Conceptualisations and Enactments of the Community National School Ethos in one Diverse Primary School

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Declaration Page

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Education is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Table of Contents

Contents

List of Abbreviations

BoM: Board of Management

BST: Belief Specific Teaching

CAQDAS: Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis System

CPD: Continuous Professional Development

CRP: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

DCU: Dublin City University

DE: Department of Education

DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

EAL: English as an Additional Language

EEC: European Economic Community

ELT: Ethos Leadership Team

ET: Educate Together

ETB: Education and Training Board

ETBI: Education and Training Boards Ireland

EU: European Union

GMGY: Goodness Me, Goodness You!

HSCL: Home School Community Liaison Coordinator

IEGs: Intercultural Education Guidelines

NCCA: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PA: Parent Association

PLN: Professional Learning Network

RSE: Relationships and Sexuality Education

RTÉ: Raidió Teilifís Éireann (Radio Television Ireland)

SEN: Special Educational Needs

SESE: Social, Environmental and Scientific Curriculum

SPHE: Social, Personal and Health Education

TD: Teachta Dála (Member of Parliament)

UNCRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

List of Tables and Figures

List of Tables

Table Number	Description	Page
Table 1	Mainstream Primary Schools by Patron 2020	9

List of Figures

Figure Number	Description	Page
Figure 1	Norman's (2003) Framework on Ethos	12
Figure 2	Diversity Variables in this Study	16
Figure 3	Norman's Goals vis-à-vis Literature Pertaining to Ethos	65
Figure 4	Values/Principles Underpinning the Ethos of CNS/Educate Together Schools	82
Figure 5	Strands of GMGY and Learn Together	85
Figure 6	Overview of the Study's Conceptual Framework	90
Figure 7	The Study's Theoretical Framework	94
Figure 8	Participant Profiles	102
Figure 9	Overview of Participant Groups	105
Figure 10	Braun and Clarke's Six Phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis	110
Figure 11	Initial Codes in Phase 2 of Data Analysis	112
Figure 12	Phase Four of Data Analysis	113
Figure 13	Themes and Sub-themes	115
Figure 14	Relating Themes to Norman's (2003) Framework on Ethos	124
Figure 15	Summary of Key Findings	195

List of Appendices

Appendix	Description
Appendix A	Matrix of Policy Statements on Identity Variables in Community National Schools and Educate Together Schools
Appendix B	Ethos Statement for Community National Schools
Appendix C	Informed Consent Form
Appendix D	Letter to Board of Management
Appendix E	Interview Questions for Participant Group 1
Appendix F	Interview Questions for Participant Group 2
Appendix G	Interview Questions for Participant Group 3
Appendix H	Interview Questions for Participant Group 4
Appendix I	Plain Language Statement
Appendix J	Code Book Phase Two
Appendix K	Example of Applying the Theoretical Framework to the 'Storied' Data
Appendix L	Excerpt from a Transcribed Interview
Appendix M	Excerpt from NCCA Review of the Original GMGY Programme

Abstract

Conceptualisations and Enactments of the Community National School Ethos in One Diverse Primary School. Séamus Conboy.

This research study critically examines how key stakeholders in the CNS model conceptualise the CNS ethos and how school staff in one diverse primary school conceptualise and enact the CNS ethos.

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data as part of a qualitative, single case study methodology. The qualitative software programme NVivo was used to support data analysis processing. A theoretical framework comprising of both critical and liberal egalitarian theories from the interdisciplinary field of equality studies (e.g., Gramsci, 1971; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Baker *et al.*, 2009; Ladson-Billings 1995;2014) was then applied to coded data.

Critical analysis suggests that key stakeholders' and school staff's conceptualisations of the CNS ethos have evolved over time. Understandings have changed from religious-centric interpretations of the CNS ethos to broader egalitarian conceptualisations which are congruent with liberal forms of multicultural education. Analysis also suggests that areas of school life associated with ethos have broadened from a sole emphasis on the Patron's Curriculum (Goodness Me! Goodness You!) to multiple aspects of school life. Analysis indicates conflicting perspectives on the continued use of the term 'multi-denominational' as a descriptor for the CNS model given its religious connotations.

While enactments of the CNS ethos are broadly reflective of conceptualisations, there are also notable dissonant elements. Consistent with liberal forms of multicultural education, in enacting the CNS ethos, significant efforts are made by teachers to ensure that both the formal and hidden curricula are reflective of the school's diverse community. Teachers employ democratic pedagogies which draw on the children's cultural/linguistic/religious/belief knowledge and lived experiences. School leaders actively address the barriers faced by minoritised parents in engaging with school life. They encourage parents from minoritised religious and ethnic groups to participate on various democratic and decision-making fora (e.g., Parent Association, Board of Management, ethos-related policy committees). However, findings also indicate that the *habitus* and various forms of capital possessed by minoritised parents from middle-class, highly educated backgrounds are valued over those of parents from working class backgrounds from either dominant or minoritised groups.

Although the school endeavours to affirm diversity, there is evidence of the hierarchisation of the diversity variables recognised and affirmed in the classroom. While the *habitus* of minoritised religious/belief, linguistic and cultural groups are affirmed, this is less so the case for members of the LGBTQ+ community and children from working class backgrounds. Responses to LGBTQ+ identities are particularly constrained due to the significant influence parents from conservative religious backgrounds have on the school's ethos-related curricula and policies. This can be seen as problematic as it results in a dissonance between the school's espoused egalitarian ethos and current practices in responding to some forms of diversity. Several policy recommendations are suggested to address issues raised in the study.

Chapter One – Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Ireland has a long history of ethnic and cultural diversity with a long-established presence of several minoritised groups such as Travellers, Protestants, Jews, and Black Irish (Bryan, 2009c; Tyrrell, Darmody and Song, 2011; Darmody, Smyth and McCoy, 2012; Faas and Fionda, 2019). However, labour shortages as a result of rapid economic growth during the Celtic Tiger[1] era of economic expansion between 1995 – 2007, led to an unprecedented increase in ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity in Irish society (NCCA, 2005; Bryan, 2009b, 2009a; Irwin, 2010; Bryan and Bracken, 2011; IHREC, 2011; Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather, 2012; Faas, Smith and Darmody, 2018). In addition, there has been a seismic shift in attitudes towards the dominant role the Catholic Church has played in Irish life to date, leading to an increase in nominal Catholicism (Irwin, 2010). This is evidenced in the results of recent referendums where the majority of the electorate voted against the positions of the Catholic Church on same-sex marriage and abortion (McGraw and Tiernan, 2022, p. 1). There has also been a change in attitudes amongst the general public towards "religious personnel following child-abuse scandals" in the Catholic Church (Griffin, 2018, p 67).

According to the Central Statistics Office (CSO, 2016), the percentage of the population identifying as Roman Catholic has decreased steadily in all censuses taken since 1961. In 1961, 94.9% of the Irish population identified as Roman Catholic, the highest percentage ever recorded. This fell to 78.3% in 2016. Simultaneously, the percentage of the population identifying as having 'no religion' has steadily increased since 1961. In 2016, 9.8% of the population identified as having no religion. While the percentage of the population

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[1] The period of rapid economic growth between 1997-2007 was known as the 'Celtic Tiger'.

identifying as Catholic remains high, "these numbers do not give the whole story" with participation in Catholic religious services consistently decreasing (Anderson, Byrne and Cullen, 2016, p. 162).

The decrease in the unquestioned Catholic *habitus* of the Irish people has also been attributed to technological advancements and an increase in the power of the media (Andersen, 2010, pp. 16–23). Ireland's joining of the European Economic Community (EEC)[2] in 1973 and the return of emigrants, who had experienced more pluralist societies elsewhere, exposed more Irish people to alternatives to the *status quo* of dominant Catholic Church (Lalor, 2013, p. 22). In addition, the Celtic Tiger "brought a host of social changes with it" (Anderson, Byrne and Cullen, 2016, p. 163). As a result of these changes, Irish primary classrooms have never been more diverse in terms of ethnicity, religions and beliefs[3], family structures and backgrounds, home languages and sexual orientations (NCCA, 2020, p. 3).

This new reality has challenged and destabilised the theocentric nature of the Irish primary education system, where the vast majority of schools are under the patronage[4] of religious bodies that promote a religious ethos (Kitching, 2013, p. 18). How this reality came about will be discussed in a later section of this chapter. Regardless of how this came to be, it is now apparent that there is a major disjoint between the rapid changes that have taken place in Irish society and the slow rate of change to the patronage system (Coolahan, Hussey and

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[2] Later the 'European Union' (EU)

[3] The terms 'beliefs' is used in this thesis to describe non-religious world views. It could be argued that the term 'belief' suggests a religious worldview. The rationale for using this term to describe non-religious world views is that it is the term used in both the Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions an Beliefs in Public Schools (OSCE, 2007) and by the NCCA in both the GMGY curriculum (NCCA, 2018a) and the Junior Cycle Religious Education Specification (NCCA, 2019).

[4] The 'patron' of a school is tasked by the Department of Education to manage a school, employ its staff, and take responsibility, through the principal and the school's board of management, for the day-to-day operations of the school. The patron also has responsibility for the 'characteristic spirit' (ethos) of the school and the provision of a Patron's Curriculum. The Department of Education provides funding for salaries and the school's day-to-day running costs (McGraw and Tiernan, 2022, p. 6).

Kilfeather, 2012). As a result, many argue that there is a mismatch between the ethos of the majority of primary schools in the Irish education system and the diverse populations they currently serve (Tuohy, 2008; Irwin, 2010; Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather, 2012; Smyth, Darmody and Lyons, 2013b; O'Toole, 2015; Fischer, 2016; Hyland, 2017; Faas, Smith and Darmody, 2018a). This applies at staff level also. A recent Doctoral study carried out by McHugh (2021) on the wellbeing of primary school principals found that 53% of principals believe that religion should not be taught in schools (ibid., 2021, p. 304).

To address these changes, successive governments have committed to expanding the number of primary schools under the patronage of secular bodies or 'multi-denominational' schools (Government of Ireland, 2020, pp. 96–97), as they are defined in Ireland (Faas, Smith and Darmody, 2018a; Malone, O'Toole and Mullally, 2020). Unlike denominational schools with a religious ethos that responds particularly to those who share the same religious belief as the patron, 'multi-denominational' schools strive to respond to the needs of all community members, regardless of any aspect of their identity.

Community National Schools (CNSs) were established in 2008 under the patronage of Education and Training Boards (ETBs). As ETBs are state bodies, CNSs are Ireland's first 'state' multi-denominational primary schools (Irwin, 2015, p. 49). This is significant for several reasons. Firstly, the emergence of this state model disrupts the heretofore privatised and mono-religious nature of the Irish education system (Daly, 2012; McGraw and Tiernan, 2022). McHugh (2021, p. 304) found an appetite for state-run schools amongst school leaders with 48% of principals involved in her study expressing a preference for "a model featuring a separation of church and state…with multidenominational Community National Schools being the preferred model". Secondly, the establishment of a state model is significant in the context of a changing Ireland, given that in the British context, state schooling "has been perceived as a primary institution in which the multicultural society

would be lived out" (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2021, p. 264). Finally, it is also argued that state schools have particular responsibilities in preparing children to live harmoniously in a diverse society, participate in a democratic society and engage with a variety of beliefs and values (McCormack *et al.*, 2018, p. 16).

To examine the role that schools with a CNS ethos play in responding to diversity, this study advances a qualitative, single case study methodology grounded in an interpretative paradigm. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, this study critically examines how the CNS ethos is:

1. conceptualised by key stakeholders in the CNS model.
2. conceptualised and enacted by school staff in one diverse primary school.

The analysis is supported by concepts drawn from a variety of explanatory frameworks, including school ethos (e.g., Norman, 2003), multi-denominational education (e.g., Hyland, 2017) and both critical and liberal egalitarian theories from the interdisciplinary field of equality studies (e.g., Baker *et al*., 2009). The study's use of micro concepts such as 'ethos' and 'multi-denominational education' and macro critical and liberal egalitarian theories reflects Robinson and Diaz's (2009, p. 18) assertion that both are required to examine society comprehensively. Similarly, Baker *et al.* (2009, p. 15) advocate for the pluralist use of social theories to examine the intersectional nature of diversity rather than the limited use of one particular theoretical framework.

The current chapter examines how the distinct Irish primary school patronage system has evolved and contextualises the emergence of the concepts of 'ethos' and 'multi-denominational' education. It outlines my research aims and delineates and provides a rationale for my research questions. It then addresses my positionality, outlining my relationship to the research topic, my philosophical assumptions and theoretical

orientations. It advances my definitions of the contested terms 'ethos' and 'multi-denominational' education and defines what is meant by 'diversity' in this study. The chapter concludes with a brief outline of each thesis chapter to orientate the reader. The section which follows explores the historical and political background of the study,

1.2 Historical and Political Background of the Study

Chapter Three of this thesis critically examines the contested concepts of 'ethos' and 'multi-denominational' education, which are central to this study. While the lexicon to describe these concepts is part of the common parlance of those working within the Irish education system, this is not the case internationally. The question arises as to how these concepts came to be so significant in Ireland? To appreciate how this came to be, it is essential to examine how an education system based on the concept of 'patronage' evolved. As this concept "is deeply rooted in Irish educational and political history" (Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather, 2012, p. 9), this section examines the historical and political context of the Irish primary education system.

It is generally accepted that the model by which schools are governed in Ireland is under the principle of plurality of provision (Coolahan, 2000; IHREC, 2011). All schools, although fully state-funded, belong to individuals or groups known as 'patrons'. Kitching (2020, p. 11) describes the system as a "patron-based, effectively privatised approach to state-funded schooling". The legal basis for the embedded nature of the patronage system lies in the Irish Constitution (1937). Article 42 (4) of the Constitution outlines that "the state shall provide *for* free primary education (emphasis added) …". The 'for' here has

enormous significance as it has allowed the state to finance private[5] bodies or patrons to operate the public education system (Daly, 2012, p. 201).

Although the Catholic Church had a dominant presence in many aspects of social life across Europe until relatively recently (Clarke, 2012, p. 478), the hegemonic relationship between education and religion, and in particular Catholicism, is arguably unique to Ireland in a European context (Irwin, 2015, p. 50). An emphasis on Catholicism was seen as a way of firmly detaching Irish identity from that of its Protestant British rulers due to its colonial past (Andersen, 2010, p. 17). The development of the Constitution in 1937 was an opportunity to embed this renewed national identity. The Fianna Fáil political party, which was in power when the Constitution was drafted, was ideologically focused on the unification of the island of Ireland and the promotion of the Irish language and Catholic identity (Clarke, 2012, p. 486). This led to the Constitution becoming "essentially a Catholic document" imbued with a Catholic ethos (McGraw and Tiernan, 2022, p. 8). Primary schools were seen as central in "building a sense of nationhood, the restoration of the Irish language and the moral formation of children into the Catholic faith" (Devine, 2019, p. 20). Both the state and the Church shared a commitment to the creation of a Catholic, traditional nation. This shared vision led to a special place being given to the Catholic Church in the Constitution (Andersen, 2010, p. 17). The Constitution's "anti-statist philosophy" (Renehan, 2014, p. 25), which gave rise to the 'principle of subsidiarity' in education (Kitching, 2013, p. 27), gave religious bodies a constitutionally recognised right to provide education and promote their ethos (McGrady, 2013; Griffin, 2018). Griffin (2019, p. 56) outlines how "the partnership of the state and the Catholic Church" was seen

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[5]In many jurisdictions 'private' providers/schools refer to fee-paying institutions. However, in the context of this thesis, 'private' refers to schools "not established or run by the state" (Griffin, 2018, p. 67). The use of 'private school bodies', therefore, refers to school authorities (patrons) other than the state e.g., religious bodies, Educate Together. The majority of these schools are non-fee-paying schools.

as mutually beneficial as religious congregations provided the state with sites for schools, money for the buildings and taught free of charge at a time when the state could not afford to fund a robust education system.

The Education Act (1998) legislates for patrons to play a significant role in their schools. Of particular significance to this study is their role in determining their schools' 'characteristic spirit' (Williams, 2000; Fischer, 2010; Hyland, 2017). It is widely argued that the term 'characteristic spirit' is simply another term for 'ethos', with both words often being used interchangeably in an Irish context (Hyland, 2000; Williams, 2000; Fischer, 2010; O'Flaherty *et al.*, 2017). It is argued that 'ethos' was avoided in the legislation as it was historically used in Ireland to describe the values system of faith-based secondary schools only (Liddy, O'Flaherty and McCormack, 2019).

McGraw and Tiernan (2022, p. 42) argue that the state curriculum developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA[6]) is "blind to the ethos of particular patrons". It is the responsibility of individual schools "to imbue the curriculum with their own distinctive ethos" (ibid., 2022, p. 42)[7] to satisfy their legal requirements (as per the Education Act, 1998) to uphold the ethos of their patron. However, it could be argued that there is a hegemonic relationship between the state curriculum and Christianity as it states, "the curriculum acknowledges the centrality of the Christian heritage and tradition in the Irish experience and the Christian identity shared by the majority of Irish people" (NCCA, 1999, p. 28). Section 30 (2) (d) of The Education Act (1998) also recognises the legal right of patrons to design, implement and supervise patrons' curricula which teach and promote their specific values (Renehan, 2014, p. 35). These curricula

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[6] The NCCA is a statutory body of the Department of Education. It advises the Minister for Education on curriculum and assessment for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools. It was also responsible for the development of the revised GMGY curriculum in conjunction with CNSs and ETBs.
[7] As briefly outlined earlier in this section and again in Chapter Three, the patron has a significant influence on the ethos of schools under its auspices.

range from religious education programmes in denominational schools to broader ethical, values and multi-belief programmes in multi-denominational schools. They aim to contribute to the child's identity development from the perspective of the religious beliefs or values underpinning the school's ethos (NCCA, 2020, p. 14). The Patron's Curriculum most relevant to this study is 'Goodness Me! Goodness You!' (GMGY) (NCCA, 2018a) which is taught in all CNSs.

The state's "minimal interference" (Clarke, 2012, p. 481) approach to education is unique in a democratic Western context where the norm is for the state to manage the vast majority of schools and for privately-run schools to be in the minority (Hyland, 2017, p. 43). O' Donnell (2015, p. 253) describes the Irish patronage system as "an anomalous figure in the landscape of international schooling". It is interesting to note that the current situation of "state-funded faith schooling" (Devine, 2013, p. 393) is in stark contrast to the original multi-denominational vision for the Irish primary school system as set out by Lord Stanley, the Chief Secretary for Ireland, in the Stanley Letter (1831) (Ó'Buachalla, 1988). This letter was seen as a "foundational document" (O'Toole, 2015, p. 90) which set out a vision where all schools would be under 'mixed-management' and would enrol children of all faiths and none. The rationale behind this vision was the uniting of children of different denominations (Renehan, 2014). It also prevented the "proselytism" of children of other faiths into the dominant religion of a school (Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather, 2012, p. 1). As is evidenced in Table 1, the system did not develop in line with Lord Stanley's integrationist vision. Indeed, a radically different separatist reality emerged. It is commonly argued that the primary reason for the current patronage system was the emphatic resistance of both the Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland to Lord Stanley's vision (Williams, 2012, p. 45).

Table 1: Mainstream Primary Schools by Patron 2020/2021 (McGraw and Tiernan, 2022, p. 6)[8]

Patron	Number of Schools	% of Schools
Catholic	2,757	89%
Protestant	172	6%
Educate Together	95	3%
An Foras Pátrúnachta	36	1%
Education and Training Boards (CNSs)	25	1%
Other	23	1%
	3,108	

Ireland is "a vastly different country than the one which enacted the Constitution of Ireland in 1937" (Griffin, 2019, p. 58). However, the legacy of the place of the Catholic Church in the Constitution lives on in the educational landscape that can be seen today in Table 1, where private patrons manage 99 % of schools, 95% of which are religious bodies which promote a single denominational ethos.

The establishment and existence of the CNS model in 2008 disrupts the hegemonic private and religious control of Irish primary schools. For the first time, the state itself has taken direct responsibility not just for funding schools but also for carrying out a patron's function as per The Education Act (1998). This includes establishing an ethos appropriate to a state-run school sector. As set out in the section that follows, the central focus of this study is to understand how the CNS ethos is conceptualised by key stakeholders in the CNS model and how it is conceptualised and enacted by school staff in one diverse primary school.

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[8] Data from 2020/2021 is the most up-to-date data available from the DE.

1.3 Research Questions and Aims

The overarching questions guiding this study were arrived at due to a combination of my professional interests in the topic and a comprehensive survey of the relevant literature. This study seeks to provide a detailed and critical account of how the CNS ethos is:

1. conceptualised by key stakeholders in the CNS model.

2. conceptualised and enacted by school staff in one diverse primary school.

'Key stakeholders' include a representative from Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI[9]) and the NCCA. My rationale for including the ETBI representative is that ETBI has a significant role in supporting ETBs in their function as patron of CNSs and their post-primary schools. My rationale for including the NCCA representative is that the NCCA played a central role in developing the GMGY curriculum[10]. School staff include members of the school's senior management team, the teacher with particular responsibility for the implementation of GMGY (GMGY Coordinator) and other classroom teachers.

The primary aim of this study is to advance several policy recommendations based on the findings. This is important as the CNS model is still relatively new to the Irish educational landscape, and ETBs are relatively new (since 2016[11]) to being patrons of multi-denominational primary schools. A second aim of the study is to contribute to the theoretical and empirical literature on multi-denominational education. As will be outlined

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[9] ETBI is the national body that represents Ireland's sixteen ETBs.

[10] While the NCCA had responsibility for the development of the GMGY curriculum on behalf of ETBs, they did so in close collaboration with ETBs as patrons and teachers and school leaders from across the CNS model.

