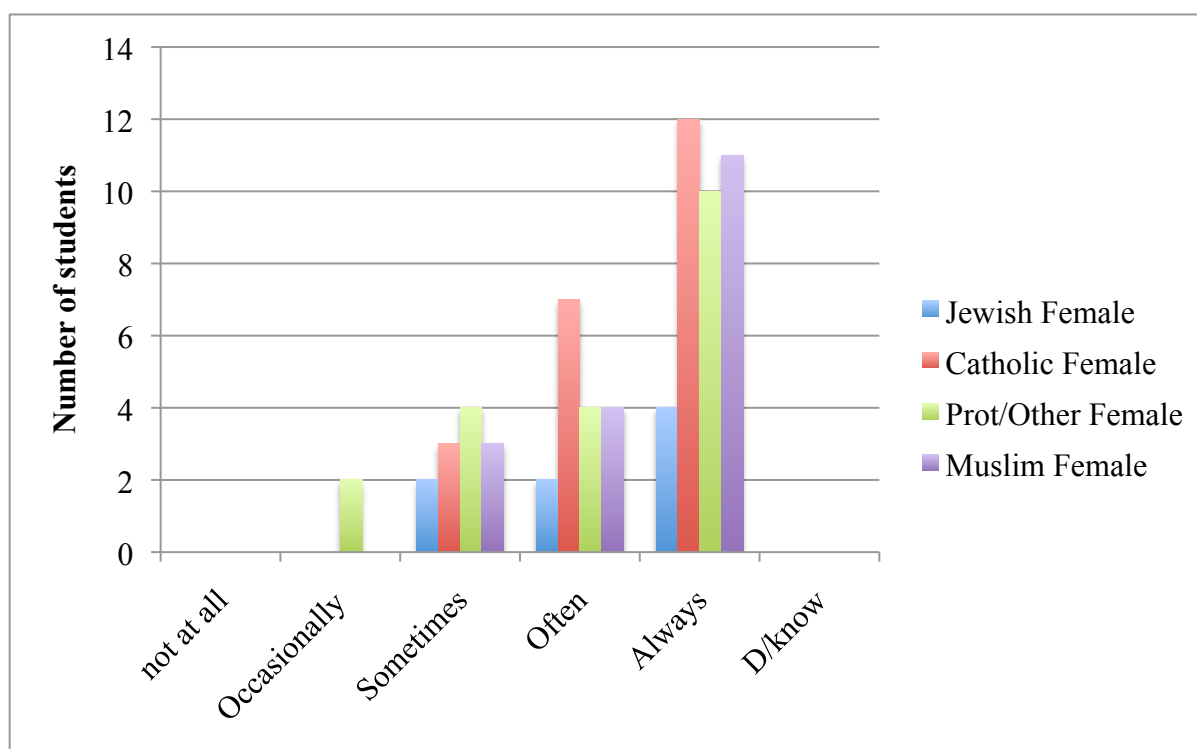
Figure 3.8 Q 20: I feel motivated to share what I've learnt with friends and family

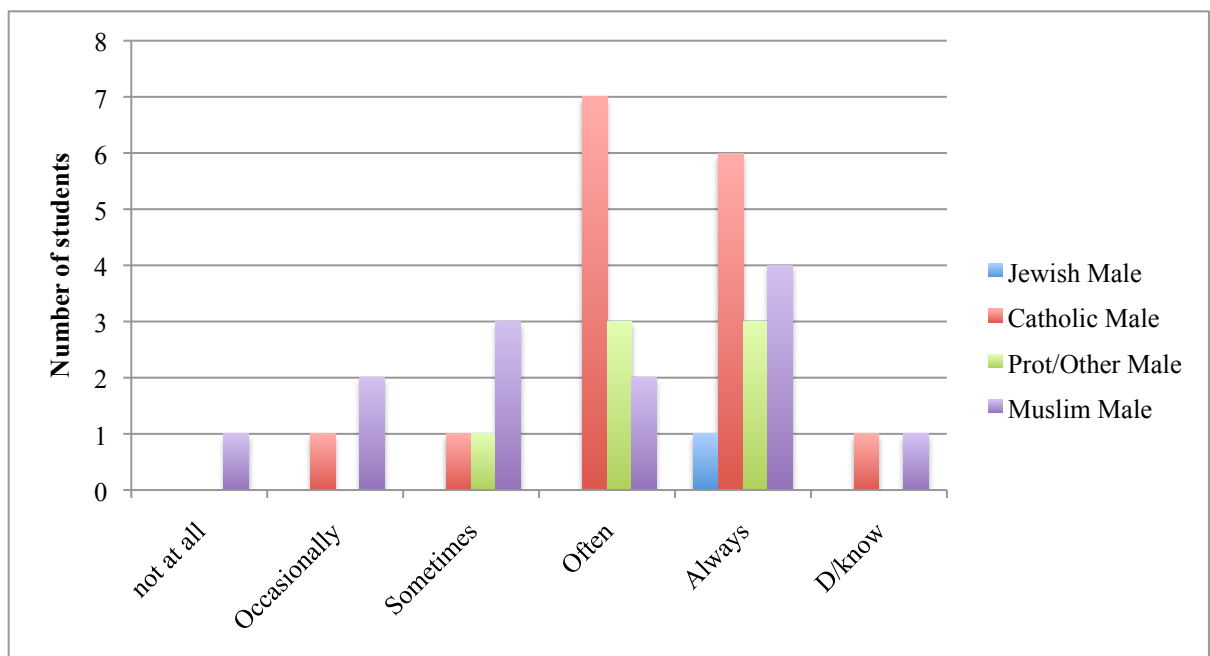
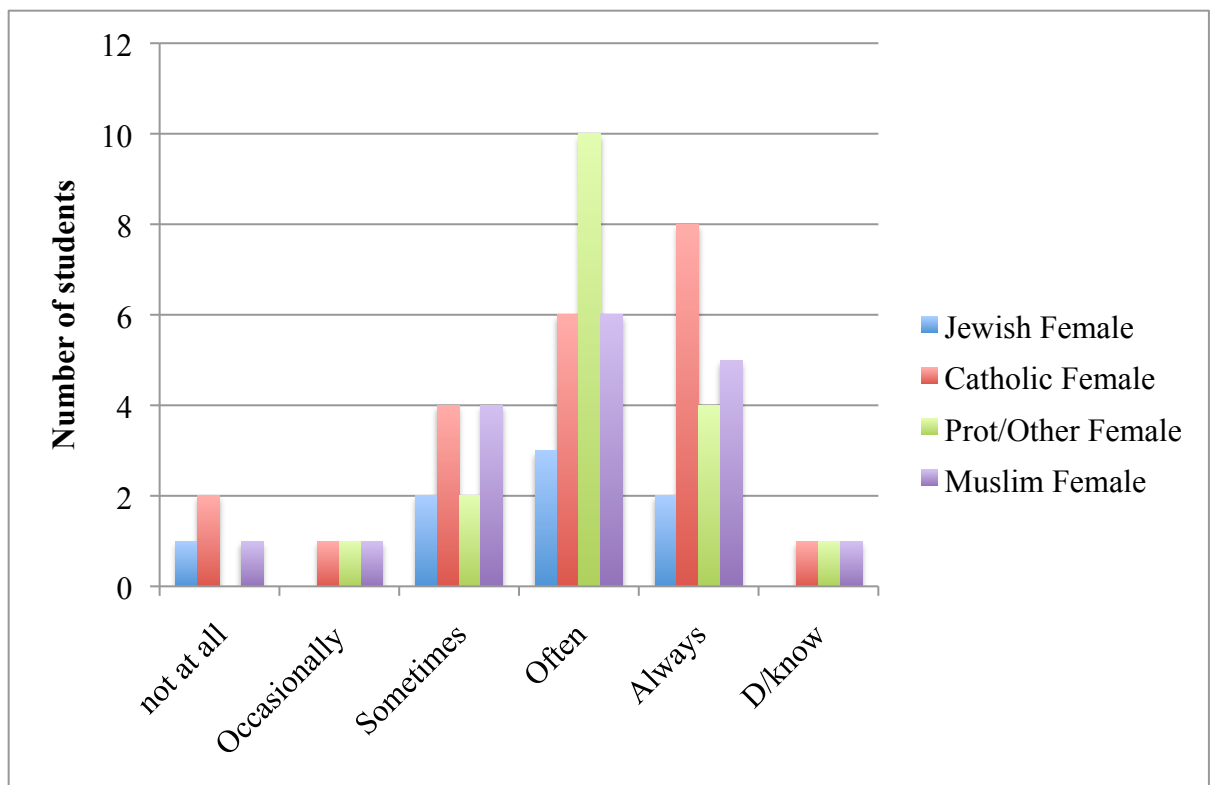
Figure 3.9 Q 25: I have a better appreciation of the issues faced by others