[11] Although ETBs (formerly VECs) managed post-primary schools since the 1930s, legislation had to pass before they could become patrons of primary schools when CNSs were established in 2008. That did not occur until 2016. From 2008-2016, the Minister for Education was the patron of CNSs. ETBs were identified as 'patrons in waiting' from the inception of the CNS model and played an active role in the schools from out outset.

later in this chapter and in Chapter Three, this is significant given the dearth of theoretical literature regarding multi-denominational education in Ireland.

1.4 Defining Key Terms

The research questions contain several contested terms with no one agreed definition, namely 'ethos' and 'multi-denominational' education'. This section introduces some of the ways these terms are conceptualised in the literature and provides a definition of each for the purposes of this study. Chapter Three unpacks how these terms are conceptualised in the literature in greater detail. This section also outlines what is meant by a 'diverse school community' in the context of this study. The next sub-section looks specifically at the concept of 'ethos'.

1.4.1 Ethos

'Ethos' is synonymous with a myriad of other terms (Allder, 1993) and is often associated with concepts such as organisational 'culture' and 'climate' (Glover and Coleman, 2005; Solvason, 2005). Although theorists conceptualise these terms differently in an educational context, they all broadly associate 'ethos' with the values and beliefs that inform policy and practice in schools (Faas, Smith and Darmody, 2018a). As 'ethos' is "an elusive entity" (Norman, 2003, p. 2), it presents challenges when researching the concept empirically (Donnelly, 2000; Graham, 2012). James Norman's conceptualisation of ethos as a school's expressive, instrumental and organisational goals is considered to be both comprehensive and applicative in an empirical school research context (Norman, 2003, pp. 2–3). As outlined in Figure 1, *Expressive* goals refer to the values promoted by the school. *Instrumental* goals are associated with the school's curriculum. In this study, they refer to

both the formal and hidden[12] curricula and what they communicate to children. *Organisational* goals are concerned with the nature of the relationships that exist within the school community. They also refer to the school's hierarchical structures which have traditionally placed "trustees and teachers at the top and students and parents lower down" (Norman, 2003, p. 3). Expressive goals should inform the school's approach to its instrumental and organisational goals.

Figure 1: Norman's (2003, pp. 2-3) Framework on Ethos

Expressive Goals	Values promoted by the school
Instrumental Goals	Associated with school's formal and hidden curricula and what they communicate to children
Organisational Goals	Concerned with the school's structures which reflect the nature of relationships that exist within the school community
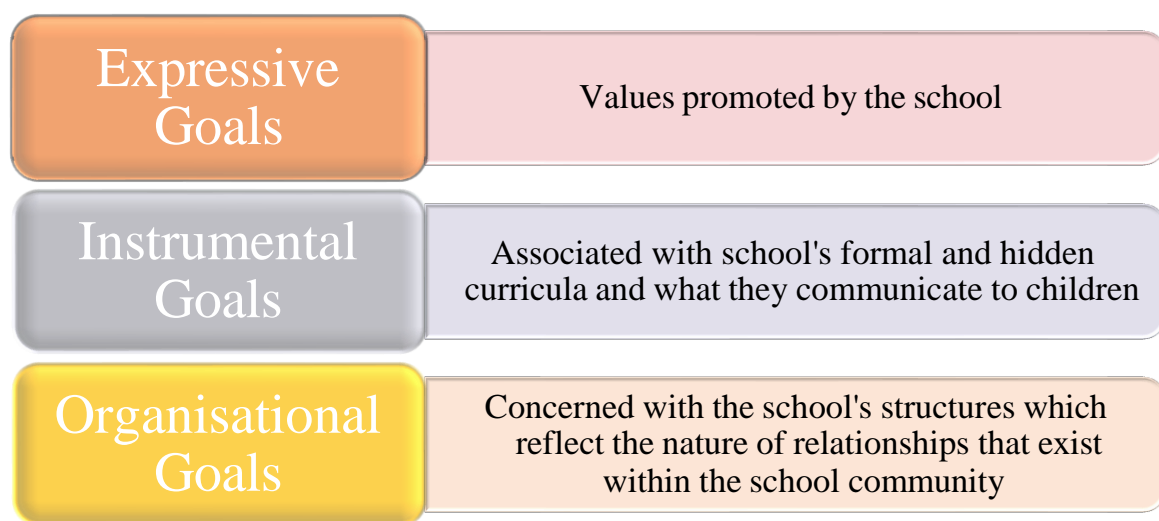
How a school's ethos emerges is also a contested question. There are differences in views as to whether it is externally assigned to schools by their authorities (e.g. the patron in an Irish context) or whether it is something that emerges organically as a result of interactions within school communities (Hogan, 1984; Donnelly, 2000; Norman, 2003). The inclusion of both key stakeholders from the CNS model and school staff in this study reflects my

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[12] The 'hidden curriculum' normally refers to the implicit messages of inclusion and exclusion communicated to children in various ways. These include values, teacher expectations, the topics chosen for study and school structures (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2015). In this study, the term 'hidden curriculum' (in terms of instrumental goals) is used predominantly to refer to its physical environment and whole-school celebrations, particularly in Chapter Five. The rationale behind this more limited conceptualisation of the term is that participants tend to associate the 'hidden curriculum' mostly with these aspects of school life. Other aspects of the hidden curriculum are examined across all three goals associated with ethos e.g., values are examined in relation to its expressive goals and school structures in relation to its organisational goals.

belief that both internal and external factors influence a school's ethos. This issue will be addressed in more detail in Chapter Three

Building on the work of Norman (2003) and cognisant of both the internal and external influences on the development of a school's ethos, for the purposes of this study, 'ethos' is defined as the values (expressive goals) espoused and promoted by both the patron and the school itself and how those values inform the formal and hidden curriculum (instrumental goals) and the nature of the relationships within the school (organisational goals). The following sub-section examines the concept of 'multi-denominational' education.

1.4.2 Multi-denominational Education

Similar to the challenge in defining 'ethos', the meaning of 'multi-denominational education' remains ambiguous, despite the growth in the sector in recent years (Mahon, 2017, p. 28). Unlike 'ethos', an internationally recognised term, the term 'multi-denominational' is particular to the Irish context. Therefore, literature on the concept is more limited. Chapter Three outlines a continuum of conceptualisations of multi-denominational education in Ireland and how this continuum emerged. In summary, conceptualisations range from a religious-centric, 'Christian pluralist' form of multi-denominational education to a pluralist, 'equality-based' understanding of the concept (Irwin, 2019, cited in ETBI, 2019, p. 35). Chapter Three outlines the CNS model's journey along this continuum and how it has arrived at its current understanding of multi-denominational education.

In this study, 'multi-denominational' education is defined in line with ETB/NCCA documentation. These documents state that 'multi-denominational' schools "strive to provide all children with equal opportunities to engage with the curriculum and school life … regardless of their race, gender, religion/belief, age, family status, civil status,

membership of the Traveller community, sexual orientation, ability or socio-economic status" (ETBI, 2021, p. 20). They also state that these schools "aim to develop culturally responsive teachers and curricula; promote culturally responsive and inclusive school environments; and enable children and parents to be active members of the school community" (NCCA, 2018a, p. 39). ETB/NCCA documentation appears to associate 'multi-denominational' education with liberal forms of multicultural education. However, conceptualisations of 'multi-denominational' are contested both in the literature (as will be outlined in Chapter Three) and in the data from this study (as will be outlined in Chapter Five). Therefore, this is a tentative rather than definitive definition.

1.4.3 Diversity

As will be outlined in the next section, research to date on the CNS model has mainly focused on questions of religious diversity. However, religious identity is only one variable among many relevant to school ethos. 'Diversity' refers to differences between individuals and groups regarding culture, class, age, ability, religion, sexuality etc. (Bell, 2016, p. 3). There are natural links between questions of ethos and diversity, given the value-laden nature of views on diversity and more tangibly the diverse nature of the school-going population. For example, positive understandings of diversity as enriching can be promoted and negative understandings of diversity as deficit can be challenged by an ethos that promotes respect for diversity. Reflecting this, Robinson and Diaz (2006, p. 6) argue that "educators can challenge the negative normative discourse that can surround difference in many ways through the effective use of both the explicit and hidden curriculum". Committing to responding to the needs of diverse school communities, the statement on ethos common to all CNSs articulates a vision of treating all children equitably in all aspects of school life regardless of any aspect of their identity (Appendix B). While I contend that focusing on one variable is too narrow when considering CNSs' ability to respond to

diversity, I argue that it is beyond the scope of this study to include all identity variables. An intensive review of the relevant literature enabled me to identify the variables most relevant to this research project, i.e., culture, social class, religion/belief, language, and sexuality. The delimitation of the variables in this way should not be mistaken as a dismissal of other forms of diversity e.g., ability, gender, family status, and age.

In using the language of 'diversity', I am conscious of Lynch's (2018) assertion that the term itself can gloss over or neutralise the debate about the unequal social capital possessed by people of different identities and the social injustices individuals and groups experience as a result. I agree with her contention that there is a need to examine 'diversity' in a way that uncovers "the powerful economic, political cultural and affective institutions that frame identities and either undermine or enhance children's wellbeing" (ibid., 2018, p. 11). The critical theories underpinning my theoretical framework enable me to examine these institutional dynamics by exposing possible hegemonic acceptances of these realities as 'common sense' (Gramsci, 1971; Bourdieu, 1977).

For this study, as diagrammatically represented in Figure 2, 'diversity' and 'diverse school communities' refer to differences amongst the school community in terms of culture, social class, religion/belief, language and sexuality. It recognises the intersectionality of these variables and the structural and political inequalities experienced by those belonging to any one or a combination of these identities.

Figure 2: Diversity Variables in this Study
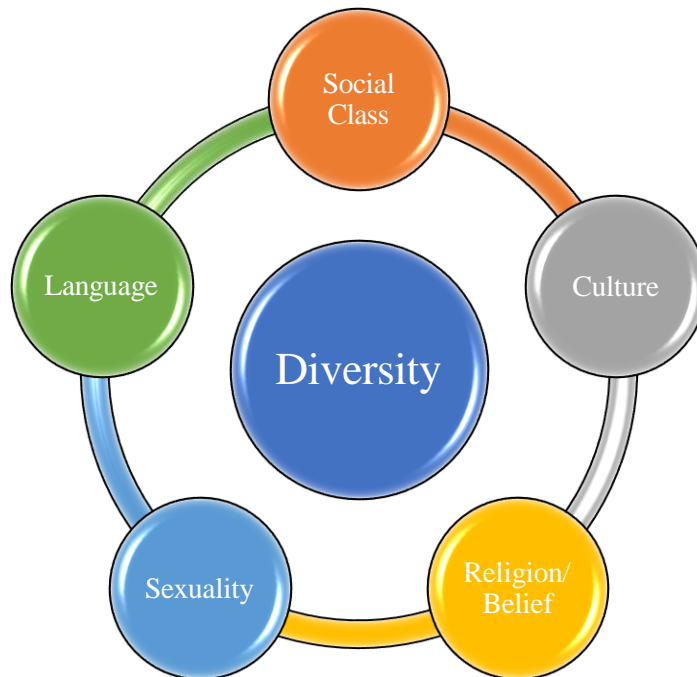
1.5 Rationale for the Study

There are two primary reasons for carrying out this study. Firstly, as the CNS model is a relatively new addition to the primary education landscape, there is a general dearth of research on how it contributes to Ireland's educational response to increased diversity. The published research on the model to date has mainly focused on the original conceptualisation of its multi-denominational ethos and, in particular, original approaches to religious education in the GMGY programme (Faas, Smith and Darmody, 2018a, 2018c, 2018b; Mullally, 2018). As outlined in Chapter Three, the CNS model has evolved significantly since these studies were conducted particularly in how it conceptualises its multi-denominational ethos. In summary, at the policy level, conceptualisations of multi-denominational education have moved from a religious-centric to a more pluralist understanding, encompassing all aspects of the child's identity. The GMGY curriculum has also been completely revised in line with these developments. Apart from one published

study that examines current approaches to religious/belief identities in the revised GMGY curriculum (Malone, O'Toole, Mullally, 2022), no research has been carried out since these changes have taken place on how the CNS ethos responds to the needs of diverse school communities. It is envisaged that this research will inform CNS ethos-related policy on responding to diverse school communities and inform the development of support materials and Professional Development programmes for CNS staff, as well as making a contribution to the theoretical and empirical literature on 'multi-denominational' education.

Secondly, the CNS ethos statement now claims that all members of the school community are treated equally regardless of any aspect of their identity (Appendix B). However, Hession (2015, p. 43) argues that there can be a "disconnection between the rhetoric of those charged with championing a particular schooling type and the extent to which teachers, managers and principals on the ground actually share the aspirations, values and commitments espoused by organisations or institutions at a public level. Considering the homogeneity of the Irish teaching profession (Heinz and Keane, 2018) and the impact a mono-religious education experience has on the *habitus* of these teachers (Devine, 2013), the claims made in CNS policies/public documentation are worthy of critical examination. Conscious of the impact of my own *habitus*, the section which follows examines my positionality relative to the study.

1.6 The Researcher and the Researched

A major stimulus for any research project is the researcher's experience (Bryman, 2016, p. 17). My professional and personal experiences to date have motivated me to undertake this research. My autobiography and "social location" in terms of class, race, and sexual orientation also influence the analysis of my study (Keane, 2022, p. 269). Therefore, it is

important to give the reader a sense of who I am personally and professionally from the outset.

From a professional perspective, I started my teaching career in a relatively homogenous Catholic school and spent two years there. Following this, I spent two years teaching in a diverse International School in Kuwait. My professional experiences in Kuwait were my first exposure to an alternative to the denominational education I experienced in Ireland. I was eager to work in a multi-denominational school in a diverse setting when I returned. I was fortunate to secure a teaching position in a newly established, highly diverse CNS in Dublin 15. Soon after taking up that position, I took on the role of Goodness Me, Goodness You (GMGY) Coordinator, with responsibility for implementing the GMGY Curriculum. I moved on to become a principal in another newly established CNS, also in Dublin. As GMGY Coordinator and Principal, I was very involved in conversations at both school and national levels relating to ethos, GMGY and how they could best respond to the needs of the communities our schools served. My interest in these areas led me to pursue a Master's in Intercultural Education. These professional and academic experiences led to my being seconded from my principalship to the position of 'Educational Policy and Development Officer' in Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) in 2016.

As well as the current 27 CNSs, ETBs are currently collectively the patrons of 252 post-primary schools[13]. My original role was to promote the growth and development of the CNS model across Ireland. However, in September 2019, a new 'Directorate' or section was established in ETBI. The primary responsibilities of this Directorate are to oversee the development of the CNS model, supports the embedding of the CNS ethos, the implementation of the GMGY curriculum across CNSs and to develop and implement an

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[13] Accounting for approximately 1/3 of post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland.

Ethos Framework and Patron's Curriculum for ETB post-primary schools. I was appointed as a permanent Director of Schools to oversee the work of this Directorate.

From a personal perspective, I am highly motivated by the long-term impact I contend that a school's ethos has on the school community. My interest in examining how it responds to the needs of diverse school communities stems from my own experiences of being a (closeted) gay man throughout my own educational experiences. My primary, post-primary and third-level education all took place in Catholic institutions. Although I do not recall ever being taught that being gay was a 'bad' thing, the total silence around any alternatives to heterosexuality left me utterly confused about my own emerging identity. Many years after my own Catholic education, the 'othering' of LGBTQ+ children is still a reality in some Catholic schools. In 2021, the Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA) issued guidelines to Catholic primary schools on Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE). The 'Introduction' to these guidelines states that "there is no such thing as an 'ethos free' approach to RSE" as neutral RSE "would disregard the sacredness and dignity of each human being as a child of God" (CPSMA, 2021, p. 2). It reminds teachers in Catholic schools that although LGBTQ+ identities can be *acknowledged* in *senior*[14] classes, "the Church's teaching in relation to marriage between a man and a woman cannot be omitted" (ibid., 2021, p. 3). Despite the significant changes to the experiences of LGBTQ+ people in recent years as a result of legislative and social developments over the past decade (2021, p. 114), Irish researchers remind us that issues still remain for LGBTQ+ teachers in Irish schools (Neary, Irwin-Gowran and Mcevoy, 2016; Egan and McDaid, 2019; Neary and Rasmussen, 2020; Gavigan, 2021). The Catholic Church's stance on same-sex marriages is significant for existing and potential school staff given the Church's

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[14] 'Senior' classes normally refer to 3rd -6th classes. Children in these classes normally range from 8-12 years old.

patronage function in 89% of Irish primary schools. As highlighted in a recent piece of research in Catholic schools (Ó'Cadhain, 2021) and at a recent INTO Conference (Roche and O'Brien, 2022), principals and teachers in these settings grapple with the tension between acknowledging school staff in same-sex marriages or relationships and the Catholic ethos of the school. Egan and McDaid (2019, p. 130), in a piece of research carried out during and directly after the Marriage Equality Referendum, found that LGBTQ+ teachers experience Irish schools as "heteronormative institutions wherein they are subject to routine and continued misrecognition based on their sexual orientation". They contend that this is particularly the case in Catholic schools. However, this is not unique to the Catholic sector only. Neary, Irwin-Gowran and McEvoy (2016) found, in a study across both Catholic and multi-denominational schools at the time of the Marriage Equality Referendum, that while there were significant issues in Catholic schools in terms of affirming LGBTQ+ identities, "assumptions that a multidenominational ethos was a guarantor of gender and sexuality equality was dispelled" by participants in their study (ibid., 2016, p. 20). They also found that some teachers working in Catholic schools, despite the stance of their patron, demonstrated a commitment to educating about homophobia, transphobia and sexuality identities. Indeed, Henry (2022) argues that denominational schools (be they Catholic, Jewish or Muslim) are well placed to affirm LGBTQ+ identities. He contends that because of these schools' experiences in responding to intra and inter-belief diversity, one cannot assume that affirming other diverse identities (including LGBTQ+ identities) is not possible in religious-run school.

As will be highlighted throughout the thesis, regardless of patron, there can be dissonances between any school's stated ethos and practices (Donnelly, 2000). This may be particularly the case in schools that espouse an egalitarian ethos because, in Irish primary schools, teachers from diverse backgrounds are underrepresented (Heinz and Keane, 2018). The

habitus of Irish teachers is heavily influenced by the fact that the vast majority of them have only experienced a Catholic education throughout their educational journey (Devine, 2013). Therefore, I believe that the assumption that multi-denominational schools respond in a meaningful way to the needs of diverse school communities must be critically examined.

As will be addressed in Chapter Four, I recognise the imperative of reflexivity on my part given my positionality both personally and professionally. The next section provides an overview of the study's conceptual framework.

1.7 Overview of Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is comprised of my ontological, epistemological and axiological stances, the theoretical framework and research methodology underpinning this study, and my position in the study as an 'insider researcher'(Saidin and Yaacob, 2016). Each aspect of my conceptual framework will be further unpacked in Chapter Four. However, it is important to disclose the philosophical assumptions underpinning all aspects of this thesis from the outset.

My ontological position rooted in *constructionism* is reflective of my belief that multiple realities exist as people interpret the world in different ways. This position is reflected in my research questions which explore 'how' the CNS ethos is conceptualised and enacted. Epistemologically, reflective of an interpretive paradigm, I consider myself a *social constructivist.* I contend that knowledge is acquired through mutual negotiation between the researcher and research participants (Bryman, 2016). As may be already evident to the reader, the values I bring to this study are egalitarian. Informed by my ontological, epistemological and axiological stances, my theoretical framework is made up of critical and liberal egalitarian theories (Gramsci, 1971; Bourdieu, 1986; May, 1999b; Baker *et al.*,

2009). The use of both types of theory is reflective of my complex understanding of my own position in relation to the study. I identify simultaneously as a person who enjoys the privilege of identifying as being from the dominant cultural, social class and linguistic background in Ireland *and* as a person who experiences the subordination that accompanies identifying as belonging to a minoritised background in terms of my sexual orientation and (non) religious identity. The use of liberal egalitarian theories also reflects the importance I place on all aspects of children's identity being recognised and affirmed in educational settings. Critical theories are used to move beyond this and facilitate the explication of ways in which schools may simultaneously espouse egalitarian values while at the same time suppressing the transformative possibilities of working within an egalitarian, CNS ethos in a diverse school context. I am conscious of what some might deem to be an incongruent use of liberal egalitarian and critical theories. However, as argued by Alvesson and Skoldberg's (2000, p. 127), as long as the researcher with a more liberal outlook recognises that there *are* taken-for-granted imbalanced power relations at play in the world, their use of critical theory to scrutinise a particular phenomenon can ameliorate the situation for those most affected by these hegemonic norms.

Methodologically, I employed a single case study research design to address the research questions and focused on one CNS with a diverse school community. Data was gathered using semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in the CNS model and staff in the case study school as they would provide the most valuable insights into the phenomenon being investigated. Given my professional involvement in the CNS model, I consider myself an 'insider researcher' in this study (Saidin and Yaacob, 2016). Chapter Four will unpack the measures taken to ensure the study's rigour and integrity.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

This introductory chapter has sought to provide a contextual background to this study and the study's research questions, aims and rationale. Chapter Two provides a detailed account of the study's theoretical framework. Drawing on this theoretical framework, Chapter Three provides a critical review of the literature pertaining to 'ethos' and how it is conceptualised in Catholic, 'multi-denominational' (ETB post-primary and CNSs) schools in response to diverse school communities. Chapter Four presents my Conceptual Framework and Research Design. It provides the rationale for the use of a single case study design, outlines the data collection and analysis processes used, the ethical considerations in the study and the strategies used to safeguard the rigour of the research. Chapter Five presents and critically examines the findings from the research under three broad headings "Conceptualisations of the CNS Ethos in the Case study School", "Developing Ethos through Fostering Partnerships with Parents" and "Striving to Affirm Diversity in the Curriculum". Finally, Chapter Six concludes the thesis by reminding the reader of the structure of the thesis and making explicit links between the 'Findings and Discussion' chapter (Chapter Five) and the research questions and aims. It addresses the aims of this research by advancing specific and detailed policy recommendations and highlighting the study's contribution to the theory and empirical research on multi-denominational education. It outlines the limitations of this study and suggests areas for future research.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter detailed the historical and political context within which this study is located prior to delineating the research questions and aims. It defined the key terms which are central to this study. It then provided a rationale for undertaking this research at this time. It outlined my positionality in relation to the study both personally and professionally and

provided an overview of the study's conceptual framework. Finally, it oriented the reader by detailing the thesis' structure and briefly summarised the purpose of each chapter. The next chapter explicates the theoretical framework underpinning this research.

Chapter Two – Theoretical Framework

> The very discourse of 'respecting', 'celebrating', 'valuing', and 'appreciating', diversity is problematic because it has the effect of denying the possibility of a national 'we' which is itself diverse…Rather than promoting equality, models of inclusion based on celebrating diversity reinforce the privileged status of culturally dominant groups within society by positioning them as the 'embracer', or 'tolerator' of difference, who get to decree the acceptability (or otherwise) of the ethnic Other (Bryan and Bracken, 2011, p. 107)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims is to explicate the theoretical framework underpinning this study. This framework comprises critical and liberal egalitarian theories, which are used to critically examine how the CNS ethos is conceptualised by key stakeholders in the CNS model and conceptualised and enacted by school staff in one diverse primary school. While Chapter Four provides further details of how the selected theoretical framework was used to analyse the empirical data, brief links will be made to the research questions throughout this chapter while outlining and unpacking the selected theories.

It is argued that the use of the inclusive language used to describe the CNS ethos (see examples at Appendix A) "fall lightly off the tongue of most people in Western nations" (Sleeter and Montecinos, 1999, p. 114). As the introductory quote from Bryan and Bracken (2011) suggests, this must be critically examined. To support such a critical analysis of how an official ethos underpinned by egalitarian values is conceptualised and enacted, this chapter firstly examines Gramsci's theory of 'hegemony' and how such a hegemony is used to maintain a taken-for-granted social order. Building on this, Bourdieu's key concepts of *habitus,* field, capital, and 'symbolic violence' and how, from a critical perspective, they contribute to the privilege or subordination experienced by those from dominant or minoritised backgrounds are outlined. The concept of 'equality' is further examined using the conceptions and dimensions underpinning Baker *et al.'s* (2009) Equality Framework.

Discussion of these dimensions are further enhanced by drawing on theories of liberal and critical forms of multicultural education.

2.2 Hegemony and its role in Education

Gramsci's theory of hegemony provides a useful lens for analysing and exploring the possible reasons behind the continued over-representation of Catholic schools in Ireland, the emergence of the multi-denominational sector and the Catholic Church's influence on shaping its form and remit. This analysis will be outlined in Chapter Three. It will also be used in Chapter Five to analyse the data generated from research participants, particularly regarding the initial religious-centric conceptualisations of the CNS ethos. It is also relevant to the other critical theories outlined in this chapter and, therefore, a helpful starting point.

Gramsci's writings do not offer one conclusive definition of 'hegemony' (Lears, 1985, p. 568). However, one can deduce from interrogating his seminal text, 'Selections from the Prison Notebooks' (1971), that he understands the concept as a form of social domination achieved through consent rather than political or physical coercion. It may also explain how people from dominant groups are socialised to accept their privileged position as normal and well-deserved rather than being achieved through ongoing systemic inequality (Bell, 2016, p. 9). Gramsci (1971) maintains that those in subordinate groups also accept the inevitability of inequality and are complicit in its reproduction. For power to be maintained by a particular group over a significant period of time, it must be gained with the *consent* of subordinate groups (Jay, 2003, p. 7). From a Gramscian perspective, this is achieved when subordinate groups' consciousness is 'saturated' so that they see relationships of domination and oppression as inevitable or as 'common sense' (May, 1994; Jones, 2006). Questions of power and subordination are of particular relevance to this study as it

examines how the egalitarian CNS ethos is conceptualised and enacted by key stakeholders and school staff from the dominant culture as they respond to a diverse school community.

Gramsci (1971) attributes the inevitability of inequality to those in power understanding that the most effective way of maintaining the *status quo* is by controlling the values systems in society rather than any form of overt coercion. He considers ideological control a key vehicle to legitimise inequality of power. The hegemonic manipulation of people's values is most effectively achieved through "the clever exploitation of religion, education, or popular national culture" (Kearney, 1994, p. 173). Although totalitarian regimes are overt in their manipulation of ideology and values through education and the media, critical theorists argue that similar processes are covertly at play in liberal democracies (Heywood, 1994, p. 99). The use of Gramsci's theories of hegemony in this study allows for a critical analysis of whether the CNS ethos, as conceptualised and enacted by participants, either maintains or challenges the *status quo* of existing unequal power relations.

Lea (2010, p. 33) argues that although hegemony is an effective mechanism to legitimise inequality, "it is not a watertight process". "Counter-hegemonies" occur when the taken-for-granted patterns, traditions and norms in society are challenged (Gramsci, 1971). However, according to critical theorists, these challenges rarely bring about fundamental changes to the *status quo*. The dominant groups are aware of the threat of counter-hegemonies and understand that power is best maintained by granting certain 'concessions' to subordinate groups. These concessions appease minoritised groups' desire for their needs to be recognised while simultaneously securing their continued allegiance to the overall hegemonic structures which maintain their subordination (Jay, 2003, p. 6).

While the emergence of the CNS model can be considered an example of 'counter-hegemony' against the dominance of Church-led education, this thesis explores whether it

is a true example of an equalising and empowering education for all or whether it merely gives the illusion of equality while simultaneously transmitting dominant hegemonic narratives onto both dominant and minoritised groups. Critical theories remind the reader that it is imperative not to assume that multi-denominational schools, whose ethos is based on egalitarian values, significantly challenge the *status quo* in terms of inequality. This is the case internationally and in jurisdictions that have secular education systems, as it is argued by critical theorists that schools "act as agents of cultural and ideological hegemony" by socialising children to accept the norms established by the dominant classes (Apple, 2019, p. 6). Jay (2003, p. 7) argues that through both the formal and hidden curricula (instrumental goals of the school's ethos) and the structures in place (organisational goals of the school's ethos), minoritised children are taught the hegemonic "values, ideas, objectives, and the cultural political meanings of the dominant class". Pierre Bourdieu's key concepts outlined in the next section provide invaluable insights into how this may take place.

2.3 Bourdieu on Equality in Education

Considering this study's focus on 'ethos' and how it can be conceptualised and enacted in response to a diverse school community, Bourdieu's theories of *habitus*, field, and capital are particularly useful in examining how the school's ethos (organisational *habitus*) interacts with the various forms of capital possessed by minoritised groups.

Interestingly, Bourdieu's educational experience was in the French secular system of *laïcité*[15]. Therefore, his (in)equality in education theories are not primarily based on the hegemonic dominance of ecclesiastical authorities in schools, as is the case in Ireland. As

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[15] 'Laïcité' is the constitutional principle of secularism in France that discourages religious influence on state policies.

his critique of the education system and its role in reproducing broader societal inequalities are borne out of his experiences in a secular system with less Church influence, his work is particularly useful in critically examining how the CNS ethos, based on egalitarian values and no official connections to the religious Churches, is conceptualised and enacted in a multi-denominational school setting.

Bourdieu argues that one must forget about the myth of the school "as a liberating force" so that the education system can be seen "in the true light of its social uses, that is, as one of the foundations of domination and of the legitimation of domination" (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 5). Similar to Gramsci, Bourdieu argues that schools are essentially middle-class institutions with those in power transmitting onto children, regardless of background, society's dominant culture (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 483). Therefore, education systems are skewed in favour of children from middle-class backgrounds (Devine, 2019, p. 15). This transmission of the dominant hegemonic culture ensures the continued privileging of those already privileged and the continued subordination of those already disadvantaged. According to Bourdieu, the purpose of education is to reproduce the *status quo* rather than to radically transform the inequalities that exist between dominant and non-dominant groups in society (Maton, 2014, p. 74). Andrews (2019, p. ix) describes education which maintains the *status quo* as 'schooling' where children are moulded into accepting a "racially unjust social order". Schools may be ideally placed to ensure the unquestioned reproduction of the *status quo* considering arguments that they are "one of the most influential socialisation domains in a young person's life" (Darmody, Smyth and McCoy, 2012, p. 12). However, Andrews (2019, p. x) argues that "a true education is a fundamental part of liberation" for minoritised groups.

Given the expressive egalitarian goals of the CNS ethos, it is imperative to critically examine whether the case study school's diverse community is socialised to recognise and

challenge the unquestioned power dynamics which prevail in society or whether the *status quo* is protected and reproduced under the guise of equality.

2.3.1 Key Concepts

Bourdieu contends that the reproduction of privilege and inequality in schools results from three main factors – *habitus*, field and capital, and how they interact with one another. *Habitus,* similar to ethos*,* can be described as the values, attitudes and beliefs that people hold as a result of how their background and experiences have socialised them to date (Bourdieu, 2020). It is made up of the social and cultural experiences individuals have encountered throughout their lives (May, 1994, p. 24). However, it is not only formed by one's family, social class, ethnic or religious background but also the collective history of the groups to which one belongs (Reay, 2004, p. 434). A person's *habitus* is deeply embedded and has an exceptionally powerful influence on how they interact with the world. One's *habitus* frames the opportunities and possibilities one sees as open to them. It "captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we then make choices to act in certain ways and not others" (Maton, 2014, p. 51). Bourdieu used the concept to understand society's 'unwritten rules' and how people's internalised frameworks result in working class children ending up in working class jobs and privileged children moving into more professional positions (Reay, 2004; Maton, 2014). The concept of *habitus* is useful to critically examine how the *habitus* of research participants and the school interacts with the *habitus* of various members of the school's diverse school community. It is also a useful tool in examining how the *habitus* of minoritised groups may act as an enabler or barrier to their inclusion and participation in the school.

How one experiences privilege or disadvantage is not dependent on one's *habitus* alone. More important is the relationship between one's *habitus* and the social context or *field* the *habitus* enters (the case study school in this research). *Habitus* and field are relational structures that influence each other (Maton, 2014, p. 56). A school is one of the most important fields a child's *habitus* will encounter as the school's ethos (or organisational *habitus* as will be outlined in Chapter Three) can have a profound impact on the child's *habitus*. A school's ethos "wields a certain amount of power to condition people to think and act in an 'acceptable' manner" (Donnelly, 2000, pp. 134–135).

Comparisons have been drawn between Bourdieu's concept of 'field' and a football field where different players are given different positions, determining where the players can go. Players need to learn the rules of the game to succeed. However, unlike a football field, the social field is never level, with some possessing more advantages than others (by understanding the unwritten rules), allowing some to move further than others (Thomson, 2014, p. 67). Where one is positioned in the field depends on how much one's *habitus* aligns or otherwise with the *habitus* of the field. However, unlike positions on a football field, one's privileged or subordinate position in the social field is not glaringly obvious to players. Critical theorists argue that as a result of the hegemonic messages internalised throughout one's lifetimes, people tend to accept and take as natural their position on this uneven playfield and behave accordingly (Maton, 2014, p. 68). This natural acceptance of privileged and subordinate positions on the field is as a result of the field's *doxa*, or natural "logic of practice", which ensures that no one questions the legitimacy of their position or those who put them in it (Deer, 2014, p. 117). Ultimately, for Bourdieu, fields, such as schools, are battlegrounds where players compete for advantage and status by using and accumulating different forms of capital (Thomson, 2014, p. 67).

Bourdieu shared Gramsci's critique of Marxism's narrow focus on the economic realm. Where Marxism considers one's level of economic capital as the main issue associated with power inequality (Robinson and Díaz, 2006, p. 12), the Cultural Reproduction Theory advanced by Bourdieu takes into account other forms of capital also (Jæger, 2009; McGinnity, Darmody and Murray, 2015). For Bourdieu, capital presents itself in three fundamental ways – economic, cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 16). Economic capital is tangible and can be measured based on the amount of money or assets one possesses. Cultural and social capital are more intangible. Bourdieu asserts that these non-material forms of capital should be considered to be equally important to economic resources (Jæger, 2009, p. 1946). Cultural capital concerns one's cultural knowledge, tastes and language. Social capital relates to the social networks to which one has access. All three forms of capital are interrelated. One form of capital can be converted into another through a process Bourdieu describes as "transubstantiation" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 16). Examples of this are when individuals use their economic capital to pay for access to leading educational institutions and gain elite academic qualifications. These educational qualifications, achieved because of economic capital, increase one's cultural capital. People also use their social capital or the social networks to which they have access to enter high-powered and well-paid positions. This use of one's social capital boosts the amount of economic capital an individual possesses. Bourdieu (1986, p. 17) argues that it is imperative to recognise the links between the different forms of capital a child possesses and their educational achievement. This recognition disrupts meritocratic views of a child's academic success depending on their natural aptitudes alone.

Bourdieu asserts that the value of one's cultural capital is determined by the sum of one's *habitus* and the 'field' this *habitus* enters. Although everyone possesses cultural capital, its value is dependent on the social recognition that the field attributes to various forms of

cultural capital (Crossley, 2014, p. 86). Those considered to have a well-formed *habitus* in the field have higher levels of cultural capital (Moore, 2014, p. 100). Like any other field, schools operate within the parameters of a particular *habitus*, legitimising the dominance of certain forms of cultural and social capital over others (May, 1994, p. 24). It is argued that the cultural capital in education systems internationally is based on the cultural capital of the dominant group in society (Darmody, 2011a, p. 226). McGinnity, Darmody and Murray (2015, p. 2) claim that minoritised families' cultural and social capital backgrounds reduces in value through the migration process. The value of the social and cultural capital they accrued in their home countries does not translate in the receiving country. Parents from minoritised backgrounds do not have the same 'feel for the game' as those from the dominant group, making home-school links more complicated (Darmody and McCoy, 2011, p. 145). The low cultural capital possessed by families from minoritised backgrounds places these children at a severe disadvantage. It is argued that those with highly valued cultural capital, on the other hand, enjoy increased chances of being treated preferentially by teachers and performing better in the education system (Jæger, 2009, p. 1946). As the mismatch between home and school cultures has a long-term impact on the life chances of children (McGinnity, Darmody and Murray, 2015, p. 3), Bourdieu considers the misrecognition of minoritised groups' non-dominant *habitus* and their social and cultural capital as a form of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu, 1996).

Bryan (2010, p. 255) defines 'symbolic violence' as "a form of domination that is exercised on individuals in a subtle and symbolic (as opposed to physical) manner, through such channels as communication and cognition". Bourdieu's use of the word 'violence' is striking at first glance as it suggests something that is brutally obvious to both those perpetuating the violence and those who are victims of it. However, this is not the case. Similar to the nature of cultural hegemony, 'symbolic violence' is subtle, and, according to Bourdieu and

Passeron (1990, p. 4), its imposition is made legitimate "by concealing power relations which are the basis of its force". Rather than being physical and overt, it is achieved as a result of its misrecognition as the natural order of things (Bryan, 2009c, p. 299). Bourdieu (1996, p. 4) contends that it is so well concealed and taken for granted that dominated groups contribute to their own domination. This assertion reflects Gramsci's thesis on the impact of cultural hegemony and Freire's (2000, p. 45) argument that as subordinated groups' perception of themselves as oppressed is completely impaired "by their submersion in the reality of oppression", the *status quo* goes unchallenged.

As the CNS ethos claims to treat all members of the school community equally, regardless of any aspect of their identity, a key consideration in this research is how the *habitus* and various forms of capital possessed by the minoritised members of the school community impact their experiences in the school from the perspective of research participants. 'Symbolic violence', as a theory, is useful in this study to conceptualise the negative impact that misrecognitions of the *habitus* and various forms of capital possessed by minoritised groups have on these groups. The next section explores the dimensions of Baker *et al.'s* (2009) Equality Framework from both critical and liberal egalitarian perspectives.

2.4 Conceptions and Dimensions of Equality

The conceptions and dimensions underpinning Baker *et al.'s* (2009) Equality Framework are also particularly useful to this study. It enables a multi-faceted examination of how the CNS ethos underpinned by egalitarian values responds to the needs of a diverse school community. The Framework identifies five different but interconnected dimensions of equality: equality of resources; equality of respect and recognition; equality of power; equality of love, care and solidarity; and equality of working and learning. Crowley (2010, p. 121) argues that it is imperative to examine equality using multiple lenses, as examining

these dimensions in isolation leads to fragmented and ineffective responses to inequality. He argues that inequality "is shaped around three interlocking forms of injustice – economic, cultural and political". He contends that dealing with any one of these in isolation only serves the interest of those in power as it ensures that the *status quo* of inequality remains. Bearing this in mind and the dimensions of equality most relevant to Norman's (2003) conceptualisation of ethos as a school's expressive, instrumental and organisational goals, this study looks in particular at 'equality of respect and recognition' and 'equality of power'.

2.4.1 Conceptions of Equality

One of the main issues contributing to the difficulty in defining 'equality' is that although egalitarians share a commitment to the ideal, they conceptualise it on different levels (Parekh, 2006; Baker *et al.*, 2009; Straw, cited in Bassot, 2012). Baker *et al.* (2009, pp. 23-42) distinguish between three conceptions of equality which exist in contemporary egalitarian theory - 'basic equality', 'liberal egalitarianism' and 'equality of condition', also known as 'radical equality' (Lynch, 1999, p, 12). Basic equality is premised on the idea that all human beings are of equal worth (ibid., 1999, p. 2). It is "the cornerstone of all egalitarian thinking" (Baker *et al*., 2009, p. 23). However, Baker *et al.* (2009) do not engage to any great extent with this form of equality. They justify the lack of focus on 'basic equality' by arguing that in and of itself, it is an inadequate conception of equality. They claim that although those who subscribe to this form of equality are concerned about protecting people from being treated inhumanely, they subscribe to many forms of inequality. Therefore, they focus their attention on the more ambitious levels of liberal egalitarianism and equality of condition.

Liberal egalitarianism advocates protecting basic civic and political rights such as freedom of speech, equality before the law and freedom to own property (Lynch, 1999, p. 14). It addresses inequalities by establishing and protecting the minimum entitlements everyone should enjoy so that they have equal opportunities to compete for advantage in a stratified and unequal system (Baker *et al.*, 2009, p. 25). It has made significant contributions to the egalitarian agenda by establishing minimum standards and promoting non-discrimination with its focus on human rights and anti-discrimination legislation (ibid., 2009, p. 32). An example of such legislation in Ireland is the Equal Status Act (2000) which made it illegal, for the first time, to discriminate based on nine different grounds.

Equality of condition (radical egalitarianism), which has its origins in Marxism (Lynch, 1999, p. 288), is by far the "most radical and controversial face of egalitarianism" (Heywood, 1994, p. 230). Radical egalitarians argue that liberal egalitarianism is more concerned with the redistribution of inequality rather than its elimination as it takes inequalities of status, resources, work, and power as inevitable realities, ignoring the deeply ingrained power relations in social institutions that lead to these inequalities (Lynch, 1999; Baker *et al.*, 2009). On the other hand, equality of condition rejects the hegemonic tendency to accept the inevitability of inequality that basic and liberal egalitarians have normalised (Lynch, 1999, p. 13). It does this by challenging previously unquestioned hegemonic inequalities of power and privilege. Where liberal egalitarianism can be summarised as focusing on 'equality of opportunity', radical egalitarianism can be summarised as focusing on 'equality of outcome' (Terzi, 2010, p. 6). Gramsci, Bourdieu, and Baker *et al.* (2009) locate themselves firmly in the equality of outcome or radical egalitarian tradition.

Critical theorists argue that a focus on equality of opportunity makes it easier to overlook how institutions, such as schools, systemically reproduce unequal outcomes (Darmody, 2011a, p. 224). They claim that the assumption that all opportunities are open to everyone,

regardless of their background, locates the responsibility for inequality in particular individuals and groups (May, 1994, p. 1). It also ignores the reality that although some opportunities may seem open to all, those from minoritised backgrounds may lack the cultural capital required to access these opportunities (Parekh, 2006, p. 241). As 'equality' is a core value espoused by the CNS ethos, a key question underpinning this research relates to how research participants understand and live out this fundamental aspect of the school's expressive goals.

To enable the critical examination of this, the next section explores the concept of equality under the dimensions of Baker *et al.'s* (2009) Equality Framework most relevant to this study drawing on both liberal egalitarian and equality of condition (critical) perspectives. The explication of these dimensions is further supported by theories of Liberal Multicultural Education (closely aligned with liberal egalitarianism) and Critical Multicultural Education (closely aligned with radical egalitarianism) (Baker *et al.*, 2009, p. 35).

2.4.2 Dimensions of Equality

The most relevant dimensions of Baker *et al.'s* (2009) Equality Framework to this study are 'equality of respect and recognition' and 'equality of power'. Considering 'equality of respect and recognition' from both liberal egalitarian and critical/radical egalitarian perspectives is particularly useful in examining how a school ethos' instrumental goals can respond to diverse members of the school community through the formal and hidden curricula. Examining issues of 'equality of power' from these perspectives is particularly useful when considering how minoritised groups can be included and excluded from decision-making processes that affect their lives in schools (organisational goals).