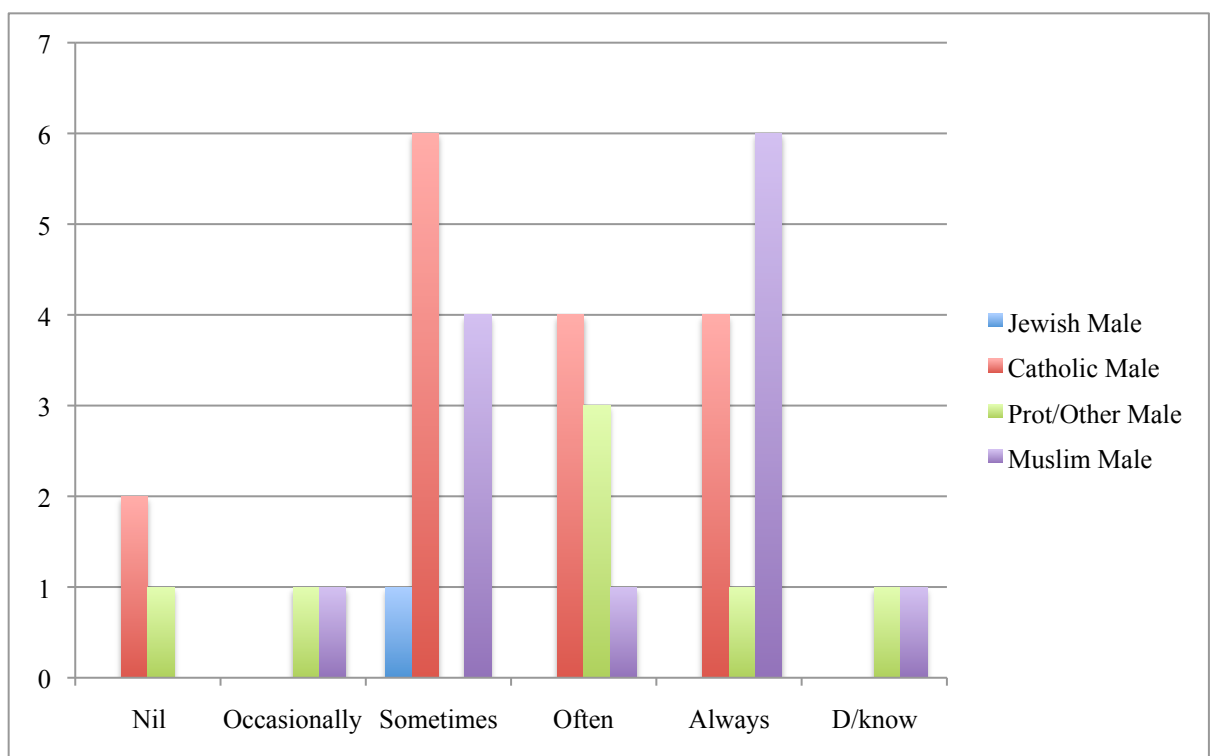
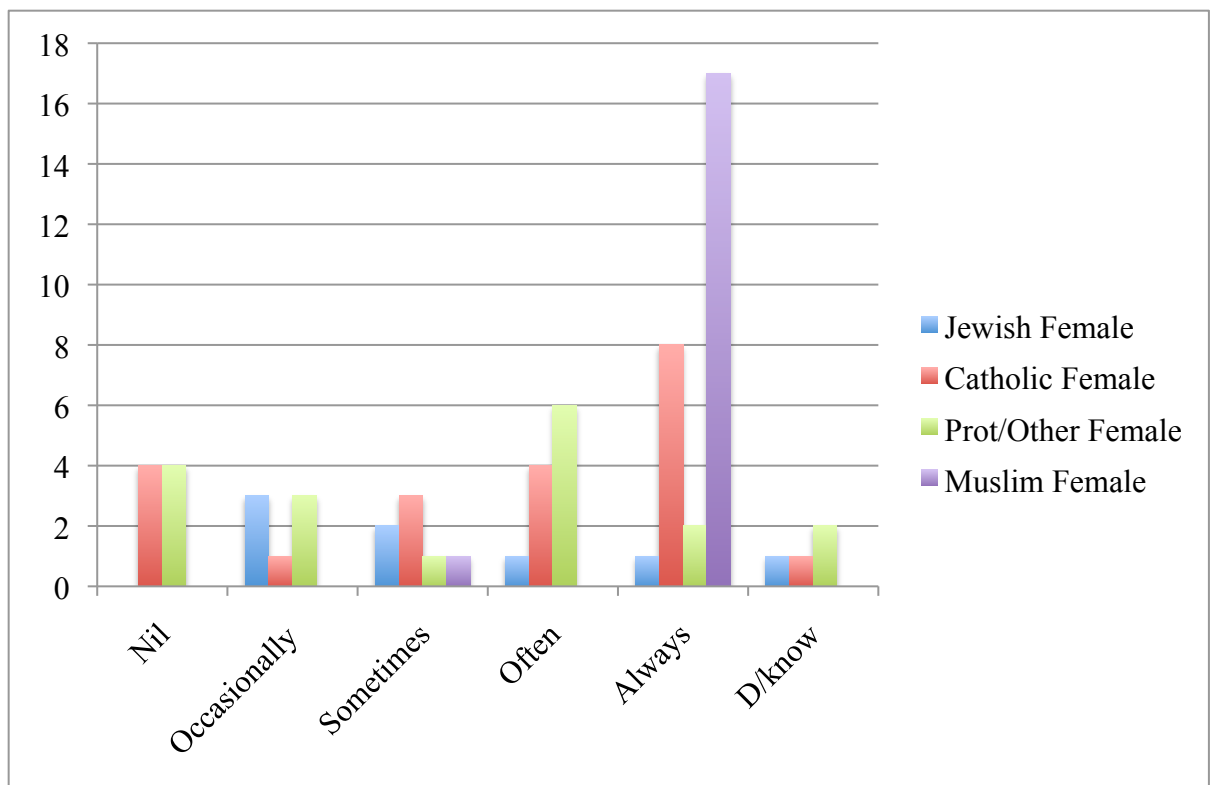
Figure 3.10 Q 32: I have a greater interest in developing a relationship with God