2.4.2.1 Equality of Respect and Recognition

Parekh (2006, p. 9) argues that multicultural societies have one dominant cultural community, just as in a class-divided society where there is a dominant class. Devine (2019, p. 14) argues that for education to have an impact "it must connect with all aspects of the child's cultural and social repertoire". However, all minoritised groups experience some forms of mis- or non-recognition in society, particularly those "least endowed with the cultural and linguistic capital valued by the school and wider society" (Bryan, 2010, p. 253). This is a central consideration in diverse school contexts as peoples' identities "deeply matter to them," and the level of recognition and respect these identities receive from others significantly influence individuals' self-esteem (Parekh, 2006, p. 8). Taylor (1997, p. 25) contends that one's identity is shaped by the levels of recognition or misrecognition it receives from others. He argues that the non-recognition of someone's identity "can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being". Counter to this, Devine (2009) argues that when children feel a sense of belonging and recognition in school, it leads to feelings of self-efficacy and motivates them to learn. How the case study school's ethos (expressive, instrumental, and organisational goals) recognises or misrecognises the identities (*habitus)* of its diverse school community is central to this study.

Although both liberal and radical (critical) egalitarians agree on the importance of equality of respect and recognition of diversity, they conceptualise it in different ways. Liberal egalitarianism advocates for *'tolerance'* of difference while radical egalitarianism promotes the '*celebration'[16]* of difference (Baker *et al.*, 2009, pp. 34-36). Radical

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[16]As indicated in the chapter's introductory quote, 'celebrating' diversity is often associated with tokenistic gestures from the dominant group to 'celebrate' the 'Other' (Bryan, 2010), Baker *et al.* (2009) use the term as a positive way to critically engage with both dominant and subordinate groups' identities.

egalitarians argue that 'tolerance' is a minimal form of equality of respect and recognition and contend that "equality of respect demands moving beyond grudging acceptance of difference to affirming it" (Parekh, 2006, p. 1). O'Donnell (2015, p. 251) outlines how other words such as 'welcoming' have been used to move beyond the concept of 'tolerance'. However, she argues that while the language of welcoming is appropriate in domestic settings where you welcome someone into your home, it is "imperialist and egoistic" when applied to people who already live in and share "a metaphorical home in a national territory, and who often already have rights and bear responsibilities as citizens". Where one may be tolerant of others, one may still believe in one's own superiority (Baker *et al.*, 2009, p. 34). The presence of the language of 'tolerance' and 'celebration' will be carefully examined when explicating participants' conceptualisations of the CNS ethos (expressive goals).

Another significant difference between liberal egalitarianism and equality of condition's conceptualisation of equality of respect and recognition is how they treat the public and private spheres of life (Baker *et al.*, 2009, pp. 34-36). Liberal egalitarians draw a clear distinction between the two spheres. They contend that everyone is entitled to an equal public status where differences in people's private spheres of life, such as one's religion or sexual orientation, are put to one side so that people can interact based on their shared identity as citizens (ibid., 2009, p. 26). Individual and group differences are tolerated as long as they respect fundamental human rights. From this perspective, although one may fundamentally disagree with the values of others, no attempt is made to indoctrinate others with one's own value systems. Impartiality in terms of people's beliefs is of paramount importance. As religious beliefs, values, and cultural norms are firmly rooted in the private sphere, they are off limits for public regulation or egalitarian scrutiny from a liberal egalitarian perspective.

Radical egalitarians, on the other hand, disagree with such a clear distinction between the public and private spheres as they claim that a lack of scrutiny of the private sphere has made unequal cultural and religious practices exempt from any form of public challenge (ibid., 2009, p. 35). Although Baker *et al.* (2009) advocate for the 'celebration' of diversity, this does not require all differences in beliefs to be blindly accepted without critique. They claim that the use of the language of 'celebrating' diversity "can mislead us into thinking that it is wrong to criticise beliefs we disagree with, that the politically correct view is to cherish all differences" (ibid., 2009, p. 35). However, this is not the case. Radical egalitarians argue that all beliefs should be open to challenge, whether they belong to dominant or minoritised groups. They contend that one shows more respect for others by critically engaging with their beliefs rather than ignoring differences and treating them as 'other'. The challenge is in opening a space where critical discussion can take place on both dominant and subordinate views, where people from all groups are listened to and are open to their own beliefs being critically examined (ibid., 2009, p. 35). The critical engagement with the dominant group's views as well as subordinate views ensures the avoidance of assuming that it is only the minoritised view that must assimilate into one hegemonic culture, as Taylor (1997, p. 43) claims that many "difference-blind principles of the politics of equal dignity" tend to do. This form of "blind" liberalism, he argues, is "a kind of pragmatic contradiction, a particularism masquerading as the universal" (ibid., 1997, p. 44). Some of the diversity variables considered in this study fall under the 'private sphere' category i.e., religions/beliefs and sexual orientation. Therefore, Baker *et al.'s* (2009) distinctions between critical and liberal egalitarian approaches will be helpful in critically examining how the school engages with these identity markers.

Kavanagh (2021, p. 215) contends that embedding values such as respect for difference, inclusion and equity into all aspects of school life is "complex and challenging". Therefore,

it is not surprising that a lack of respect and recognition is one of the main inequalities minoritised groups experience in education settings (Baker *et al*., 2009, p. 154). It could be argued that this is particularly the case in an Irish context due to the mono-religious nature of the current primary education landscape. Baker *et al.* (2009) describe any inequality experienced as a result of one's race, religion/beliefs, ability, gender, sexuality, home language etc., as status-related inequalities. As these are located in the 'symbolic realm', they are difficult to quantify. They are expressed in terms of the level of inclusion and exclusion of the *habitus* of minoritised groups in and from schools, curricula, and textbooks. If one's cultural traditions, practices and lived experiences are not included in the child's educational experience, schools themselves become sites where one's identity is denied, and one's voice is silenced (Lynch, 1999, p. 17). When minoritised children's values, perspectives and life worlds are made invisible by the dominant group in schools, they begin to view themselves through this deficit lens (Lynch and Lodge, 2002, p. 131). The school replaces their cultural capital, norms and values with the cultural capital, values and norms of the middle-classes who hold positions of power in the school (Lea, 2010, p. 36). This is of particular concern in an Irish context as studies have found that textbooks used in primary school classrooms are unreflective of its diverse population and reinforce stereotypes of particular minoritised groups (Kavanagh, 2013; Moloney and O'Toole, 2018). As CNSs were established as a response to increased diversity in Irish society, how the case study school ensures that its diverse school community experiences equality of respect and recognition is a central aspect of this research.

Lea (2010, p. 35) argues that schools and curricula that do not reflect minoritised children's real lives and identities are examples of a hegemonic educational practice. The establishment of the CNS model could be considered a counter-hegemony to the dominance of mono-religious schools, which many claim do not respond appropriately to the needs of

a diverse society (O'Loinsigh, 2000; Kavanagh, 2013). Interestingly, the GMGY Curriculum defines a 'multi-denominational' ethos in the following way:

> (multi-denominational schools) promote culturally responsive education and uphold and respect the equality of beliefs and values held by children, parents, staff and members of the wider community. These schools aim to develop culturally responsive teachers and curricula, promote culturally responsive and inclusive school environments, and enable children and parents to be active members of the school community. Being a culturally responsive school involves understanding differences within their diverse populations, understanding the norms and values of these diverse populations and being sensitive to the transitions of children between home and school, and adapting the communication with parents to be responsive to cultural norms (NCCA, 2018a, p. 39).

The emphasis on promoting a "culturally responsive education" throughout this definition indicates the CNS ethos's commitment to ensuring that minoritised groups experience equality of respect and recognition. This is significant as, unlike charges outlined in Chapter Three against denominational schools and the challenges they face in delivering effective multicultural education (O'Loinsigh, 2000; Kavanagh, 2013); it is argued that there is a natural link between the aims and values of multicultural education and common (multi-denominational) schooling (Callan, 1997; Dhillon and Halstead, 2003; Halstead, 2007).

In examining how the case study school provides a "culturally responsive" or intercultural form of education[17], it is useful to examine these concepts from liberal, and radical egalitarian perspectives. Baker *et al.* (2009) argue that liberal egalitarians and radical egalitarians advocate for different forms of multicultural education. Liberal egalitarians promote liberal forms of multicultural education while radical egalitarians advocate for more critical forms of multicultural education. Ladson-Billings' (1995; 2014) work on "culturally relevant pedagogies" is a useful framework for examining these approaches as

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[17] Where the term 'multicultural education' is prominent in the US, Canada, UK, Australia and New Zealand, the term most commonly used in European countries, including Ireland, is 'Intercultural Education' (IE). While they vary theoretically, empirical research indicates that there is little difference at the level of practice (Kavanagh, 2013). Participants also use the terms 'multicultural' and 'intercultural' education interchangeably. As a consequence, the terms 'multicultural' and intercultural' education are used interchangeably in this thesis.

it could be argued that it contains elements of both liberal and critical forms of multicultural education.

The impetus behind Ladson-Billings' development of the concept of "culturally relevant pedagogy" (CRP) was to instil in student teachers an appreciation for the assets African-American children brought to the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 74). It is based on three main propositions. Firstly, all children, including those from minoritised backgrounds, should experience academic success. Secondly, children should develop or maintain their 'cultural competence'. Finally, children "must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the *status quo* of the current social order". It could be argued that a commitment to academic success and developing the children's cultural competence is common to both liberal and radical egalitarians. However, the level of commitment to developing the children's 'critical consciousness' is the biggest difference between liberal and radical egalitarian approaches to multicultural education. As indicated earlier, the congruence between CNS policy interpretations of CRP relative to Ladson-Billings' work and the enactment of CRP in schools will be critically engaged with in Chapter Five.

2.4.2.1.1 Liberal Multicultural Education

Liberal forms of multicultural education aim to close the achievement gap by promoting equality of respect and recognition and cultural pluralism by providing children with opportunities to recognise and affirm differences, thus increasing the self-esteem and academic achievement of those from minoritised groups (Kavanagh, 2021, p. 216). Lea (2010, p. 34) argues that multicultural education is an example of counter-hegemony which challenges the "Eurocentric and in that sense monocultural content and ethos of the prevailing system of education" (Parekh, 2006, p. 225). Parekh also maintains that where

monocultural education imprisons children "within the framework of their own culture" (ibid., 2006, p. 226), a multicultural education, on the other hand, equips them with the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and values necessary to live in a diverse society.

Ladson-Billings (1995, p. 161) contends that teachers can develop children's 'cultural competence' by utilising their cultural experiences as a resource for providing culturally relevant education. Such approaches disrupt unequal teacher-child power relations and the hegemonic tendencies for children to be seen as passive recipients of knowledge from the all-knowing teacher (Kavanagh, 2021, p. 223). Internationally, liberal forms of multicultural education are the predominant framework used to respond to difference in schools (Robinson and Díaz, 2006, p. 70). However, it is widely argued by critical theorists that it is overly concerned with developing minoritised children's self-esteem through the representation of their diverse identities in the curriculum rather than on improving their life chances and outcomes (Dhillon & Halstead, 2003; Fischer, 2016; Kalantzis & Cope, 1999; Kavanagh, 2013; May, 1999, 2004; May & Sleeter, 2010; Nieto, 1999, 2004; Parekh, 2006; Robinson and Diaz, 2006; Sleeter & Montecinos, 1999; Stokke & Lybæk, 2018). Liberal forms of multicultural education can be used as "diversity awareness programmes" which prepare children from the dominant group to study or work overseas, rather than as a means of "supporting them to engage with and interrogate societal power dynamics" (O'Toole, Joseph and Nyaluke, 2019, p. 185).

Ladson-Billings (2014), in more recent years, influenced by Paris' (2012) re-imagining of her initial work, has reconceptualised "culturally relevant pedagogy" into "culturally sustaining pedagogy". A rationale behind this was that many educators who are committed to culturally relevant pedagogy fail to recognise the diversity within cultural groups and either dull or simply do not engage in the critical elements of culturally relevant pedagogy (ibid., 2014, p. 77). In her 2.0 remix article (2014, p. 82), she outlines how she has seen

what were meant to be examples of CRP that bear no resemblance to her understanding of the concept. In particular, she is critical of those who add a few images into textbooks or classroom displays and deems this "culturally relevant" (ibid., 2014, p. 82). Kavanagh (2021, p. 224) makes a similar assertion about Irish classrooms and contends that teachers tend to emphasise drawing on the experiences of minoritised children rather than "exploring critically the structural, macro root causes and effects of social injustices". Similarly, O'Toole (2015, p. 90) contends that there is an "inherent conservatism" in Ireland's efforts at intercultural education, which she claims lacks any robust measures to tackle inequalities meaningfully. These arguments echo Lynch's (2018) concern about the apolitical discourse surrounding 'diversity'. May and Sleeter (2010, p. 3) argue that the "affirmational and politically-muted discourses on 'culture' and cultural recognition" fail to recognise the systemic and structural inequalities experienced by minoritised groups. Bryan (2009c, 2009b, 2010; Bryan and Bracken, 2011) equates these "additive" and "tokenistic" (Banks, 1993) approaches to multicultural education forms of 'symbolic violence'. She claims that a limited focus on incorporating diverse cultural content into the existing curriculum only serves to trick minoritised groups into believing they are being included. She argues that liberal forms of multicultural education are an effort "to appease and accommodate minority groups' concerns about their lack of representation in the curriculum which prevents disruption to the *status quo*" (2009b, p. 312). Similarly, O'Toole, Joseph and Nyaluke (2019, p. 185) argue that intercultural education that fails to take a critical perspective is a form of 'symbolic violence' as it "remains in the safe domain of celebration" rather than bringing about meaningful change.

Such assertions highlight how liberal forms of multicultural education could be considered a 'concession' to the prevailing Euro-centric cultural hegemony rather than a genuine counter-hegemony as they ensure that awareness of inequalities amongst dominant groups

are "grounded in Others' experiences of discrimination and not on their experiences of privilege" (Bryan, 2009a, p. 236). In general, empirical research in the Irish context indicates that intercultural approaches are reflective of weaker forms of multicultural education (Bryan, 2009a; Bryan and Bracken, 2011; Kavanagh, 2013).

2.4.2.1.2   Critical Multicultural Education

Critical forms of multicultural education which focus on developing children's 'critical consciousness' (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014) are advocated for by radical egalitarians as a direct challenge to the issues raised concerning liberal forms of multicultural education. It requires schools to move beyond the language of 'peaceful co-existence' (Dhillon and Halstead, 2003, p. 159) and to "unmask the reproductive processes" where a school's *habitus* or ethos favours certain cultural capital, values and practices over others (May, 1999, p. 33). May and Sleeter (2010, p. 10) argue that Critical Multicultural Education provides the most effective analytical tool to challenge various forms of unequal power relations experienced by all minoritised groups. They claim that unlike other critical theories that focus on one form of oppression over others, such as Critical Race Theory's emphasis on race, Queer Theory's focus on sexuality, Feminism's concentration on gender, Marxism's focus on socio-economic status, Critical Multicultural Education recognises the intersectionality of inequality. This multi-faceted approach is complementary to Bourdieu's and Baker *et al.'s* conceptualisations of equality. The 'critical' element is essential as it addresses concerns concern about the apolitical use of the term 'diversity' (May and Sleeter, 2010; Lynch, 2018).

From a critical perspective, the curriculum must reflect the realities of the lives of all children through the provision of culturally relevant pedagogies. It must also deal with the inequities and injustices experienced by minoritised groups (Lea, 2010, p. 43). Change to

the hegemonic *status-quo* of unequal power relations between dominant and minoritised groups is only possible if individuals "possess the agency to engage in praxis by naming and at least challenging these forces" (Lea, 2010, p. 37). Bartolomé (2010, p. 49) argues that Critical Multicultural Education is a form of "conscientisation" (Freire, 2000) that replaces naïve understandings of the world with a more critical awareness of the realities of inequality. May and Sleeter (2010, p. 9) also describe it from a Freirean perspective as "a dialogical process in which the teacher, acting as a partner with students, helps them to examine the world critically and politically". Such approaches allow teachers to move beyond superficial, apolitical, and tokenistic approaches to difference by engaging in pedagogical strategies which enable children to think critically about difference, inequality, and power relations (Robinson and Díaz, 2006, p. 79). By engaging in this process, "there is a possibility of institutional and eventual societal transformation" (Kavanagh, 2021, p. 216). An over-focus on the integration of diversity in the curriculum, on the other hand, has "rarely pushed students to consider critical perspectives on policy and practice that may have a direct impact on their lives and communities" (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 77).

Fischer (2016, p. 86) argues that liberal egalitarian conceptualisations of 'culture' as something fixed and static that should be universally *tolerated* (Jackson, 2005; Robinson and Díaz, 2006) "runs the risk of bypassing or rejecting out of hand any critical analysis of cultural realities since the assumption is that cultural traditions may only be accepted and praised" (op.cit., 2016, p. 87). Critical forms of multicultural education require children to engage "critically" with all cultural and ethnic backgrounds, their own included (May, 1999, p. 33).

Although it is hard to deny the validity of critiques of liberal forms of multicultural education, May (1999b, p. 4) argues that it is far easier to implement in schools as theories of Critical Multicultural Education "have been largely ignored because they have presented

theory divorced from practice". Its proponents have failed to provide concrete examples of how it can be used in everyday life in classrooms (May and Sleeter, 2010, p. 3). In addition, May and Sleeter (2010, p. 4) argue that "the less substantively a set of practices challenges power relations, the more likely they are to be taken up in school". They argue that teachers avoid using critical approaches, "deeming them to be too destabilising" (ibid., 2010, p. 12). Critical theorists argue that teachers eschew what Nieto (1999, p. 208) describes as the "dangerous discourse that challenges existing arrangements in and out of school". As many are part of the dominant group themselves, they may not have the necessary conceptual understandings or skills to deliver a transformative type of intercultural education (Sleeter and Montecinos, 1999; Bryan and Bracken, 2011). Teachers from the dominant group, according to critical theorists, are largely uncomfortable with "discussions of oppression, marginalisation, colonisation, racism and alternative ideologies" (Bryan, 2009a, p. 228). Freire (2000, p. 54) questions the ability of teachers from the dominant group to deliver a truly Critical Multicultural Education as he claims that "it would be a contradiction in terms if the oppressors not only defended but actually implemented a liberating education". Teachers' efforts to provide it may be impacted by other teachers from the dominant group engaging in "horizontal hostility" towards them for daring to challenge the *status quo* (Bell, 2016, p. 12).

For teachers to provide effective Critical Multicultural Education, it is imperative that they become aware of and address their own deficit thinking in the first instance (Lea, 2010, p. 38) and raise their own critical understanding of inequality prior to engaging children in such topics (Bartolomé, 2010, p. 48). This is particularly important for teachers who have had monocultural educational experiences (Rhedding-Jones, 2010, p. 73) as these experiences largely inform their *habitus*. Engaging in reflexive forms of continuous professional development allows teachers "to challenge the supremacy of hegemonic ways

of knowing and doing things" (Kavanagh and Dupont, 2021, p. 564). This requires teachers from the dominant group to go through a process of 'unlearning' (O'Toole, 2019, p. 45) or the 'decolonisation of minds' (Pirbhai-Illich, Pete, Martin, 2017) followed by "learning grounded in critical social justice perspectives" (op.cit., 2019, p. 45). O'Toole (2019) argues that this process of 'unlearning' places significant demands on teachers from the dominant group. Reflecting this assertion, Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997, p. 29) describe the critical multicultural teacher as "a scholar who spends a lifetime studying the pedagogical and its concern with the intersection of power, identity and knowledge". Therefore, Critical Multicultural Education places a significant academic onus on teachers to engage in a critical analysis of their practice. As part of this research, how research participants conceptualise and enact the CNS's commitment to "culturally responsive education" (NCCA, 2018a, p. 39) will be examined, from both liberal and radical egalitarian perspectives.

Baker *et al.* (2009, p. 155) argue that the most common form of non-recognition in education is for groups not to be named or made known in the school (Baker *et al.*, 2009, p. 155). Critical theories are of the view that the making of certain groups "invisibilised" (Swartz, 2009, p. 1049) in schools is a form of oppression (Lodge and Lynch, 2004, p. 38). According to Baker *et al.* (2009), the groups most subjected to this form of oppression are those from the LGBTQ+ community and those from working class backgrounds.

2.4.2.1.3 Non-Recognition and Invisibilisation

The non-recognition of the LGBTQ+ community comes about where heteronormativity is hegemonic in educational policy and practice (Robinson and Díaz, 2006; Logan *et al.*, 2016). In addition, sexuality is often seen by liberal egalitarians as a private matter and irrelevant and inappropriate to the lives of young children (Robinson and Díaz, 2006, p.

148). Although in an Irish context, Marriage Equality was voted for by a significant majority, it did not fully translate into the acceptance of LGBTQ+ inclusive conversations at primary level (Neary, Irwin-Gowran and McEvoy, 2016; Neary and Rasmussen, 2019). According to Neary and Rasmussen (2019, p. 902), "the persistence of notions of childhood innocence ensures that education about sexuality and gender diversity continues to be seen by school staff and parents" as an "explosive topic". In Ireland, it could be argued that this is a result of the fact the Catholic Church controls the majority of schools, its particular views on homosexuality which make it "almost impossible for those who are openly gay, lesbian or bisexual to feel that they have parity of status with heterosexual persons" (Lodge and Lynch, 2004, p. 3). Egan and McDaid (2019, p. 131) contend that "the strong heteronormative culture of the vast majority of denominational schools in Ireland means that LGBT teachers' disclosure of sexual identity is rarely an option". In addition, they found that many participants in their study feared using LGBTQ+ inclusive resources because of their school's Catholic ethos. Neary, Irwin-Gowran and McEvoy (2016, p. 4) also found that "uncertainties and assumptions regarding the religious ethos of denominational schools in particular legitimised silences around homophobia/transphobia and gender/sexuality identity". However, even in schools with an egalitarian outlook, the use of LGBTQ+ literature is considered too risky to include in the curriculum (Logan *et al.*, 2016, p. 381). Indeed, in an Irish context, Egan and McDaid (2019, p. 137) found that a teacher working in a multi-denominational school was more reluctant to use LGBTQ+ inclusive resources than teachers in their study working in Catholic schools. The reason for this was that the teacher held a temporary contract. S/he did not want to risk a negative reaction from parents to such inclusive resources as s/he believed that doing so might jeopardise their chances of gaining a permanent contract in the school in the future.

Teachers who are deeply committed to social justice issues often place different types of diversity in hierarchical order, with issues of race and religion coming up on top and issues of sexuality falling to the bottom (Robinson and Díaz, 2006, p. 8). This "institutional invisibility" (Lynch and Lodge, 2002, p. 186) on homosexuality leads to a total silence about the subject of sexual orientation in schools and a wholesale denial of the existence of lesbian and gay existence" within the school community (Egan and McDaid, 2019, p. 131). This silence deprives young LGBTQ+ people of "a legitimated social space and language for reflecting upon a defining part of their personal and social identity" (Baker *et al.*, 2009, p. 155). This has significant ramifications as "recognition is vital for the development of positive self-image" (Egan and McDaid, 2019, p. 132). The invisibilisation of LGBTQ+ identities has serious consequences as people are only capable of fully understanding their identities when they are equipped with "rich human languages of expression" (Taylor, 1997, p. 32). This silence also deprives children of an important opportunity to deconstruct the prejudicial stereotypes they may have formed about LGBTQ+ people from an early age (Robinson and Díaz, 2006, p. 148). Another consequence of this non-recognition is that it legitimises the views of those who claim homosexuality is immoral or deviant as schools "lay the societal benchmarks for what is deemed acceptable or legitimate" (Egan and McDaid, 2019, po. 131). This is an important consideration in diverse school contexts where there may be groups of children from conservative religious or cultural backgrounds who have negative perceptions of members of the LGBTQ+ community. Non-recognition of LGBTQ+ identities not only affect children but also seriously impacts LGBTQ+ teachers in the school. How research participants strive to ensure equality of respect and recognition for members of the LGBTQ+ community is an important element of this study, considering the CNS ethos' egalitarian expressive goals.

Critical theorists maintain that the non-recognition of children from working class backgrounds comes about as schools are fundamentally middle-class institutions where the hegemonic norms and mores are based on the economic resources of the middle and upper classes. From this perspective, this has ensured that middle and upper-class parents have been able to retain their privileged status in education at the expense of others (Lynch and Lodge, 2002, p. 35). Middle-class teachers define children from working class backgrounds as "culturally deficient or deviant" (Baker *et al.*, 2009, p. 156). These children's educational failure and negative sense of self are intensified by the school's failure to recognise the dissonance between the *habitus* of the school and the *habitus* of these children. In addition, social class inequalities continue in schools as teachers "invisibilise economically-related injustices" by failing to provide a safe space to discuss social class issues (Lynch, 2018, p. 11). The lack of education provision on this issue allows the "silence about class to continue" (Baker *et al.*, 2009, p. 156). It renders children powerless to bring about change as they are denied the linguistic and conceptual tools they require to name and challenge the structures and institutions which oppresses them (Lynch, 2018, p. 8). Freire uses the term "banking" to describe the teacher simply depositing information into children's minds without stimulating them to think critically about the topic in an effort "to control thinking and action" (ibid., 2000, p. 77). He argues that this form of education, although not necessarily intentional on behalf of the teacher, serves the interests of the dominant group as it avoids the threat of children's conscientisation. In other words, it inhibits the child from becoming aware of their situation and the options available to them to change that situation. Freire (2000, p. 64) also contends that this ensures that children from working class and other minoritised backgrounds remain unaware of the causes of the inequalities they experience, thus ensuring that "they fatalistically "accept" their exploitation". Such considerations are particularly relevant to the case study school involved in this study,

given its 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools' (DEIS)[18] status and the level of diversity present in the school. It is not surprising that the case study school has DEIS status as minoritised families in Ireland, even those with high levels of education, tend to end up in lower-paid, lower-status jobs, reducing the amount of economic capital they have available to support their children's academic achievement (McGinnity, Darmody and Murray, 2015; Joseph, 2019).

2.4.2.2 Equality of Power

The formation of one's individual and group identities is also inextricably linked to power (Devine, 2005; Bryan, 2010). Devine (2019, p. 12) argues that "education is embedded in relations of power". People can be organised into 'in' and 'out' groups depending on their cultural capital, directly affecting their access to social power and resources (Tormey and Gleeson, 2012, p. 158). Developing a genuinely egalitarian school ethos requires the development of infrastructures that move beyond benign forms of recognition of diversity into the creation of "deliberate democratic processes" which enable genuine partnership (Blackmore, 2010, p. 58). Kavanagh (2021, p. 222) defines partnership as "providing opportunities for all members of the school community to be involved in the decision-making process". However, partnership in diverse school settings can be challenging as, according to critical theorists, the creation and maintenance of hierarchies in schools that place dominant groups at the centre of decision-making processes and subordinate groups on the margins have been normalised (Bell, 2016). In addition, due to inequality of respect and recognition, minoritised groups can develop an inferiority complex that paralyses them from taking their place at the decision-making table even when some of the barriers to participation have been taken away (Taylor, 1997, p. 25). Equality of power in a diverse

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[18] DEIS status is granted to schools with a high percentage of families from disadvantaged backgrounds.

school context is an important consideration in the CNS context. The CNS ethos statement (Appendix B) claims to make every effort to ensure that parents and children, regardless of their identity, are actively encouraged to fully participate in school life. Therefore, this dimension, alongside the concepts of *habitus* and capital (Bourdieu, 2020) provides an opportunity to examine how the school's organisational goals (Norman, 2003) align with its egalitarian expressive goals.

'Democracy' is central to liberal egalitarianism and is a concept that most societies and social institutions subscribe to. However, the quality of democracies varies significantly in terms of the genuine distribution of power (Baker *et al.*, 2009, p. 96). Although liberal egalitarianism has achieved a great deal in improving the quality of these democracies by increasing women's and other minoritised groups' access to voting, liberal democracies may "denigrate into a tyranny of the majority, depriving economic, ethnic or religious minorities of an effective voice" (Heywood, 1994, p. 35). It is often the case that culturally dominant groups have the most influence on public policy and that marginalised groups have little say over the policies which affect their lives (op. cit., 2009, p. 29). Baker *et al.* (2009, p. 57) argue that as this form of inequality has "hegemonic status" in society, it is not subject to scrutiny and debate making this form of inequality appear natural and inevitable. They maintain that the liberal egalitarian focus on regulating these inequalities rather than eliminating them has done little to challenge the *status quo*, where dominant groups continue to exercise the most influence on policy (ibid., 2009, p. 30). Equality of condition proposes to address this by creating a more "participatory form of politics" (ibid., 2009, p. 39) where groups that have not had political influence in the past are actively engaged in decision-making processes. This requires a radical change to current norms, which exclude those who are culturally marginalised from being around the table when important decisions are being made that affect their lives (ibid., 2009, p. 63). Ensuring that diversity

is represented at all levels of decision-making processes creates a space where people from different backgrounds are shown equal respect, allowing for mutual understanding and concern to emerge. How people from minoritised backgrounds are given the opportunity to participate in the school's democratic and other decision-making fora is a central consideration in examining how the school's organisational goals are congruent/incongruent with its egalitarian expressive goals.

Baker *et al.* (2009, p. 109) argue that forms of deliberative discussion, where all voices are heard, are particularly effective on issues of moral disagreement. Issues of moral disagreement inevitably arise in diverse school settings as not all values held by any school community are mutually compatible (McLaughlin, 1994). Reflective of this complexity, O'Flaherty *et al.* (2017, p. 325) describe schools as "sites of polycultural contestation". As societies and schools have become more diverse, questions about whose values and traditions should be promoted are raised (Noddings and Slote, 2003, p. 350). Irwin (2012, p. 9) contends that this issue is heightened when people arrive in a society where their values and norms are at odds with those of the dominant culture. Parekh (2006) argues that this is particularly the case for religious Muslims who may be concerned that their core values will be eroded if they are to fit in with the liberal values of a given society. He contends that there is a dilemma in liberal societies in securing religious Muslims' allegiance to liberal values as if they refuse to do so, "the stage is now set for mutual hostility and suspicion" (ibid., 2008, p. 118). Reflective of this assertion, Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2021, p. 265) argue that the UK has moved from viewing Muslims as central to the future of a multicultural society to positioning them as "the enemy within who reject modern British values". The UK government regards schools as the "major site for the inculcation of 'appropriate' values" as a way of countering the threat posed by religious Muslims (Panjwani, 2017, p. 9). Panjwani (2017, p. 13) argues that the

"religification" of Muslims, despite significant intra-belief diversity within the community, has led to all Muslims being seen as a "homogenous, undifferentiated mass", with presumed deterministic values diametrically opposed to, and threatening the values of the civilised West".

Clashes in values pose considerable challenges given Parekh's (2006) contention that for multicultural societies to function effectively, a sense of shared culture and values is essential. Halstead (2007, p. 831) questions whether there is an assimilationist element to the concept of the 'common school'[19], which strives to unite diverse societies through the promotion of common values, as they may force minority groups to accept a radical shift in their identity in order to fit in. This is significant considering Taylor's (1997, p. 38) assertion that assimilation is "the cardinal sin of authenticity".

Parekh (2006, p. 343) succinctly describes the fundamental issues raised concerning moral disagreements in pluralist societies in the following way:

> Multicultural societies throw up problems that have no parallel in history. They need to find ways of reconciling the legitimate demands of unity and diversity, achieving political unity without cultural uniformity, being inclusive without being assimilationist, cultivating among their citizens a common sense of belonging while respecting their legitimate cultural differences, and cherishing plural cultural identities without weakening the shared and precious identity of shared citizenship. This is a formidable political task and no multicultural society so far has succeeded in tackling it (Parekh, 2006, p. 343).

Such assertions make it apparent that, in diverse school settings, a very delicate balance needs to be struck between respect for diversity and the need for a shared identity (Halstead, 2007; McLaughlin, 2008). Reflective of arguments that schools are never values-neutral (May, 1994; Alexander and McLaughlin, 2003; McLaughlin, 2003, 2008; Baker *et al.*,

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[19] Although CNSs are were not established as a 'common school', some of the literature relating to common schooling is relevant as they are defined as schools "which is open to, and intended for, all students within a given society, regardless of their specific differentiating characteristics" (McLaughlin, 2003, p. 122).
Similar to the ideals of the 'common school', the CNS ethos commits to preparing "open-minded, culturally sensitive and responsible citizens with a strong sense of shared values" (Appendix B).

2004; Modood, 2007; Devine, 2011; Irwin, 2012; Smyth, Darmody and Lyons, 2013c; Kieran, 2015; O'Connell, 2015), it could be argued that these moral "dilemmas" (McLaughlin, 2005) are highly likely in schools, such as CNSs, which promote an egalitarian ethos.

Providing opportunities for diverse groups to dialogue about issues where moral disagreement arise counters natural tendencies to universalise the dominant values system as it brings together "different historical experience and cultural sensibilities" (Parekh, 2006, p. 128). Parekh (2006) contends that moral dialogue requires us to defend our values and explain to others why we hold them. Although Baker *et al.* (2009, p. 109) acknowledge that consensus may not be reached on issues of moral disagreement, they claim that resolutions that take into account all views can be accepted by those who disagree with them. How the research participants navigate the egalitarian ethos of the CNS model, and its diverse school community is an important consideration in this study.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the key theorists (Gramsci, 1971; Bourdieu, 1977; Baker *et al.*, 2009) and the critical and liberal egalitarian theories underpinning the study's theoretical framework. Although a school with an egalitarian ethos can have a transformative impact on the lives of children and communities who have been historically marginalised and 'othered', the theoretical framework outlined here reminds the reader that egalitarian claims must be critically examined. The theoretical framework will be used in the next chapter to critically examine the contested concept of 'ethos' and how it is conceptualised in Catholic, 'multi-denominational' (ETB post-primary and CNSs) and 'equality-based' Educate Together schools. It is also used in Chapter Five to critically analyse the data gathered in the research project.

Chapter Three – Literature Review

When lessons are forgotten, and differential calculus, the periodic table of the elements and irregular verbs have become shadowy memories, the ethos of the school we attended can remain part of our consciousness (Williams, 2000, p. 76)

3.1 Introduction

While a small number of Irish studies have provided insights into how multi-denominational schools respond to the needs of diverse school communities (Mulcahy, 2006; Lalor, 2013; Faas, Smith and Darmody, 2018a; Mihut and McCoy, 2020), no previously published research has provided a comprehensive, critical analysis of how the CNS ethos is conceptualised and enacted in response to the needs of diverse school communities

This chapter critically examines the concept of ethos and explores how it is conceptualised in Catholic, 'multi-denominational' (ETB post-primary and CNSs) and Educate Together schools in response to diverse school communities.

3.2 Ethos as a Vehicle for Inclusion and Exclusion in Diverse School Settings

In Ireland, what differentiates schools under different patrons is their ethos (Darmody, Smyth and McCoy, 2012, p. 3; Faas, Foster and Smith, 2018, p. 603). As outlined in Chapter One, the establishment of more schools with a multi-denominational ethos has been a significant policy response to the diversification of Irish society in recent years. Prior to problematising this policy response, it is crucial to understand the role of 'ethos' itself and its impact on the school community. The aforementioned quotation from Kevin Williams highlights its significance in the life of those attending the school, not just while

they are enrolled but well into their futures. Ethos plays a central role in how much a child, parent or teacher feels included or excluded from the life of the school and is central "in the development of positive multicultural school environments" (Faas, Foster and Smith, 2018, p. 606).

Bragg and Manchester (2011, p. 11) argue that although ethos is seen as immensely powerful in shaping the values, attitudes and conduct of those within the school, it is also "extremely slippery and difficult to define". It is a multi-layered concept with no agreed definition (Allder, 1993; Brown *et al.*, 2011; Irwin, 2012; Faas, Smith and Darmody, 2018b). The term itself is used interchangeably with a myriad of synonyms (Allder, 1993), such as 'culture', 'climate' (Glover and Coleman, 2005; Solvason, 2005), the 'hidden curriculum' (Nieto, 1999) and in an Irish context 'characteristic spirit' (O'Flaherty *et al.*, 2018). A comprehensive review of the literature and analysis of various conceptualisations points to a broadly shared understanding of ethos as the values, beliefs and practices underpinning the life of the school (Fischer, 2010; Faas, Smith and Darmody, 2018a; Liddy, O'Flaherty and McCormack, 2019) or the school's *habitus* (Smith, 2003).

There is some debate about whether Bourdieu intended for the concept of *habitus* to apply in an organisational context (Smith, 2003; Bragg and Manchester, 2011). However, many theorists who have examined the phenomenon of ethos have used *habitus* as their theoretical lens (May, 1994; McLaughlin, 2005a; Irwin, 2012; Devine, 2013; Faas, Smith and Darmody, 2018a). The etymology of the Greek word 'ethos' and the Latin word *'habitus'* are closely aligned (Smith, 2003, p. 466). However, distinctions can be made between an individual's and an organisation's *habitus*. As outlined in Chapter Two, an individual's *habitus* can be described as one's dispositions, and deeply ingrained beliefs about themselves and the world formed due to their upbringing, family, religious and cultural backgrounds (Maton, 2014, p. 50). All school community members arrive with a

fully-formed *habitus* based on their life experiences to date (Furlong, 2000). This *habitus* informs the "prejudices, biases, assumptions and beliefs" different members of the school community bring to the school (Hession, 2015, pp. 41-42). When joining a school, a process of socialisation occurs where new members of the community are conditioned to conform to the norms and values of the school (Glover and Coleman, 2005, p. 258) or its organisational *habitus* (ethos). This is an unconscious process (Byrne and Devine, 2018) where new members are "socialised into accepting and conforming to a particular ethos which is influenced by a combination of the organisational member's cultural identity, organisational traditions, religion, and their own personalities" (Donnelly, 1999, p. 225). The school's organisational *habitus* significantly influences the individual's *habitus*, their view of themselves and what is possible or otherwise for them to achieve. It has a significant role in how included or excluded minoritised families are in the life of the school (Darmody, 2013, p. 403).

According to May (1994), a school's *habitus* can be used as a form of 'symbolic violence' against minoritised children whose *habitus* are not embodied in the school environment. A formal and hidden curriculum (instrumental goal) which reflects and affirms the diversity of all children communicates to them that they are valued members of the school community (Kavanagh and McGuirk, 2021, p. 204). Ensuring that the *habitus* of the school reflects the *habitus* of the school community "is crucial for developing individual children's positive 'self-esteem', as well as fostering their appreciation for the diversity that exists more broadly in society" (Robinson and Díaz, 2006, p. 147). However, similar to arguments that multicultural education fails to realise its transformative potential as outlined in Chapter Two, a multi-denominational ethos may, despite its egalitarian values (expressive goals), act as a hegemonic device that privileges dominant groups and maintains the subordination of minoritised groups. This is a particular concern in an Irish context, as the

vast majority of Irish primary teachers come from middle-class, settled, white, Catholic backgrounds (Keane and Heinz, 2016; Heinz and Keane, 2018). Teachers and principals come to their roles in diverse schools "embedded within their own *habitus*" (Darmody, 2013, p. 394), which inevitably has an influence on their ability to respond to the needs of diverse school communities (Kavanagh and Dupont, 2021, p. 563). The homogeneity of teachers working in multi-denominational settings in Ireland raises questions about their ability to genuinely understand and value the various forms of capital which minoritised children bring to the school which are dissimilar to their own. Teachers' privileged positions in Irish society "places them a long distance from many of their children's lived realities and the intersecting identity markers which disadvantage them" (Kavanagh, Waldron and Mallon, 2021, p. 7).

Studies consistently show that children from minoritised groups fare better when taught by diverse teaching populations (Frankenberg, 2009; Villagómez *et al.*, 2016; Liou, Marsh and Antrop-González, 2017). It is argued that this is the case as teachers who understand and value the cultural and social capital of minoritised children and their families have higher expectations those who are often viewed in deficit terms (Liou, Marsh and Antrop-González, 2017, p. 69). Therefore, although the school's ethos may have ambitious egalitarian claims, the relative homogeneity of the staff working in these schools may undermine their ability to respond effectively to diverse school communities. Lea (2010, p. 38) argues that unconscious deficit thinking (symbolic violence) carried out by teachers who do not value the *habitus* of minoritised members of the school community is a direct "offshoot of hegemony". She argues that this issue is exacerbated when teachers are unaware of their deficit thinking and this is arguably particularly likely for teachers who consider themselves advocates for equality. As outlined in Chapter Two, to overcome this, it is imperative that teachers become aware of deficit thinking as a form of 'symbolic

violence' and take action to address it, such as adopting forms of multicultural education and employing a reflexive stance

3.2.1 Defining 'Ethos' for the Purposes of this Study

As previously outlined, ethos is understood as the values, beliefs and practices underpinning policy and practice within the school. However, it is beyond the scope of this research project to analyse all aspects of school life. Consequently, it was decided to focus on those areas of school life most relevant to the concept of ethos i.e., its expressive, instrumental and organisational goals.

Expressive goals are the least tangible of the goals as they indicate the values promoted by the school. These values are often articulated in a school's mission and vision statements. In an Irish context, it is important to consider the influence the patron can have on the school's expressive goals as a result of the responsibilities given to them in the Education Act (1998). Various Irish academics have grappled with the complex relationship between the patron and the school in determining their ethos (Hogan, 1984; Donnelly, 2000; Norman, 2003; Griffin, 2018; Liddy, O'Flaherty and McCormack, 2018). Norman (2003, p. 5) distinguishes between Platonic and Aristotelian approaches to ethos. He argues that Plato had a "paternalistic vision of ethos" whereas Aristotle had more of an organic understanding of the concept. He claims that the Irish education system is based on a Platonic, "custodial vision of ethos" (2003, p. 24), where patrons act as guarantors of the values of their schools. The Education Act (1998) has enabled patrons to use what Donnelly (2000, pp. 135–136) describes as a 'positivist' approach to ethos. She describes a positivist ethos as "an objective phenomenon, existing independently of the people and social events in an organisation" which is controlled by the school authorities. Although patrons are not involved in the day-to-day life of the school community, they can transmit their values onto

the children attending their schools (Hogan, 1984; Fischer, 2010). The antithesis of a positivist ethos is an 'anti-positivist' one which emerges from "social interaction and process" (Donnelly, 2000, p. 136). Many theorists advocate for this more bottom-up approach to establishing the expressive goals of the school (Coolahan, 2000; Murray, 2000; Pring, 2000; Norman, 2003).

While a Platonic/positivist view of ethos has been deemed problematic in research conducted in denominational schools (Hogan, 1984; Donnelly, 2000; Norman, 2003), a study carried out in ETB post-primary schools problematised the absence of a sectoral ethos for its schools. Liddy, O'Flaherty and McCormack (2018, p. 11) argue that the lack of direction from ETBs in their post-primary schools left the schools to form their own school-specific mission statements and values-related policies. As will be outlined in the next section, this lack of direction contributed to many ETB post-primary schools, although state and multi-denominational in theory, living out a Catholic ethos in practice (Liddy and Liston, 2016; O'Flaherty *et al.*, 2018). While they do not recommend an over-arching compulsory policy on values from the patron, they do caution against leaving the development of a school's ethos entirely to individuals within the school. They recommended for ETBs, as patrons, to provide a statement of values appropriate to state schools that still allows them the flexibility to meet the needs of the local community. Such a vision for the development of ethos corresponds with Smith's (2003, p. 468) assertion that ethos is the result of both the formal expressions of the school authority's aims and the values and the behaviours and attitudes children bring to school. A balance between Platonic/Aristotelian and positivist/anti-positivist approaches to developing ethos.