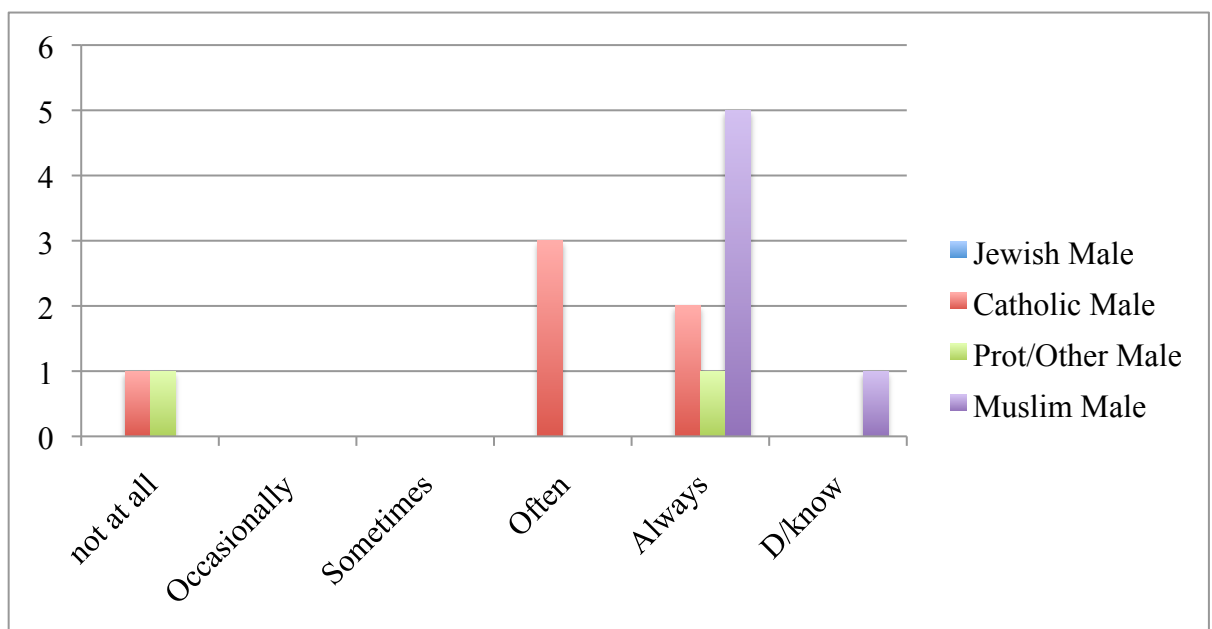
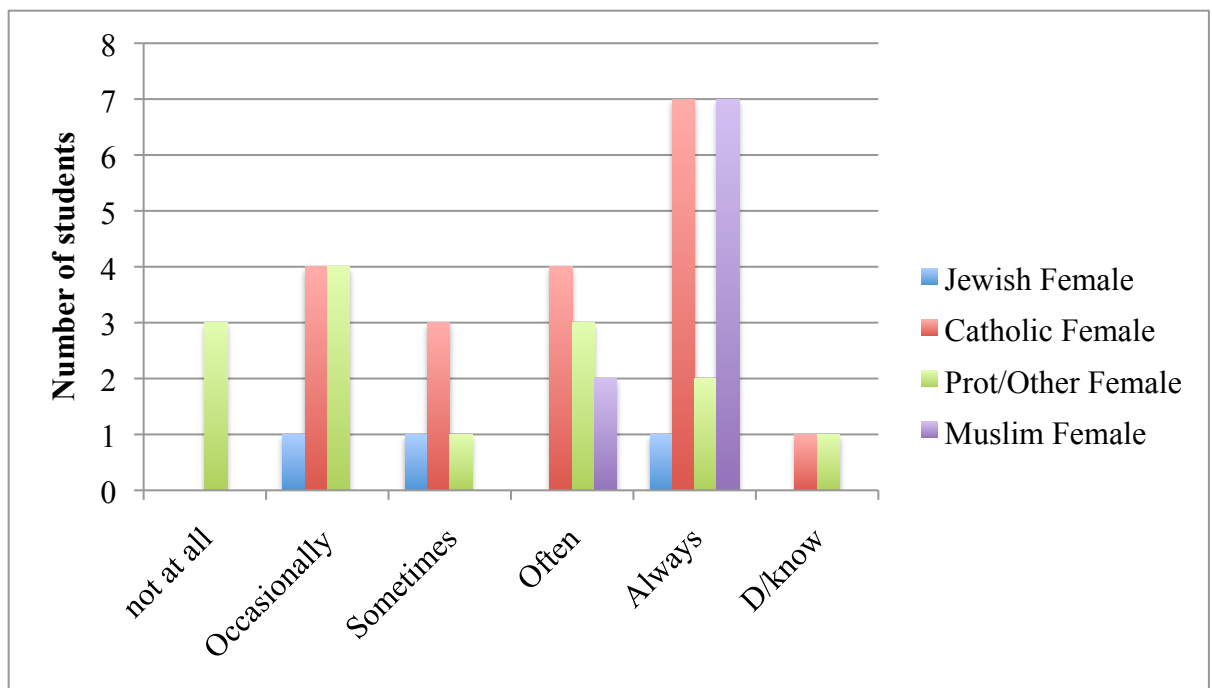
Figure 3.11 Q 34: How important is your religious faith to your daily life?

Figure 3.12 Q 36: I am more aware of how society differentially treats religious or cultural groups other than my own

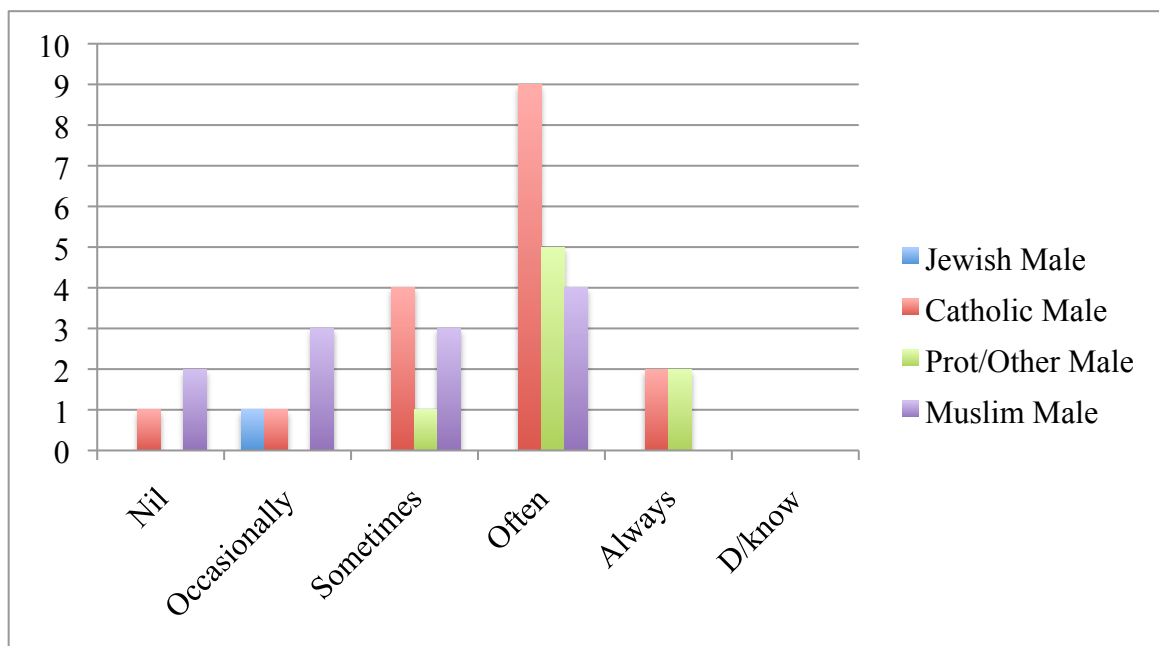
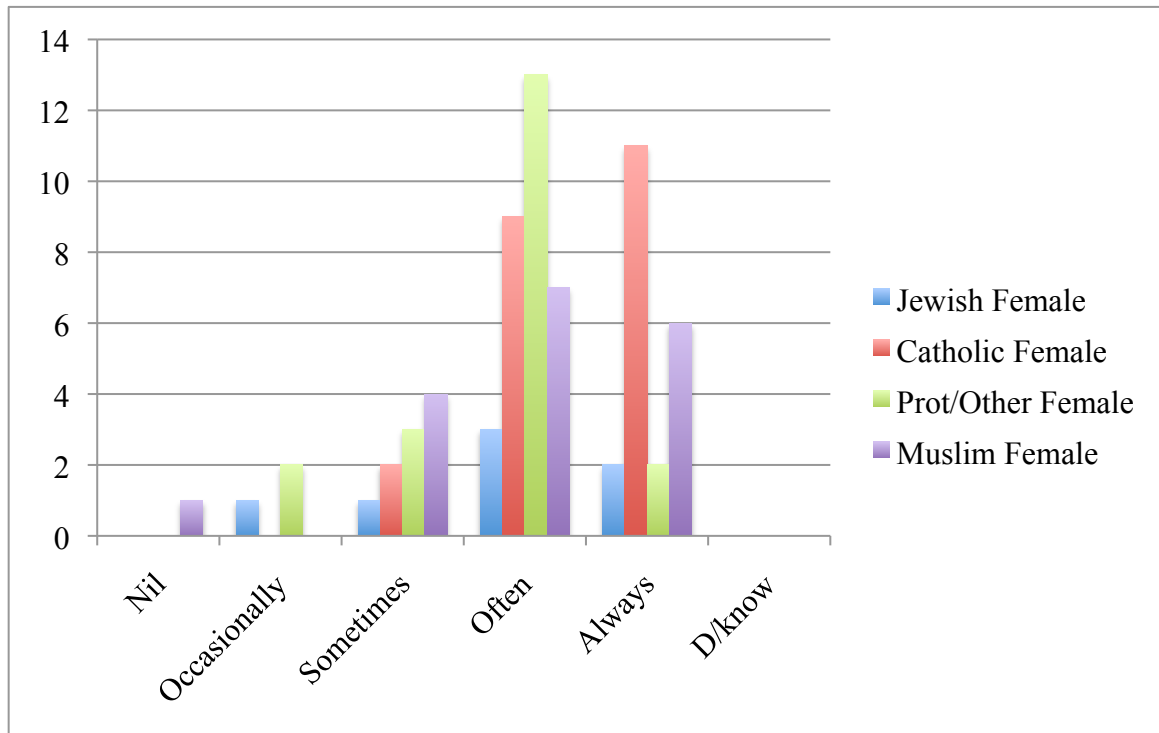