Instrumental goals refer to what is taught in the school's curriculum. This study also includes aspects of the 'hidden curriculum' as part of the Instrumental goals[20] (Nieto, 2004). *Organisational* goals are concerned with the organisational structures in place in the school and the hierarchies within them e.g., the place of children and parents in the hierarchy of organisational structures. Norman (2003, p. 3) warns that there needs to be a coherence between all three goals as a school's expressive goals can quickly be displaced by its instrumental and organisational goals, "resulting in an expressive order which is in reality something significantly different to that which is contained in its mission statement". The dissonance between various aspects of policy and practice can be described as a series of "fault lines" (Smith, 1987, cited in Rusch 2004, p. 18). Rusch (2004, p. 20) argues that minoritised children experience a school's "fault lines" when they encounter a school environment that has a "tenuous commitment" to diversity, equity, and multiculturalism. She claims that although schools may have a wealth of policies addressing these issues, these alone "do not change hearts and minds".

Figure 3 outlines the key areas of school life most influenced by its ethos as described across the literature and connects them with Norman's Framework on Ethos.

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[20] As previously outlined, the term 'hidden curriculum' is used in terms of the school's instrumental goals to refer to its physical environment and whole-school celebrations. Other aspects of the hidden curriculum are examined across all three goals associated with ethos e.g., values are examined in relation to its expressive goals and school structures in relation to its organisational goals.

Figure 3: Norman's Goals vis-à-vis Literature Pertaining to Ethos

Area of School Life influenced by 'Ethos'	As described by:	Links to Norman's Framework
The values and beliefs underpinning practices, behaviours and decision-making in the school.	(Department of Education and Science, 1995, p. 11); (Williams, 2000, p. 74); (Donnelly, 2000, p. 134) (Smith, 2003, p. 467); (Glover and Coleman, 2005, p. 266); (McLaughlin, 2005, p. 310); (DES, 2006, p. 10); (Fischer, 2010, p. 4); (CPSMA, 2016, p. 15); (O'Flaherty *et al.*, 2018); (NCCA, 2018a, p. 36); (Faas, Foster and Smith, 2018, p. 4); (O'Flaherty, Liddy and McCormack, 2018);	Expressive Goals
The values promoted by the school and its patron.	(Donnelly, 2000); (Smith, 2003, p. 467); (NCCA, 2018a, p. 36)	Expressive Goals
How the curriculum is structured and taught, including the 'hidden curriculum'.	(Halloran, 1982, p. 63); (Coolahan, 2000, p. 118); (Bragg and Manchester, 2011); (Lalor, 2013)	Instrumental Goals

The nature of relationships within the school.	(Halstead and Taylor, 2000, p. 176); (Smith, 2003, p. 467); (Bragg and H. Manchester, 2011, p. 1);	Organisational Goals

For this study, 'ethos' is defined as the values, beliefs, and practices promoted by both the patron and the school itself and how these values inform policy and practice, the formal and hidden curriculum, and the nature of relationships within the school. As a result of the relationship between the *habitus* of the school and an individual's *habitus*, the school's ethos is understood to have a significant impact on the levels of inclusion and exclusion felt by those who experience it. To understand the rationale for the establishment of the CNS model, the following section critically examines how the ethos of Catholic schools claims to respond to diverse school communities and the challenges they face in doing so.

3.3 Exploring the Capacity of Denominational Education to Respond to the Needs of Diverse School Communities

The hegemonic, normative nature of Catholic education in Ireland has become increasingly criticised by the various international agencies such as the UN, EU, and the Council of Europe for its failure to meet the needs of a more pluralist Ireland (Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather, 2012, p. 6). This has prompted successive governments to increase the number of multi-denominational schools available across the country. Recognising such policy positions as a 'concession' to an education system dominated by religious patrons rather than a 'counter-hegemony' to the *status quo*, some Irish academics have heavily criticised such measures for not going far enough (O'Toole, 2015; Fischer, 2016). Despite such criticisms, the increase in the number of multi-denominational schools rather than a radical

overhaul of the education system remains the current governmental policy (Government of Ireland, 2020).

Before examining the strengths and weaknesses of multi-denominational education as a response to increased diversity, it is important to examine why the current overrepresentation of Catholic schools is considered problematic by those seeking a more inclusive education system.

O'Loinsigh (2000, p. 229) argues that an affirming school ethos is essential to creating the conditions necessary to promote respect for diversity. As outlined in Chapter Two, inequality of respect and recognition is one of the most common forms of inequality experienced by minoritised families in schools. O'Loinsigh questions the ability of denominational schools, which centre around one dominant culture, to create an ethos where minoritised children experience equality of respect and recognition. The collective expressive goal of the ethos of Catholic schools is articulated in a statement called 'The Schedule' which must be displayed in a prominent position in all Catholic schools and act as the basis for all policy and practice within the school (Mahon, 2017, p. 40). The Schedule defines a Catholic ethos as follows:

> A Roman Catholic school (which is established in connection with the Minister) aims at promoting the full and harmonious development of the person of the pupil: intellectual, physical, cultural, moral and spiritual, including living relationship with God and other people. The school models and promotes a philosophy of life inspired by belief in God and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Catholic school provides Religious Education for the pupils in accordance with the doctrines, practices and tradition of the Roman Catholic Church and promotes the formation of the pupils in the Catholic Faith (CPSMA, 2016, p. 15)

The ethos is unambiguous in its aim to foster in children a commitment to the Catholic faith and to develop their relationship with one specific god. However, given the omnipresent nature of Catholic schools in Ireland, it is inevitable that they have experienced a significant diversification of their school communities in line with national trends in recent years. In

response to these changes, Church authorities have published various policy and guidance documents on meeting the needs of diverse school communities (CPSMA, 2016; Veritas, 2018; Mullally, 2019). The main thrust of these documents is that Catholic schools *are* capable of responding to the needs of children from backgrounds other than Catholic "precisely because they are Catholic and thus open to dialogue with the other" (CEIST, 2007, p. 8). The guidelines recognise the challenges of diversity in a denominational context but remind schools that "Jesus valued diversity….He reached out in particular to those considered to be the 'other' or different in society" (Mullally, 2019, p. 5). It is precisely the "Other" in these statements that captures why schools with a denominational ethos are considered, from an egalitarian perspective, to be significantly limited in their capacity to respond to the needs of diverse school communities. Robinson and Diaz (2009, p. 183) define the 'Other' as "those groups that have been marginalised, silenced, denigrated, or violated, and defined in opposition to, and seen as other than, the privileged groups that are identified as representing the idealised, mythical norm of society". The use of the term is symbolic of a hegemonic culture in denominational schools where one worldview is dominant, and the marginalisation of those whose *habitus* is misaligned with the school's ethos is normalised (Stapleton, 2018).

The language of 'tolerance' and the 'inclusion of the 'Other'' in these documents raises significant questions about these schools' ability to respond in an equitable way to diverse school communities when an ethos presupposes the dominance of one group over another (O'Donnell, 2015, p. 255). Although these documents encourage the inclusion of children from minoritised religious/belief backgrounds in school life, they are unequivocal that "Catholic schools must not renounce" their Catholic ethos "when immigrants' children of another religion are accepted" (CPSMA, 2016, p. 15). Irwin (2010, p. 453), drawing on Charles Taylor's essay 'The Politics of Recognition' (1997), refers to the 'tolerance' of

children from minoritised backgrounds in denominational schools as a form of 'patronising' recognition. From a Bourdieusian perspective, this minimal form of inclusion could be considered a form of 'symbolic violence' against minoritised children and their families. Counter to such arguments made from an egalitarian perspective, Hession (2015, p. 43) argues that all schools, be they religious or secular, share a values framework based on "concern for democracy, social justice and human rights" so that children are prepared to act as "good citizens in a democratic society". Therefore, she argues that in a "genuinely pluralist society", there is space for both religious-based and secular school types as long as they "assume a framework of values consistent with a concern for intellectual, moral, and spiritual liberty, democracy, social and human rights" (ibid., 2015, p. 56).

Some studies have been carried out which examine minoritised groups' experience in denominational schools; using critical theories such as Bourdieu's key concepts and Critical Multicultural Education (Darmody, 2011a, 2011b; Darmody and McCoy, 2011; Devine, 2013; McGinnity, Darmody and Murray, 2015; Kavanagh, 2013; Stapleton, 2018).

Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus*, cultural capital and 'symbolic violence', Darmody (2011) examined how minoritised families experience inequality in the Irish education system. In line with Bourdieu's thesis, she found that schools transmit the cultural capital of the dominant group, i.e., white, middle-class, and Catholic, whilst at the same time marginalising those possessing other forms of cultural capital. She argues that this is done by providing a Euro-Western formal and hidden curriculum which 'others' minoritised families. Whilst principals and teachers in her study spoke about '*involving*' minoritised families in school life, there was little ambition to engage them as *equal* partners in their child's education (inequality of power). She found that some schools attempted to recognise the *habitus* of children from minoritised religious/belief backgrounds by granting them an opt-out of whole-school Catholic ceremonies. However,

69

other schools expected all children to participate in every aspect of school life. She concluded that a significant factor determining the amount of cultural capital possessed by minoritised families is their proficiency in the English language. Parents with lower English language proficiency did not participate in school life at the same level as parents from the dominant group, other than those with higher levels of cultural capital accrued through the acquisition of proficiency in the English language.

Building on this finding, Darmody and McCoy (2011, p. 159), in their study examining the barriers to parental involvement experienced by ethnic minorities, argue that the denominational nature of the Irish education system in the context of increased diversity presents "a meeting of two worlds that both possess different cultural and social capitals". They found that parents who are minoritised because they are immigrants need to activate their cultural and social capital by learning the English language. They argue that the language barrier impacts minoritised parents' ability to understand how schools and the Irish education system function, placing their children at a disadvantage compared to those from dominant groups. They contend that the reduction in the value of the social and cultural capitals possessed by minoritised parents because of the immigration process places them on the margins of decision-making processes in schools. They argue that schools should make a conscious effort to educate minoritised families about how schools and the education system function and include them as partners in school life through culturally sensitive parental involvement programmes.

Devine (2013), using the concepts of *habitus*, field and capital, examined leadership practices in newly multi-ethnic Irish schools. The research was carried out in both Catholic and Educate Together schools. Regardless of school type, the principals in her study, tended to come from white, middle-class, Catholic backgrounds. In addition, the principals' entire education experiences from primary through to third level were in Catholic institutions.

Being informed by their personal and educational backgrounds, the principals' *habitus* significantly influenced their leadership practices. This may explain why similar to Darmody (2011), she found that in one Catholic school, recognition was conceptualised as providing opt-outs of school religious ceremonies rather than any attempt to "challenge the underlying *habitus* of the school" (op.cit., 2013, p. 403). She also concludes that the patronage of a school significantly influences practices relating to the recognition and misrecognition of the *habitus* of minoritised families. She claims that the school's ethos can either promote the inclusion or exclusion of minoritised families. Unlike the Catholic school, where recognition was conceptualised in opt-outs, she found that recognition of difference underpinned all practices in the Educate Together school. However, there were exceptions to this dichotomy. The inclusive practices of a principal in one Catholic school involved in her study led to many Muslim parents choosing that school. However, this led to tensions within the school community as staff and parents from the dominant group feared that the presence of a large cohort of Muslim children made it challenging to maintain the Catholic ethos of the school.

Kavanagh (2013), using 'Critical Multicultural Education' as a theoretical framework, examined how intercultural education is conceptualised and enacted in Irish primary schools. This research was carried out across both Catholic and Educate Together schools. Similar to Devine (2013), she found that patronage and ethos directly impacted the discourses of inclusion in use in the school. Reflecting the language used in Catholic documentation on responding to diversity, Kavanagh found that the discourse of 'tolerance' and 'accommodation of others' was predominant in the Catholic schools involved in her study. Another Irish study carried out by Stapleton (2018) found that children from minoritised religious and belief backgrounds felt marginalised and 'othered' in schools with a Catholic ethos. Their 'othering' affected their sense of belonging and their wellbeing.

Counter to these studies, which are critical of approaches to intercultural education in denominational schools, Ní Dhiorbháin (2021, p. 160), using Bourdieu's concept of 'linguistic capital' (Bourdieu, 1991), examined a diverse Catholic school's whole-school plurilingual policy. Such considerations are important, given Cummins' (2015) assertion that there is a direct link between intercultural education and the promotion of linguistic diversity. She found that the school affirmed the children's home languages by including their home languages as much as possible in the classroom, encouraging children to write texts in their home languages and drawing on parents "as experts in their home language". One of the more tangible outcomes of this approach was that although the standardised testing in the school was done through English, the schools scored at or above the national average.

The findings in most of these studies using critical theories are problematic and lead to critical theorists working in an Irish context such as Kavanagh (2013, p. 278) asserting that "denominationalism is entirely incompatible with interculturalism" and, therefore to responding effectively to the needs of diverse school communities. From this perspective, it is clear then that to meet the needs of Irish society today; there is a requirement for many more schools whose ethos does not privilege one group over another.

3.4 Exploring Multi-denominational Education as a Response to Diverse School Communities

Counter to the charges made against denominational education, it is argued that the ethos of multi-denominational schools is "highly relevant in preparing students to play an informed, but caring role, as citizens in an increasingly pluralist society" (Mulcahy, 2000, p. 93). This section critically examines this claim. The concept of 'multi-denominational' is complex as it does not represent one patron or a homogenous group of schools. Therefore,

it is conceptualised differently depending on the patron (Coolahan, 2000; Darmody, Smyth and McCoy, 2012; McGrady, 2013). This section suggests the existence of a continuum of multi-denominational education, bookended by Catholic-centric and equality-based understandings of the concept. Of particular relevance to this study is the development of ETBs as patrons of multi-denominational schools as they are the patrons of Community National Schools.

3.4.1 State-Established Multi-denominational Schools: A Weak 'Counter-Hegemony'?

As previously outlined, the concept of 'multi-denominational' education is unique to the Irish context. The Department of Education (DE) defines it as "those schools that do not provide religious education as formation, during the school day but do provide education about religions and beliefs" (DES, 2007). Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather (2012, p. v) provide an equally religious-centric definition by stating that there are two types of multi-denominational primary schools in Ireland. While both provide education about religions and beliefs, one provides opportunities for faith formation within the school day[21] and the other provides it outside the school day, depending on parental demand. Faas, Foster and Smith (2018, p. 603) broaden the definition of 'multi-denominational education' slightly by defining it as a school type that facilitates education for children from varying religious backgrounds but add that this is done within an ethos of "equality and inclusion". These narrow, religious-centric definitions are reflective of the hegemonic relationship between education and religion that exists in Ireland. Of particular relevance to this study is the

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[21] At the time this definition was devised, CNSs were providing faith formation within the school day. Although this is no longer the case (as will be outlined later in this chapter), it is still relevant as some multi-denominational schools under the patronage of An Foras Pátrúnactha (the patron of many Irish-medium, gaelscoileanna) provide sacramental preparation for Catholic children within the school day as well as education about religions and beliefs for children from minoritised religious/belief backgrounds

influence that religion, and particularly the Catholic Church, has had on how the ETB sector conceptualises a multi-denominational ethos.

The emergence of the multi-denominational state sector in the 1930s with the introduction of ETB (formerly VEC) post-primary schools could be considered counter-hegemonic to the Church's "near-stranglehold" on the Irish education system (Irwin, 2010, p. 8). Prior to their establishment, all schools were under religious control (Liddy, O'Flaherty and McCormack, 2019, p. 107). However, the Church's concern over its lack of influence on the values being promoted in these new multi-denominational schools prompted them to negotiate with the state on how they would operate (Clarke, 2012). The result was the securing of a "theocentric approach" to education in these schools with Catholic values permeating state schooling (O'Flaherty *et al.*, 2018).

The legacy of the hegemonic influence of the Catholic Church in these schools' lives on today. Although they are *de jure* 'multi-denominational', various pieces of research have concluded that they remain *de facto* Catholic, prioritising the dominant group over those from minoritised backgrounds (Bryan, 2009c, 2009a; Bryan and Bracken, 2011, p. 108; Liddy and Liston, 2016, p. 17). Bryan (2009c, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Bryan and Bracken, 2011), using Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic violence' as a theoretical framework, examined ways in which racial inequality was perpetuated in an ETB post-primary school, which was considered an exemplar of best practices of intercultural education. She found that the hegemonic position of the dominant cultural groups was perpetuated as Christianity remained "the dominant, yet unmarked reference point" against which non-Christian students were marked as "Other" (Bryan and Bracken, 2011, p. 110). Beyond the recognition of Christianity as the most valuable cultural capital in the school, she also concluded that attempts at intercultural education were largely tokenistic, with the dominant group essentially acting as the 'valuer' or 'celebrator' of difference "while

defining minorities in terms of how they benefit or enrich the 'host' culture (Bryan, 2010, p. 255). Reflecting Baker *et al.'s* (2009) assertions in relation to the silencing and sanitisation of social justice issues, she found that teachers were wholly uncomfortable with and incapable of enabling minoritised students to recognise the injustices stemming from racialised issues (Bryan, 2009b, p. 55). A more recent comprehensive piece of research that was carried out in 2016 on the ethos of ETB post-primary schools had similar findings (McCormack *et al.*, 2018; O'Flaherty *et al.*, 2018; O'Flaherty, Liddy and McCormack, 2018; Liddy, O'Flaherty and McCormack, 2019). The researchers concluded that although these schools are officially 'multi-denominational', there was evidence of a Catholic *habitus* across the schools, with practices privileging Catholic children over children from other religions and beliefs remaining unquestioned and normalised (McCormack *et al.*, 2018). Similar to research outlined earlier in Catholic schools, issues of cultural and religious diversity were perceived from a predominantly Catholic perspective. The researchers questioned the juxtaposition of 'inclusion' as a core value in these schools where "one religion is frequently given greater recognition than other (or no) religions" (McCormack *et al.*, 2018, p. 13[22]).

It is important to consider these findings from the aforementioned studies as when the CNS model was established in 2008, the Catholic-centric ethos of ETB post-primary schools remained largely unproblematised. This directly impacted how a multi-denominational ethos was originally conceptualised in Ireland's first state primary schools. As outlined in Chapter One, the ethos of CNS schools and the GMGY curriculum have evolved over time. Although it has always been the stated policy of CNSs to respect and affirm diversity in all

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[22]It is important to note that significant progress has been made in ETB post-primary school at policy level in addressing the concerns raised in this research. ETB post-primary schools now share a common ethos framework with CNSs within which all schools should operate. However, no empirical research has been carried out since these policy developments have taken place to examine their impact.

areas of life since their inception in 2008 (NCCA, 2018b, p. 5), understandings and approaches within the model to achieving this have changed over time (Conboy, 2018). The following section outlines how the model has travelled along the continuum of conceptualisations of multi-denominational education.

3.4.2 The Development of the CNS Model

The CNS model was established as the first state model of primary education where the state itself could directly meet the needs of an increasingly pluralist Irish society without relying on private patrons (McGraw and Tiernan, 2022, p. 150). However, the announcement of its establishment was sudden. The first CNSs opened with no other published documentation or rationale for the model other than a press release statement by the Minister (ibid., 2022, p. 150). The press release announcing the establishment of CNSs outlined a vision for the model and stated that:

> The new schools will be open to children of all religions and none. They will be interdenominational in character, aiming for religious education and faith formation during the school day for each of the main faith groups represented. A general ethics programme will also be available for children whose parents opt for that, and the schools will operate through an ethos of inclusiveness and respect for all beliefs, both religious and non-religious" (DES, 2007)

This narrow, religious-centric conceptualisation of 'multi-denominational' education reflects the hegemonic influence the Catholic Church had on the initial development of the model. Similar to the endorsement of the Catholic Church being seen as imperative for the development of state post-primary schools in the 1930s (Liddy and Liston, 2016, p. 17), its support was also seen as crucial by some of the key personnel involved in the founding of the CNS model (NCCA, 2018b, p. 19). The provision of faith-formation within the school day is a result of the Church's insistence that in order for them to divest some of its schools to ETBs in the future, faith formation for Catholic children would have to be provided within the school day (McGraw and Tiernan, 2022, p. 174). From a Gramscian perspective

(1971), the Church's backing of a multi-denominational model that still prioritised Catholic children is a clear example of a dominant group granting the 'concessions' necessary for them to maintain their overall control of the education system.

Reflecting the Minister's vision for these schools and the pressure from the Church to provide faith formation to Catholic children, the original patrons' programme was concerned primarily with the provision of religious education (RE). It was described as a 'faith and belief programme' that emphasised the important role religions and beliefs play in children's lives (NCCA, 2014, p. 5). The curriculum took a two-pronged approach to the provision of RE. The 'core programme', which was taught to all children together for the majority of the year, consisted of general RE lessons designed to enable the faith or belief of the child "to flourish" (NCCA, 2014, p. 14). Lessons specific to different religions and beliefs or 'Belief Specific Teaching' (BST) lessons were also developed for four main groupings – Catholic, Muslim, Christian and Hinduism, Buddhist and Humanist. All groups were taught by teachers already teaching in the schools[23] (Hyland, 2017; Nelson, 2017). These lessons were delivered for four weeks per year. Sacramental education for Catholic children also took place at this time within the school day (Conboy, 2018).