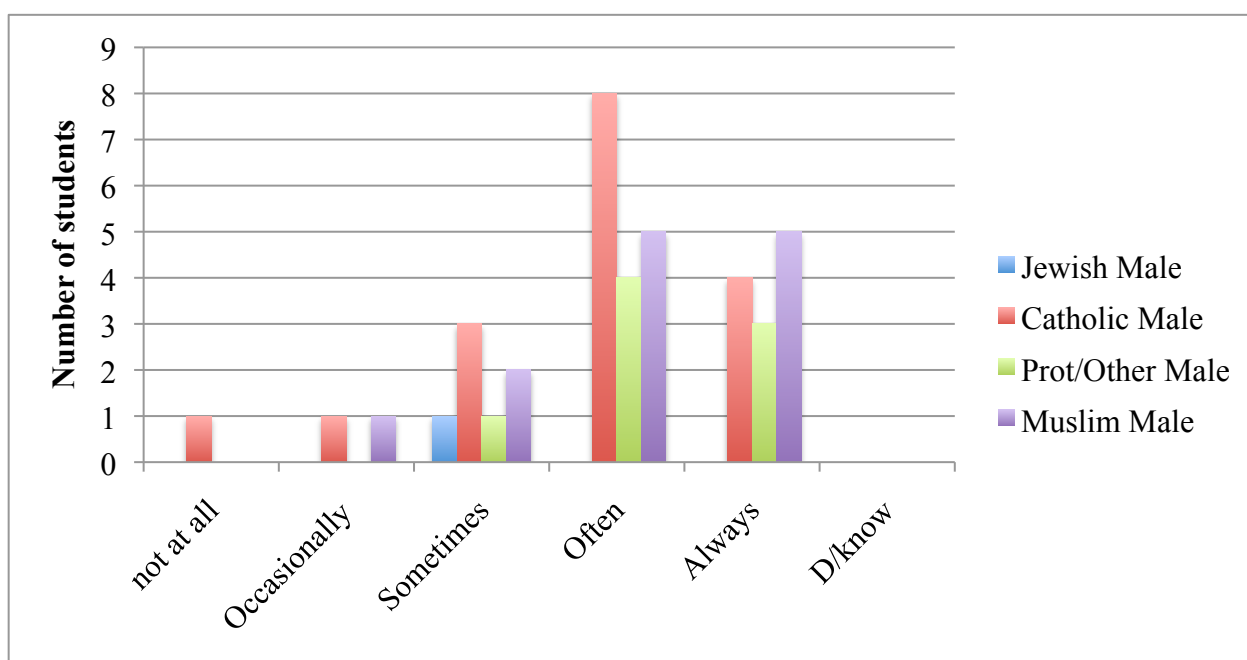
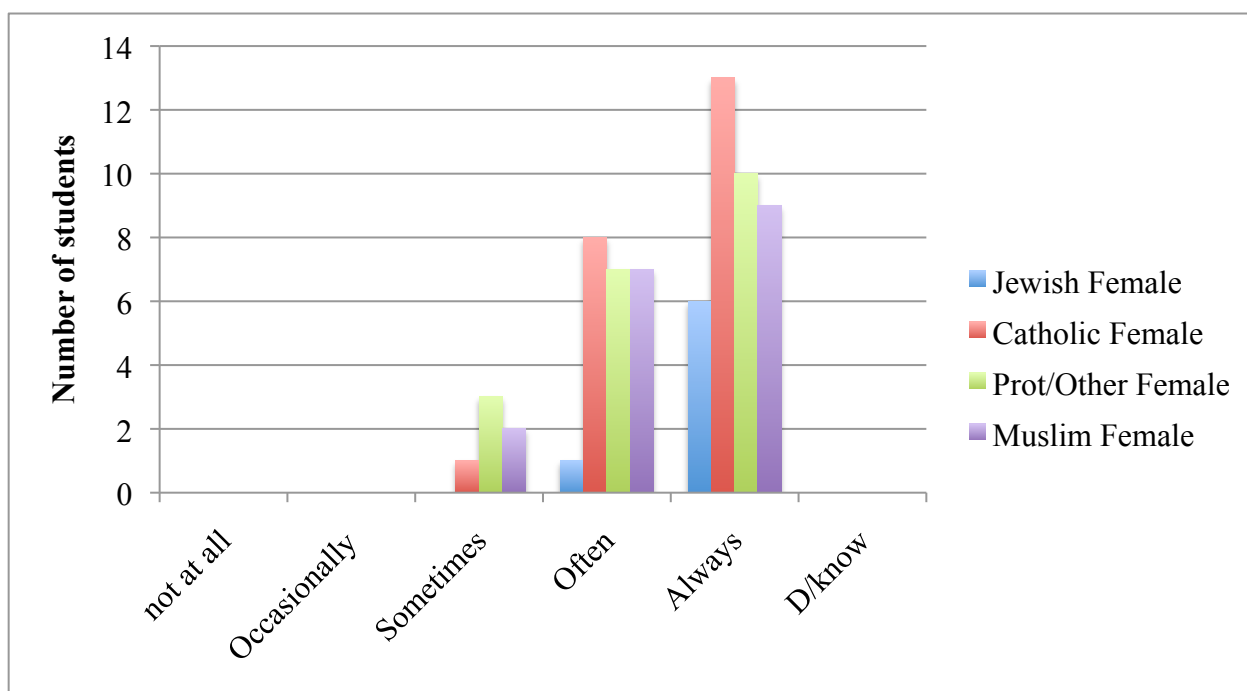
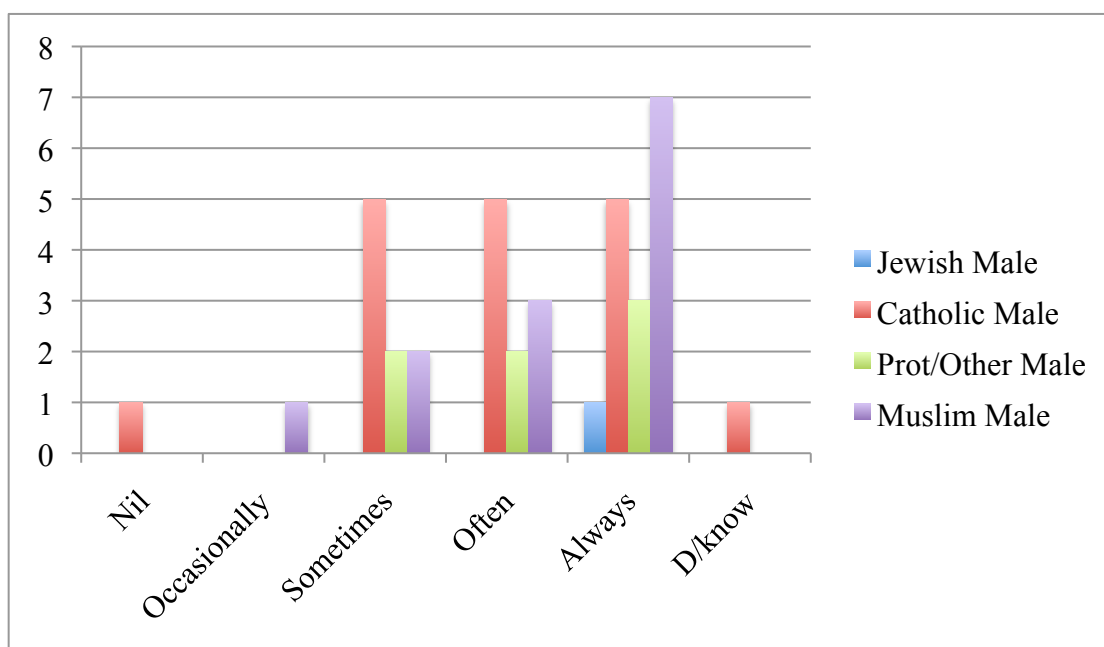
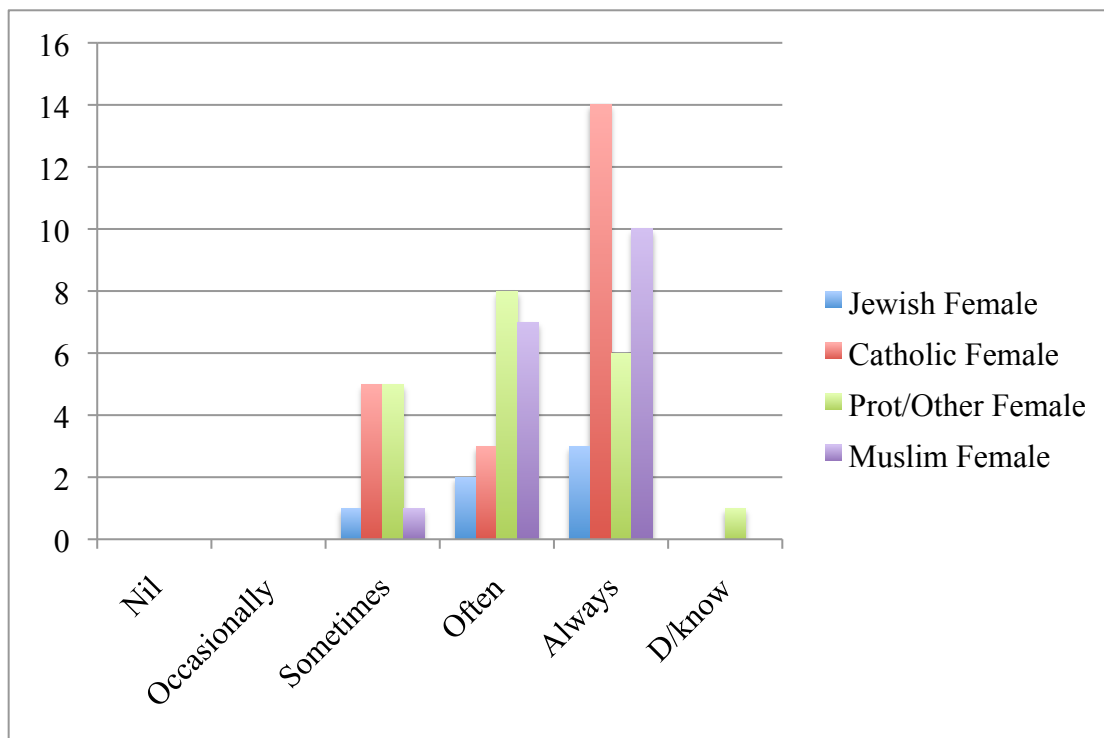
Figure 3.13 Q 39: I want to promote our society's cultural and religious diversity