Empirical research carried out by Trinity College Dublin (TCD) in 2017 across CNSs, examined their approaches to RE. It noted that children within the CNS model had high levels of religious literacy, practised agency in developing their religious/belief identities, and were comfortable naming and affirming differences in religious diversity within the classroom (Faas, Smith and Darmody, 2018b). However, the same research, as well as other research carried out at that time, concluded that there was a Catholic bias within the model

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[23] A Muslim teacher was brought into some of the CNSs to teach the BST lessons in Islam. However, this proved unsuccessful for a number of reasons (Nelson, 2017). Therefore, teachers from the school were given responsibility for teaching Islamic BST classes.

as a result of the provision of sacramental preparation for Catholic children and a Catholic-centric GMGY programme (Faas, 2017; Faas, Smith and Darmody, 2018c; Mullally, 2018; NCCA, 2018b). Many of the schools participating in the TCD research had ceased BST provision as principals and teachers reported dissonances between this practice and claims of inclusivity made by the model (Faas, Smith and Darmody, 2018a). Teachers and principals within the model also felt a lack of conceptual clarity in terms of understandings of a multi-denominational ethos across the schools and an appropriate Patron's Programme to support that ethos (NCCA, 2018b). The TCD research also found a dissonance between the inclusive ethos espoused in more recent CNS documentation (e.g., information leaflets claiming 'equality' as a core value of the model) and practices relating to religious education (Faas, Smith and Darmody, 2018a, pp. 14–15). This eventually led to a full review of the CNS ethos and GMGY Curriculum.

3.4.3 CNS and GMGY Today

The findings from empirical research (Faas, Smith and Darmody, 2018a; Mullally, 2018), internal policy and practice papers (ETBI, 2017; Nelson, 2017; NCCA, 2018b), and consultations between CNSs and ETBs resulted in the model reconceptualising its understanding of 'multi-denominational' education. This also led to a complete revision of GMGY to support this reconceptualisation. Significantly, it evolved from being a 'programme' that was prescriptive in its content to a 'curriculum' that outlined broad learning outcomes to be achieved at each stage (e.g., by the end of senior infants, second, class etc.). The model's understanding of multi-denominational education and the revised GMGY curriculum have evolved from the narrow, religious-centric language of "respect for and celebration[24] of the different beliefs of children is central to the characteristic spirit

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[24] The term 'celebrate' in CNS/ETB documentation is used in ways consistent with liberal egalitarian rather than critical perspectives of the concept.

of a Community National School" (NCCA, 2018b, p. 32) to language that encompasses much more than just the religious/belief aspect of the child. Reflecting Irish equality legislation, the revised ethos statement (Appendix B) now claims that "in all aspects of school life, all members of our school communities are treated equitably regardless of their race, gender, religion/belief, family status, civil status, membership of the Traveller community, sexual orientation, ability or socio-economic background[25]".

Significantly, the GMGY curriculum has moved from describing itself as a 'faith and belief programme' to identifying as a 'multi-belief and values curriculum' (NCCA, 2018a, p. 8). Provisions for any faith formation within the school day have been removed (Conboy, 2018). McGraw and Tiernan (2022, p. 168) argue that "the withdrawal of Church support for the model happened almost simultaneously" with these developments. The model became "a less appealing option for the Catholic bishops, who sought to provide for the faith lives of Catholic children in the schools" on foot of these changes (Griffin, 2019, p. 430)[26].

Unlike the original GMGY programme, which provided different forms of religious education only, the revised curriculum is divided into four inter-related strands, identity education, philosophy, values education and multi-denominational religious education (NCCA, 2018a, p. 5). Despite these developments, the model has opted to retain "multi-denominational" as the overall descriptor for the model. McGraw and Tiernan (2022, p. 175) argue that this is due to the hegemonic relationship that exist between education and

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[25] Socio-economic background is not one of the grounds of discrimination included in the Equal Status Act, 2000

[26] It is important to note that the evolution of the CNS ethos has had a significant impact on the ETB post-primary sector's journey towards addressing the issues raised by the aforementioned research. CNSs and ETB post-primary schools now share a common 'Patrons' Framework on Ethos' (ETBI, 2021) that is currently being implemented across all ETB schools.

religion and argue that "whether people like it or not, religion continues to define the system".

It is apparent that both the overarching ethos of the CNS model and the GMGY curriculum have evolved considerably at the policy level since their inception in 2008. This research examines whether this has translated into policy and practice in the case study school. When examining conceptualisations and enactments of the CNS ethos today, it is also worthwhile considering the ethos of the other main provider of multi-denominational/equality-based education in Ireland today – Educate Together. Established in the 1970s, Educate Together was the first multi-denominational education model at primary level in Ireland (Hyland, 1993). The ethos of this model has evolved along a similar trajectory to that of CNSs over the years. At the outset, conceptualisations of multi-denominational education within the model were reflective of the hegemonic relationship between religion and education in Ireland, where it was defined as "a school in which children of all religions and none would have equal right of access and would be equally respected" (Hyland, 2020, p. 10). However, over time the definition departed from a religious-centric one, with Hyland later defining 'multi-denominational' schools as essentially being about children experiencing equality of access and recognition in the school regardless of their social, cultural or religious backgrounds. Rowe (2011, p. 2), the former CEO of ET, reiterates this expanded definition of multi-denominational education by stating that an ET school's commitment to equality "extends beyond just religious or non-religious belief; it embraces social, cultural and other facets of identity". Reflective of the expanded conceptualisation of their ethos, the model decided to replace the descriptor 'multi-denominational' with 'equality-based' in 2015. The next sub-section critically examines both CNS and Educate Together ethos-related policies which support their schools in responding to diverse school communities.

3.4.4 Problematising CNS/Educate Together Policies in Response to Diverse School Communities

Considering the dearth of academic literature regarding schools with a 'multi-denominational' and 'equality-based' ethos, it is useful to critically examine ethos-related policy using the theoretical framework underpinning this study. Therefore, the purpose of this sub-section is to critically analyse both CNS and Educate Together publicly available ethos-related policies.

Legislation in Ireland requires all children to attend school until they are sixteen years of age. Therefore, their experience of this state-imposed requirement must be positive where their wellbeing and self-esteem are nurtured. It could be argued that this is best achieved in multi-denominational/equality-based schools that have an egalitarian ethos, where all children and staff are treated with equal respect. The conditions are created for every school community member to reach their full potential. However, as the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Two suggests, it is possible that the positive language of inclusion used in multi-denominational/equality-based schools masks relationships of dominance and subordination, which are adversative to their espoused egalitarian ideals. Heywood (1994, p. 226) contends that the language of equality can be used as "an attractive slogan" rather than anything meaningful unless the fundamental question of 'equality of what?' is addressed. Unless conceptualisations and enactments of multi-denominational education in a diverse school context are critically analysed, they may in reality simply be another "hegemonic device" that secures the dominant position enjoyed by those already in power in society and the subordinate positions occupied by those from minoritised groups (Jay, 2003, p. 3).

When addressing the research questions previously outlined, it is useful to consider Norman's conceptualisation of ethos as a school's expressive, instrumental and

organisational goals (Norman, 2003). It is also important to bear in mind the variables of diversity addressed in this study, i.e., social class, culture, religion/beliefs, sexual orientation, and language. Appendix A provides examples of how both CNSs and ET policies claim to respond to different types of diversity in terms of the expressive, instrumental and organisational goals of their ethos. Given the dearth of academic literature on multi-denominational/equality-based education in Ireland, the following sub-sections critically examines these claims using the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Two.

3.4.4.1 Expressive Goals

An exploration of both models' websites and publicly available ethos-related policy documents as outlined in Appendix A reveals that they have similar egalitarian expressive goals.

Figure 4: Values/Principles Underpinning the Ethos of CNSs/Educate Together Schools

School Type	CNS	Educate- Together
	Excellence in Education	Equality-Based
	Equality	Co-Educational
Expressive Goals (Values)	Care	Child-Centred
	Respect	Democratically-run
	Community	

Where five core values underpin the ethos of CNSs, the ethos of ET schools is informed by four key principles. Other ethos-related policy documents show that unlike the language of 'tolerance' found in denominational schools, CNS policy is to "respect, celebrate and recognise diversity in all areas of human life" (NCCA, 2018a, p. 5). An egalitarian ethos is

central to the CNS model, which aims to "enable every student to realise their full potential regardless of any aspect of their identity or background" (Appendix B). Similarly, Educate Together schools commit to delivering equality of access and esteem to all children, irrespective of their social, cultural, and religious backgrounds (Educate Together, 2017). The Educate Together charter affirms the right of children to an education that reflects their identities while exploring those of others (Educate Together, 2004, p. 7). Therefore, unlike the *habitus* of denominational schools, which reflects the dominant culture alone, the *habitus* of both multi-denominational/equality-based school types pledges to reflect that of *all* children, regardless of their culture, religion/belief, social class, language and sexual orientation. The recognition of all the children's cultural and social capital reduces the risk of them being perceived by teachers from the dominant group in deficit terms (symbolic violence). Indeed, CNS policy advises schools to ensure that all school community members "are provided with opportunities to reflect on their potential bias towards certain groups or individuals and the impact such biases have on perpetuating inequality and inequity" (ETBI, 2021, p. 16). However, similar to critiques of Liberal Multicultural Education, the expressive goals outlined earlier could be charged with emphasising equality of respect and recognition to the detriment of equality of power.

Although egalitarian ideals are central to such a statement, from a critical perspective, it raises questions of who is the 'valuer' of diversity and who is treating who with dignity and respect (Bryan, 2010). The use of such language, while aiming to be inclusive, raises questions of who is "extending" equality of respect and recognition to whom? (Bousetta and Jacobs, 2006, p. 26). If it is understood as the dominant group 'generously' recognising minoritised identities, these seemingly egalitarian ideals have the counter-productive effect of entrenching power differentials between the culturally dominant and minoritised groups in society (Bryan, 2009c).

The language of 'celebrating' diversity is ubiquitous across the documentation of both models and the case study school. Although the term 'celebrate' can suggest a radical egalitarian approach to equality of recognition and respect, policy documentation in both CNS and Educate Together appear to use the term in line with liberal egalitarianism's apolitical celebration of diversity (Baker *et al.*, 2009). Children are explicitly taught the knowledge and attitudes required to 'embrace' the diversity in a pluralist society with little evidence of the parameters within which such 'celebration' ought to occur. There is some evidence of a radical egalitarian conceptualisation of 'celebrating' diversity in both models' expressive goals. In the CNS model, where values and beliefs are expressed that are contrary to the egalitarian ethos of the school, teachers are advised to challenge that belief "by explaining that the school promotes equality and human rights, and therefore that belief is in conflict with the values promoted by the school" (ETBI, 2020, p. 4).Similarly, Educate Together advises parents whose strict religious beliefs inhibit them from engaging respectfully with other beliefs "to seek a denominational school in line with their conscience or to home-school their children" (Educate Together, 2017, p. 9).

3.4.4.2 Instrumental Goals

A school's instrumental and organisational goals should reflect its expressive goals (Norman, 2003). The Patron's Framework (2021, p. 16) supports CNSs in this regard by advising schools to ensure that "diversity within the school community is meaningfully affirmed on an ongoing basis in both the formal and hidden curricula and the organisational structures of the school". This appears to be a genuine attempt to ensure that the school's *habitus* reflects all groups' *habitus* and cultural capital, both dominant and minoritised. However, as per critiques of Liberal Multicultural Education, efforts at including minoritised identities in the formal and hidden curricula will achieve little if there is a politically muted approach to their recognition.

The patrons' curricula in both models are central to translating their expressive goals into instrumental goals. The strands currently underpinning these curricula in both models reflect their broader conceptualisation of multi-denominational/equality-based education that moves beyond a focus on the religious aspect of diversity alone.

Figure 5: Strands of GMGY and Learn Together

School Type	CNS	Educate Together
Patrons' Curriculum	**GMGY**	**Learn Together**
Strand	My Stories (Identity Education)	Moral and Spiritual Development
	We are a CNS (Values Education)	Equality and Justice
	Thinking Time (Philosophy)	Ethics and the Environment
	Religions and Beliefs (Multi-denominational Religious Education)	Belief Systems

It is evident from the strands outlined above that neither model takes the liberal egalitarian approach of non-engagement with the private spheres of life. Both curricula explicitly address questions of religions, beliefs and values. It is widely argued that engaging with issues of religions and beliefs is an essential aspect of intercultural education (Smyth and Darmody, 2011; Jackson, 2013; Smyth, Darmody and Lyons, 2013). In line with a radical egalitarian approach to equality of respect and recognition, there is evidence in both models of children being encouraged to critically question different values, beliefs, and traditions

they encounter in a pluralist society. In GMGY, this is most evident in Strand Three, 'Thinking Time', which takes a philosophy for and with children approach. Children develop their ability to be "critical, creative, collaborative and caring" thinkers in this strand (NCCA, 2018a, p. 7). Although the curriculum document encourages teachers to apply the skills acquired in Strand Three across the other strands, it does not explicitly name a critical approach in other strands such as the 'Beliefs and Religions', 'My Stories' or 'We are a CNS' strand. This lack of clarity may lead to teachers taking a liberal egalitarian approach where all religious/non-religious worldviews, values and cultural practices are *tolerated*. However, the curriculum appears open to teachers taking a more critical approach, where all beliefs, values and traditions, be they from dominant or minoritised groups, are open to egalitarian challenge (Baker *et al.*, 2009, p. 35). Similarly, the Learn Together curriculum also encourages critical reflection on issues relating to diversity, discrimination, and the media's role in equality and social justice issues (Educate Together, 2004).

In Appendix A, there is an abundance of evidence of both models' commitment to responding to the needs of certain minoritised members of the school communities at a macro level. However, what becomes apparent when breaking down policy into the variables being examined in this study is a lack of specific guidance on how schools can respond to various aspects of diversity. Reflective of Baker *et al.'s* (2009) assertion that the biggest victims of non-recognition in schools are those from working class backgrounds and the LGBTQ+ community, there is a dearth of policy publicly available on how either school type or the case study school respond to members of the school community from these backgrounds. Chapter Two outlined the serious consequences of "institutional invisibility" (Lynch and Lodge, 2002, p. 186) as a form of 'symbolic violence'. It may be unrealistic to expect a publicly available policy on all identity variables. Individual schools develop specific policies and practices as they require them based on the expressive goals

of each model. Therefore, a deeper exploration of how the case study school responds to the identity variables is required.

3.4.4.3 Organisational Goals

'Equality of Power' is exceptionally challenging to achieve in schools which are described as "endemically inegalitarian" (Lynch and Lodge, 2002, p. 20). All schools, regardless of patron, have formal structures to ensure that various stakeholders have a voice in terms of how the school is run through the existence of Boards of Management and Parent and Student Councils. However, as outlined in Chapter Two, the structures established to achieve this may be populated to ensure that only the voice of the dominant cultural group in the school is represented. A natural consequence of this is for school policy to reflect the interests of the dominant group only. CNS policy aims to overcome this by advising schools to ensure that "all school committees are reflective of the diversity within the school community" (ETBI, 2021, p. 18). In line with Darmody and McCoy's (2011) recommendation about enabling genuine parental involvement in school life by providing direct supports to parents to ensure their participation, both CNS and Educate Together schools are advised by their patrons to be cognisant of the barriers minoritised groups face in participating in formal democratic processes. In addition, they are also advised to provide the supports required by minoritised groups to overcome the challenges they face because of their reduced social capital in an education system they are unfamiliar with. As outlined in Chapter Two, Baker *et al.* (2009) argue that it is imperative for formal committees to represent both dominant and minoritised perspectives, particularly in areas where moral disagreement is possible. This is an important consideration in this study. Although the CNS model claims to respond to the needs of families from all backgrounds, its egalitarian ethos may be incompatible with the beliefs of the minoritised groups represented on school

committees. The question of how the school overcomes this challenge is an essential element of this study.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the significant role that ethos plays in the lives of all members of the school community. An ethos that reflects the *habitus* and various forms of capital possessed by the entire school community is considered the most effective way of disrupting hegemonic norms of dominance and subordination. A school with a multi-denominational ethos underpinned by egalitarian values is understood to be the most appropriate context to respond to the needs of diverse school communities. However, it is clear from what is outlined in this chapter that a multi-denominational school's effectiveness in achieving this aim largely depends on how its ethos is conceptualised and enacted. Surveying the literature and ethos-related policy in multi-denominational/equality-based schools using the critical and liberal egalitarian theories outlined in Chapter Two raises significant questions about how the CNS ethos is conceptualised and enacted in response to a diverse school community. Chapter Four provides details of the methodologies used to address the research questions underpinning this study.

Chapter Four – Conceptual Framework and Research Design

4.1 Introduction

This study critically examines how the CNS ethos is conceptualised by key stakeholders in the CNS model and conceptualised and enacted by school staff in one diverse primary school. This chapter delineates the study's conceptual framework, commencing with an outline of my ontological, epistemological, and axiological stances. It then provides an account of how the study's theoretical framework was applied. The rationale for the use of a qualitative single case study methodology is provided. A justification for selecting the case study school, particular research participants, data collection and analytical tools are then set out. The chapter concludes with an exploration of the ethical considerations which inform the study and the steps I took to ensure that methodological rigour was central to how I conducted this qualitative study.

4.2 Conceptual Framework

My conceptual framework comprises my philosophical assumptions, the applied theoretical framework, research methodology and methods, my status as an 'insider researcher' and the key concepts of 'ethos', 'multi-denominational' education and 'diversity' as outlined in previous chapters. It is depicted diagrammatically in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Overview of the Study's Conceptual Framework
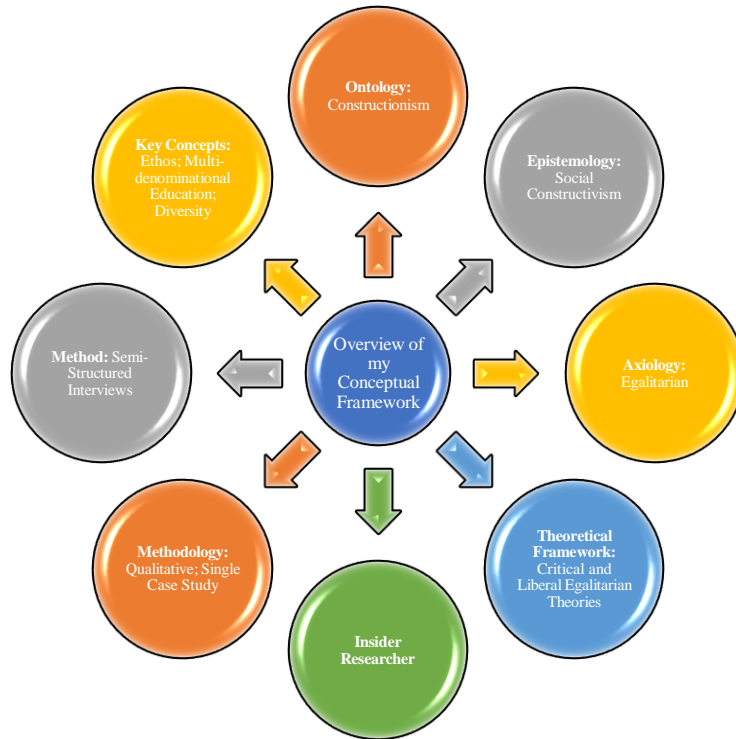
4.2.1 Identifying my Philosophical Assumptions

Recognising the impact of my beliefs and philosophical assumptions on the research process, including the selection of my research paradigm (Sefotho, 2015; O'Leary, 2017; Creswell and Poth, 2018); I will now outline my view of the nature of reality (ontological stance), my theory of knowledge/how I come to know reality (epistemological stance), my value-stance (axiological stance), and the procedures used in the study (methodological stance) (Creswell and Poth, 2018, pp. 19–20).

An essential first step in identifying my research paradigm is to illuminate my ontological positionality. Ontologically speaking, I do not believe in the notion of objective reality, the idea that there is a single truth 'out there' which can be objectively discovered or observed (Pring, 2015). Rather, I believe in multiple realities, and that truth is constructed and

negotiated between research participants and the researcher (Crotty, 2015) as my reality interacts with theirs (Merriam, 1998, p. 22). Epistemologically, then, I would describe myself as a social constructivist or interpretivist.

My research questions seek to understand the research participants' multiple conceptualisations and interpretations of the CNS ethos and how those conceptualisations are put into practice. Analysis will reflect our collective construction of knowledge through "mutual negotiation" (O'Donoghue, 2007, p. 10).

Congruent with my ontological and epistemological stances is an understanding that the research process is value laden. Therefore, I am required to make my values (axiological position) known (Sefotho, 2015, p. 27). As Bryman (2016) argues, values inform every aspect of the study, from formulating the research questions, the choice of methods, data collection techniques, data analysis and conclusions. The theoretical framework underpinning this study, which is informed by liberal egalitarian and critical theories, reflects my complex axiological position. Engaging with these theories has been a useful heuristic in examining my positionality in relation to the research. As a result, I can confidently say that 'equality' and 'respect for diversity' are core values I bring to this study. However, the use of both liberal egalitarian and critical theories of equality in my theoretical framework is reflective of my complex understanding of the concept and my position on the continuum between being a 'traditional' and 'organic' intellectual[27] (Gramsci, 1971). Although critical theories heavily inform my theoretical framework, I cannot claim with the greatest level of authenticity that I am firmly located in the critical

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[27] Gramsci (1971) differentiated between 'common sense' and 'good sense' and between the 'traditional' and 'organic' intellectuals who advocated for them. Where 'traditional' intellectuals, belonging to the dominant groups, play a key role in maintaining the common-sense view of the natural order of things, 'organic' intellectuals fight for the needs of subordinated groups by attempting to move the 'common sense' view to a 'good sense' view i.e., one where the reality of inequality is recognised, challenged and overcome.

space alone. Like all other researchers, my interpretation of the world is reflective of the hegemonic narratives that I have internalised throughout my lifetime. As a result of the tensions between these deeply embedded narratives and a more recent introduction to more radical ways of viewing the world, my philosophical assumptions are varied and at times contradictory. This complexity is reflective of my personal journey as well as my academic one.