Figure 3.14 Q 41: I feel more confident talking about my beliefs with others

Appendix 4: Interview Questions for Teachers- 2010.

ACU PhD student researcher: Tim McCowan

1. How has your involvement in the Building Bridges Programme affected you personally and /or professionally (eg. in your views, beliefs, relationships or attitudes towards others from different backgrounds from you)?
2. Why do you continue to be involved in the BBP? Or what has been the most rewarding aspect/s of the programme for you, personally and professionally? (ie. What are the main reasons for continuing your involvement- whether personal or professional or both?)
3. What is your goal or hope for students who start the programme each year?
4. What concerns, if any, do you have for students who enter the programme?
5. What parts of the programme have been of the greatest benefit for the school, and for the students?
6. What have been the most problematic or difficult aspects of the programme for you and why? What suggestions do you have on resolving these or improving the programme?
7. Have you been able to use or build on the learning of the BBP in your role or teaching at the school? If so, how?
8. The BBP aims to build trust and understanding between people of different cultural and religious backgrounds. What evidence do you have, if any, for the programme building trust and understanding between students and staff from different religious and cultural backgrounds?
9. The BBP also seeks to teach skills for how to engage in respectful dialogue with those who are different in background. What evidence do you have, if any, of these skills being used by participants outside the sessions of the programme?
10. What qualities or skills do you think are needed by facilitators involved in the programme?
11. What qualities or skills do you think are needed by teachers involved in the programme?

Appendix 5: Interview Questions for Regional Co-ordinators: - 2010.

ACU PhD student researcher: Tim McCowan

1. How has your involvement in the Building Bridges Programme affected you personally and /or professionally (eg. in your views, beliefs, relationships or attitudes towards others from different backgrounds from you)?
2. Why do you continue to be involved in the BBP? Or what has been the most rewarding aspect/s of the programme for you, personally and professionally? (ie. What are the main reasons for continuing your involvement- whether personal or professional or both?)
3. What is your goal or hope for students who start the programme each year?
4. What concerns, if any, do you have for students who enter the programme?
5. What parts of the programme have been of the greatest benefit for the school, and for the students?
6. What have been the most problematic or difficult aspects of the programme for you and why? What suggestions do you have on resolving these or improving the programme?
7. Have you been able to use or build on the learning of the BBP in your role or teaching at the school? If so, how?
8. The BBP aims to build trust and understanding between people of different cultural and religious backgrounds. What evidence do you have, if any, for the programme building trust and understanding between students and staff from different religious and cultural backgrounds?
9. The BBP also seeks to teach skills for how to engage in respectful dialogue with those who are different in background. What evidence do you have, if any, of these skills being used by participants outside the sessions of the programme?
10. What qualities or skills do you think are needed by teachers involved in the programme?
11. What qualities or skills do you think are needed by facilitators involved in the programme?

12. What have been the most difficult or troublesome issues of overseeing the programme for you, and how have you dealt with these?
13. Where have you found weaknesses in the BB Programme that you feel have needed amendment or change? What amendments have you made?
14. What qualities or skills do you think are needed to be an effective Regional Co-ordinator?

Appendix 6: Interview Questions for BB Facilitators- 2010.

ACU PhD student researcher: Tim McCowan

1. Why did you get involved in the Building Bridges Programme?
2. How has your involvement in the BB Programme affected you personally? (eg. in your views, beliefs, feelings, relationships or attitudes towards others from different backgrounds from you)?
3. What have been the most rewarding aspects of the programme for you personally?
4. What is your goal or hope for the students who join your small group in the programme?
5. What stories or experiences stand out for you, from your time facilitating? (No names need to be mentioned).
6. What insights did you discover about yourself (eg. new awareness of who you are, or your gifts, or needs or values etc) through facilitating a BB small group?
7. What are the most important elements of facilitating a BB small group for you, and how do you practice these in your facilitating? (These might include attitudes, skills, group atmosphere etc...).
8. What challenges did you encounter in your role as a facilitator of a small group, and how did you respond to these?
9. What do you believe are the least effective elements of the programme and what would you do to improve or amend it/them?
10. The BBP aims to build trust and understanding between people of different cultural and religious backgrounds, particularly through the small group sharing in a safe, respectful environment. How do you practically try to create this safe, respectful environment in your small group?
11. The facilitator is expected to encourage all participants to share as much of their life experiences with each other as they feel comfortable. What personal attitudes and

methods (of yours) did you find helped this deeper sharing, and what hindered this sharing?

12. What qualities or skills do you think are needed or even essential for facilitators involved in the BB programme, and why?
13. Having facilitated a BB small group, how would you attempt to prepare and train someone to be an effective facilitator of a BB small group? Or what elements do you feel need to be incorporated to properly prepare facilitators in this programme?

Appendix 7: Human Research Ethics Committee: Application Approval

Human Research Ethics Committee

Committee Approval Form**Principal Investigator/Supervisor:** KAENGEBRETSON Melbourne Campus**Co-Investigators:** Melbourne Campus**Student Researcher:** Rev Tim McCowan Melbourne Campus**Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:**

Building Bridges through Interfaith Dialogue in Schools Programme

for the period: 19.03.10 - 19.11.10**Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number:** V2009 93

The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (2007)* apply:

- (i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:

- security of records
- compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
- compliance with special conditions, and

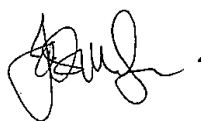
- (ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:

- proposed changes to the protocol
- unforeseen circumstances or events
- adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than low risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of negligible risk and low risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.



Signed: Date: 19.03.2010.....

(Research Services Officer, Melbourne Campus)

Appendix 8: Information letters and consent forms

Melbourne Campus (St Patricks)

115 Victoria Parade, Fitzroy VIC 3065

Locked Bag 4115 Fitzroy VIC 3065 Australia

Telephone: **9953 3292**

Facsimile: **9953 3575**

www.acu.edu.au

INFORMATION LETTER TO STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

TITLE OF PROJECT: The Building Bridges through Interfaith Dialogue in Schools Programme

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: Associate Professor Kath Engebretson

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Rev. Tim McCowan

PROGRAMME IN WHICH ENROLLED:

Ph D. in Religious Education

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research project to investigate the effectiveness of the *Building bridges through interfaith dialogue in schools programme*. This letter is designed to provide you with some information to help you decide whether you want to contribute to this research.

You are invited to participate in an interview, lasting approximately thirty minutes. You will be asked questions about your participation in the Building bridges programme, how you've been affected by your participation, in terms of your perceptions, attitudes and behaviour.

This programme has been operating for seven years, and needs some research into how well it has met its aims of fostering trust, understanding and empathy between people of different faiths and cultures. This research will benefit all participants of the Building bridges programme and other interfaith programmes, by providing insights into the most effective components that build trust and empathy in such programmes, as well as how to facilitate such dialogues with young people. This research will likely be published in journals to encourage effective dialogue and understanding among people of diverse faiths

and backgrounds across the world. Only aggregate data from this research will be published in any form.

Your involvement is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any stage without having to justify your decision. Such withdrawal from the research will not prejudice in any way, your academic progress at school, your relationship with teachers, the programme or any educational outcomes. There is no foreseeable risk for your involvement. Your confidentiality will be ensured at all times, so that your name and all identifiers of your identity will be removed after analysis of the interviews.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to Tim McCowan (the Student Researcher):

Rev. Tim McCowan,
c/o Ass. Prof. Kath Engebretson
Australian Catholic University, St Patricks campus
Address: 115 Victoria Parade, Fitzroy 3065.
Or via mobile to Tim: 0400436430.

On request a summary of our findings will be available for you to read.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University.

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Researcher has not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Melbourne branch of the Research Services Office.

Chair, HREC
c/o Research Services, Australian Catholic University
Melbourne Campus. Locked Bag 4115
FITZROY VIC 3065
Tel 03 9953 3158
Fax 03 9953 3315

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the consent form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to either your 'Building bridges teacher' at your school, or the student researcher at 1708 / 8 Dorcas Street, Southbank VIC 3006. Thank you very much.



.....

Principal Supervisor



Student Researcher

CONSENT FORM
Copy for Researcher to Keep

TITLE OF PROJECT: Building Bridges Programme.....

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: Associate Professor Kath Engebretson.....

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Rev. Tim McCowan.....

I.....(name of student) have read (or had read to me) and understood the information provided in the Information Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I realize that I can withdraw at any time. I agree that only aggregate data from this research will be published in any form, and such data collected may be published in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF STUDENT PARTICIPANT:

SCHOOL.....

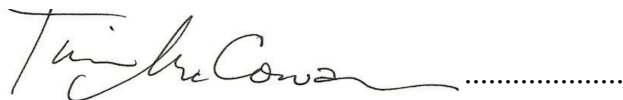
SIGNATURE DATE

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:



DATE:...1st August 2010.

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:.....



DATE:. 1st August 2010.

CONSENT FORM
Copy for Student Participant

TITLE OF PROJECT: Building Bridges Programme

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: Associate Professor Kath Engebretson.....

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Rev. Tim McCowan.....

I.....(name of student) have read (or had read to me) and understood the information provided in the Information Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I realize that I can withdraw at any time. I agree that only aggregate data from this research will be published in any form, and such data collected may be published in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF STUDENT PARTICIPANT:

NAME OF SCHOOL:

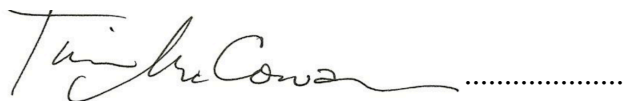
SIGNATURE DATE

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:



DATE:..1st August 2010.

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:.....



DATE:. 1st August 2010.

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM
Copy for Researcher

TITLE OF PROJECT: Building Bridges Programme

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: Associate Professor Kath Engebretson.....

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Rev. Tim McCowan.....

I (the parent/guardian) have read (or, where appropriate, have had read to me) and understood the information provided in the Letter to the Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that my child, nominated below, may participate in the focus group interview that will occur at a mutually convenient time and location. I realize that I can withdraw my child's involvement at any time. I agree that only aggregate data from this research will be published in any form, and such data collected may be published in a form that does not identify my child in any way.

NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN:

SIGNATURE DATE:


NAME OF CHILD

NAME OF SCHOOL

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:



DATE: 1st August, 2010

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: 

DATE: 1st August 2010

ASSENT OF STUDENT PARTICIPANTS AGED UNDER 18 YEARS

I (*the participant aged under 18 years*) understand what this research project is designed to explore and what I will be asked to do has been explained to me. I agree to participate in this focus group interview, which will occur at a mutually convenient time and location.

I realize that I can withdraw at any time. I agree that only aggregate data from this research will be published in any form, and such data collected may be published in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT AGED UNDER 18:

SIGNATURE:..... DATE:.....

NAME OF SCHOOL:

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:



DATE: 1st Aug 2010

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:



DATE: 1st Aug 2010.

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