Personally, I have moved from identifying as a straight, Catholic, relatively socially conservative person to a gay, non-religious person with an egalitarian outlook. The evolution of my philosophical assumptions is reflective of Creswell and Poth's (2018, p. 19) view that our assumptions can change over time and throughout one's career. This evolution towards living my true identity is a result of life experiences gained through a great deal of international travel, living overseas, and teaching in schools with non-faith-based, more liberal ethos than those I attended and worked in previously.

Reflecting the theses of critical theorists such as Bourdieu, Gramsci, Taylor and Freire, I was unable to recognise my oppression and actively played my part in maintaining it by accepting the *status quo* as normal. However, discussions with friends who held more critical perspectives made me realise that the treatment of the LGBTQ+ community in Irish society was not 'common sense' (Gramsci, 1971) and that our subordinate position in the social field was not inevitable. This reached a crescendo during the debates nationally and in my social and family circles leading up to the referendum on Marriage Equality in Ireland in 2015. It was for me what Freire (2000) describes as a process of 'conscientisation'. The debates made me increasingly aware of my subordination and the role I had been playing in maintaining it. This awareness empowered me to actively demand change. Thankfully, the majority of the Irish electorate heard this demand for change, and marriage equality for same-sex couples was achieved.

Academically, more recent engagement with critical theorists during my Master's and Doctoral work has greatly enhanced this process of 'conscientisation' by giving me the language and conceptual tools I required to make sense of my personal journey and to (re)examine the hegemonic inequalities being perpetuated in my professional area that I have heretofore accepted as an inevitable part of life.

In summary, as a direct consequence of the minoritised aspects of my identity and my learning from my academic studies, I am highly motivated to question and deconstruct the normalised and institutionalised inequalities that exist in society and in the education system. However, I am also a white, English speaking, middle-class, settled man who has lived a life of relative privilege. Therefore, I recognise that I have many blind spots to the realities of those from different ethnic, linguistic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. I am conscious that my socio-cultural and political-historical context limits what I can know (Pirbhai-Illich, Pete and Martin, 2017, p. 4).

In underscoring the importance of reflexivity throughout the research process, Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000, p. 129) state that "researchers are themselves prisoners or their own society and its taken-for-granted concepts, thus helping to reproduce the *status quo*". Therefore, deconstructing the consequences of the hegemonic narratives and experiences that I have internalised throughout my life about those who are different to me is still a work in progress. In naming my privilege, I am conscious that simply acknowledging it, does not make me immune to playing an active role in perpetuating inequalities (Kitching, 2014, p. 176), making this 'work in progress' a priority. Figure 7 provides a diagrammatical representation of my theoretical framework. The following sections address these selected concepts and give an account of how they were used to analyse the study's raw data.

Figure 7: The Study's Theoretical Framework
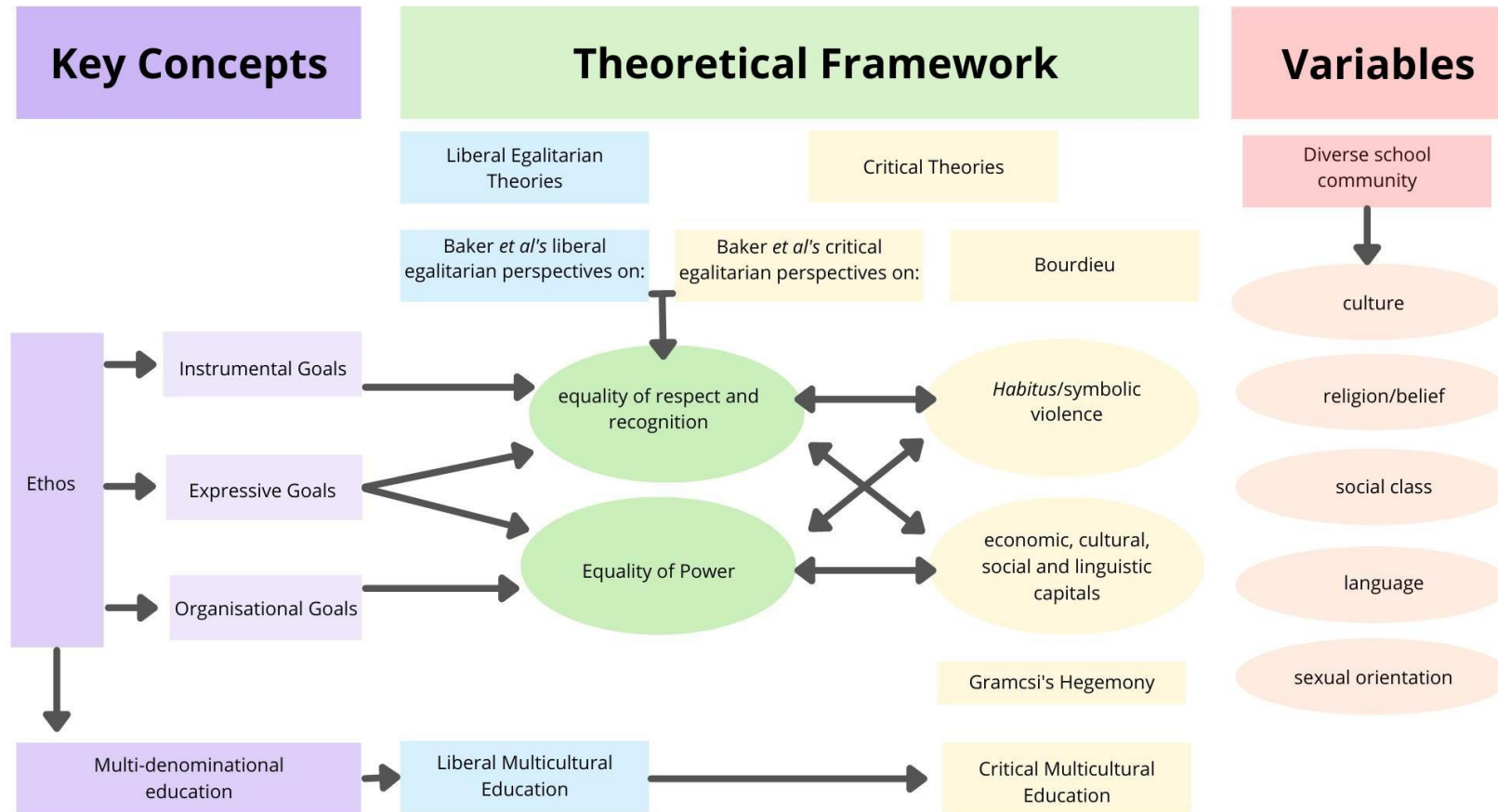
4.2.2 Theoretical Framework

As well as my personal experiences, values and knowledge of the topic in question, my theoretical framework was fundamental to the way I engaged with the literature, selected my research methodology, approached my interviews and interpreted the data (Richards, 2022, p. 161). Baker *et al.'s* (2009) liberal egalitarian perspectives on equality of respect and recognition and equality of power, and Liberal Multicultural Education (closely associated with liberal egalitarianism) were used in this study. This recognised the genuine efforts of research participants to conceptualise and enact the CNS ethos in ways that responds to the needs of a diverse school community. Critical theories such as hegemony, *habitus*, various forms of capital, 'symbolic violence', and Critical Multicultural Education were also employed to problematise my own and the research participants' hegemonic and taken-for-granted thinking and practices which potentially perpetuate rather than transform the injustices experienced by minoritised groups in diverse school communities (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). One of the main reasons I set out on this Doctoral journey was to challenge my thinking in an area where professionally I was increasingly being labelled in my work circles to have an 'expertise' in i.e., schools with a multi-denominational ethos. Therefore, the use of critical theories is prioritised in my theoretical framework as it lends itself to the possibilities of expanding my own conceptualisations of the CNS ethos and augmenting current ethos-related policies and practices in the CNS model to bring about a more just and equal society. The following sub-sections detail how I employed the main theses of the specific theorists and theories in my analysis of the data.

4.2.2.1 Hegemony

Gramsci's theory of 'hegemony' (Gramsci, 1971) is used to critically examine relevant participants' initial conceptualisations and enactments of the CNS ethos and their general acceptance of a religious-centric understanding of ethos that prioritised responses to religious/belief diversity over other diversity variables. It is also used to explore the potential of the CNS ethos, as currently conceptualised and enacted by all research participants, to act as a 'counter-hegemony' to a largely monocultural, mono-religious education system that normalises unequal power relations.

4.2.2.2 Specific Concepts from Bourdieu's Work

Bourdieu's theories of *habitus*, 'symbolic violence' and various forms of capital are used to examine how the CNS ethos (organisational *habitus*), as conceptualised and enacted by participants, includes or excludes the *habitus* and various forms of capital (economic, cultural, social) possessed by members of the school community from minoritised ethnic, religious/belief, social class, linguistic and sexual orientation backgrounds. 'Symbolic violence' is applied to conceptualise the impact of the subtle ways minoritised groups can be 'othered' by policies and practices developed or enacted by the research participants.

4.2.2.3 Baker *et al.'s* (2009) Dimensions of Equality

The use of Baker *et al.'s* (2009) dimensions of equality as part of my theoretical framework is congruent with my complex axiological position already outlined. It allows "for someone to have liberal egalitarian views in one respect, while believing in equality of condition in another" (ibid., 2009, p. 23). I apply the liberal egalitarian and critical perspectives on Baker *et al.'s* dimensions of equality most applicable to this study, i.e., equality of respect and recognition and equality of power. Closely related to Bourdieu's theories of *habitus* and various forms of capital, liberal egalitarian and critical lenses are

applied in the examination of how equality of respect and recognition is achieved by research participants' in both the formal and hidden curricula in response to those from minoritised cultural, religious/belief, linguistic, LGBTQ+ and socio-economic backgrounds. Liberal egalitarian and critical conceptualisations of 'Equality of Power' are used to analyse how minoritised members of the school community play a meaningful role in the school from the perspectives of research participants.

4.2.2.4 Liberal and Critical Forms of Multicultural Education

Theories of liberal and critical forms of multicultural education are used as a vehicle to theorise the educational responses of research participants to the demands placed on them by the liberal egalitarian and critical theories underpinning this theoretical framework in responding to the needs of minoritised members of the school community.

The following sub-section sets out my positionality as an 'insider researcher' in this study.

4.2.3 Insider Researcher

DCU's Research Ethics Committee's Guidelines on being an 'insider researcher' define it as "research in which the researcher has a direct involvement or connection with the research setting" (DCU Research Ethics Committee, 2017, p. 1). Therefore, I consider myself an 'insider researcher' (Saidin and Yaacob, 2016). Being an insider to this research project and having worked as a teacher, GMGY Coordinator, principal and policymaker in the CNS model means that I can fully understand what is being researched (Mercer, 2007, p. 5) and have a passion for the topic being studied (Sadin and Yaacob, 2016, p. 850). My familiarity with diverse school settings and interest in ethos enabled me to gather rich data from participants. However, given the roles that I have held and currently hold, my ability to remain objective throughout the research process was

potentially affected (Mercer, 2007; Saidin and Yaacob, 2016). How I endeavoured to overcome this challenge is detailed later in this chapter. Prior to examining this, the next section provides a rationale for the use of a qualitative single case study methodology. It also details the research methods used, the data collection process (semi-structured interviews) and the case study context.

4.2.4 Choosing a Methodology

Given the importance of choosing a methodology that aligns with my epistemological position as a social constructivist (Atiento, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hathaway, 1995; Slevitch, 2011), a qualitative research methodology is employed. Therefore, after examining the various options available to me, I concluded that a case study methodology was the most appropriate. My definition of a case study aligns with Stake's (1995) and Merriam's (1998) understanding of it as the study of a unit or a *bounded* system. This study is bounded within one school and to key stakeholders who develop policies (including the GMGY curriculum) that are implemented in that school.

Although methodologists who are strong proponents of case study research have differing views on the epistemological assumptions underpinning it (Yazan and De Vasconcelos, 2016), I contend that it aligns closely with my epistemological position as a social constructivist. The use of a case study enabled me to gain a deep understanding of how research participants understood the concept of the CNS ethos (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). It allowed for "different and even contradictory views of what is happening" to emerge (Stake, 1995, p. 12).

The case study was beneficial to this study considering my research question, as they are particularly effective at addressing 'how' and 'why' questions (Ashley, 2017; Yin, 2018). It enabled me to drill down into the complexities inherent in the CNS ethos through in-

depth probing, repeated visits to the school and encounters with the research participants (Ashley, 2017, p. 114). The following sub-section outlines how I chose the case study school and particular research participants.

4.2.4.1 Selecting the Case

I employed 'nonprobability', 'purposeful' sampling when selecting my case study school (Bryman, 2016; Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016; Creswell and Poth, 2018). I was cognisant that cases should be selected based on their ability to "illuminate your research questions" (Yin, 2018, p. 26). Using nonprobability, purposeful sampling enabled me to select the CNS I believed would give me the greatest insights into how the CNS ethos is conceptualised and enacted in responding to diverse school communities (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). I characterise the school involved in this case study as an 'unusual' case (Yin, 2019, pp. 49-51). My rationale for choosing an 'unusual' case is that although 'common' cases can give key insights into a particular phenomenon, an 'unusual' case can help highlight issues that may be overlooked in typical cases "helps illustrate matters we overlook in typical cases" (Stake, 1995). I consider the school involved in this study to be an "unusual" case for a number of reasons. Firstly, the level of diversity in the school community is high relative to other diverse school communities. As the other reasons are quite specific, they will not be detailed in the thesis as it could lead to the school being identifiable to some.

4.2.4.2 Recruiting Research Participants

I employed two forms of purposive sampling to select the research participants in this study – 'theory-based'[28] and 'snowball'[29] (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 159).

In terms of recruiting participants, firstly, informal contact was made with the ETBI representative, NCCA representative and school principal by telephone to outline the research questions and aims and to ask if they and the teachers in the case study school more broadly might be interested in participating in the study. It was made clear to all those contacted that participation in the research was entirely voluntary and non-participation would have no negative consequences for the principal or staff members in the potential case study school. The key stakeholders were asked to consider my proposal and to get back to me within a number of days with their response.

The principal of the case study school was requested to act as the 'gatekeeper' (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 150) if he agreed to participate in the study. As gatekeeper, he would be required to disseminate various documents to the staff on behalf of the researcher until the research participants were identified and the researcher had their permission to email them directly (See Appendix C - Informed Consent Form). This was made clear to the principal before deciding whether or not to participate. The principal was asked to

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[28] 'Theory-based' sampling was used to address the question 'how do key stakeholders in the CNS model conceptualise the CNS ethos?'. Participants were chosen based on my knowledge of their academic expertise and experiences in multi-denominational education, ethos, Community National Schools, and working in diverse school communities.

[29] A combination of 'theory-based' and 'snowball' sampling was used to address the question 'how do school staff in one diverse primary school conceptualise and enact the CNS ethos?'. Although I specifically targeted key people in the school based on their roles as former and current principal, deputy principal and GMGY Coordinator, I relied on these participants' professional judgement to direct me to other teachers whom they believed could provide the most valuable insights into the research questions underpinning this study. Their guidance towards others who were knowledgeable and interested in the area of ethos provided me with invaluable insights into the phenomenon being studied.

consider the proposal and let me know by phone or email after a number of days whether he was happy to bring the proposal to the Board of Management (BoM) for discussion.

After the principal agreed to bring the proposal to the BoM, I sent a formal letter (Appendix D) to the school's BoM seeking approval to carry out the research. As a result, the BoM formally approved the school's participation in the study on 27th April 2021. The school has been given a pseudonym to protect its identity and details that could make the school identifiable are not included.

I formally recruited participants by sending copies of the Plain Language Statement (Appendix I), a short video explaining my research and what involvement would entail and an Informed Consent Form (Appendix C). I also provided my contact details in case potential participants required any further information prior to agreeing to engage with the study. Staff members in the case study school were asked to inform their principal if they were willing to participate in the study. The principal then informed me of those willing to participate in the study. He provided me with their email addresses (if permission was granted in the Informed Consent Form from the research participants). Once the Informed Consent Forms were sent back to me containing the contact details of the research participants, I made contact directly with them from then on without the assistance of the principal.

4.2.4.3 Participant Profiles

Figure 8 provides a brief overview of the participants' profiles. It assigns a pseudonym to each participant, names their role in the CNS model/school and provides some relevant information. In profiling the participants, details are kept to a minimum to respect their anonymity.

Key Stakeholders are given pseudonyms and are labelled in accordance with the organisation they represent i.e., 'ETBI representative' and 'NCCA representative'. Staff members are given pseudonyms.

Figure 8: Participant Profiles

Name	Role	Years working in CNS model
Stephen	NCCA Representative	• five years teaching in a CNS • three years developing the Revised GMGY Curriculum
Heather	ETBI representative	• four years teaching in a CNS • three years in current role
Michelle	GMGY Coordinator[30]/Home School Liaison Coordinator[31]	• eight years teaching in case study school
Sarah	Teacher	• seven years teaching in case study school
Carmel	Former Principal	• Worked in case study school for thirteen years
Finbar	Current Principal	• eleven years teaching in the case study school

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[30] Every CNS appoints a GMGY Coordinator who is responsible for the implementation of the GMGY Curriculum in the school. GMGY Coordinators engage regularly with ETBI for Professional Development and to share ideas on how to implement the GMGY curriculum effectively. GMGY Coordinators were key players in the development of the revised GMGY curriculum and were members of an NCCA Teachers' Network working on the revised GMGY curriculum.

[31] DEIS schools are given an allocation of an ex-quota teacher who provides supports through home visits, parent classes/courses (recreational and educational)

Chloe	Deputy Principal	• seven years teaching in the case study school
Jill	Teacher	• seven years teaching in the case study school
Amber	Teacher/Assistant Principal[32]	• thirteen years teaching in the case study school
Mark	Teacher/Assistant Principal	• eight years teaching in the case study school
Geraldine	Teacher/Assistant Principal	• fourteen years teaching in the case study school
Lynn	Teacher	• two years teaching the case study school
Barry	Teacher/Assistant Principal	• eight years teaching in the case study school
Tim	Teacher/Assistant Principal	• nine years teaching the case study school

Reflective of the homogeneity of the broader Irish teaching population (Heinz and Keane, 2018), all participants identified throughout the interview as being from a white, Irish, settled background. Heather (ETBI representative), Carmel (former principal) and Mark (teacher) were the only participants who indicated they were from 'disadvantaged', urban

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[32] Assistant principals are members of the school's middle-leadership team and support the principal and deputy principal in running the school.

areas. All participants attended Catholic primary, post-primary and Initial Teacher Education (ITE) institutions.

4.2.4.4 Semi-Structured Interviews

Stake (1995, p. 64) argues that the "main road to multiple realities" is through interviews to gather data. As an insider researcher, it was imperative that my own conceptualisations and experiences of the CNS ethos were challenged by uncovering the research participants' perspectives of the phenomenon. The use of in-depth interviews enabled me to cross the boundary, or the 'membrane' of my own awareness and ways of seeing, doing and thinking and "journey into another's perspective" about a phenomenon I am very familiar with (Mears, 2017, p. 184). I used "responsive interviewing" which enabled me to tailor my questions depending on the expertise and interests of the research participants (Rubin and Rubin, 2012).

I employed the use of semi-structured interviews as they allowed the greatest level of flexibility to probe deeper into participants' responses (Bell and Waters, 2014, p. 178). I spent a great deal of time preparing my interview schedules (Appendices E,F,G and H), and anticipating probing questions that would evoke richer responses (Stake, 1995, p. 65). In preparing the interview schedules, I was also conscious of Rubin and Rubin's (2012) assertion that as qualitative interviews are extensions of normal conversations, each interview is new every time one occurs. Therefore, I had to be disciplined in not being overly determined to ask specific questions that did not relate to the responses of the research participants.

In addition, to ensure that participants were at ease during the interview, I sent them an informal video of me outlining, in plain English, what the study was about and what it would involve for them practically. I spent some time with participants prior to recording

the interview to build up a good rapport with them. This allowed for a more fluid conversation between the participant and me about a topic of mutual interest. It also helped me gain the confidence required to conduct the interviews in a way that would garner the information required, as it was easier to ask probing questions and challenge the research participants after having spent some time with them (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, p. 79).

My overarching research questions informed the interview questions set out in the interview schedules. Separate interview schedules were prepared for participants depending on their role.

Figure 9: Overview of Participant Groups

Participant Group	Role	Interview Schedule
Participant Group 1	Former and current principal and current deputy principal	Appendix E
Participant Group 2	The GMGY Coordinator and six teachers in the school	Appendix F
Participant Group 3	One representative from ETBI	Appendix G
Participant Group 4	One representative from NCCA	Appendix H

In line with a "responsive interviewing" style, interviews were transcribed immediately afterwards and before the next interview[33] (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). This enabled me to

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[33] On days where there were multiple interviews scheduled, this was not possible. However, the set of interviews was transcribed before conducting the next set of interviews.

examine which areas I wanted to follow up on with other participants and fill any data gaps. To allow time for this, school-based interviews were carried out on four separate days over a month. Interviews with key stakeholders were conducted prior to engaging with school-based participants (September 2020). They were also conducted a week apart from each other to allow time for transcription and some familiarisation with the first interview.

4.2.4.5 Piloting the Interview Schedules

I was cognisant that the researcher requires certain skills in probing and asking follow-up questions which elicit from participants "thick descriptions" which recount their first-hand experiences of the phenomenon in question (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). Given the small-scale nature of this research project, I did not have the luxury of honing these skills as the interviews progressed. Therefore, piloting my interview schedules was crucial (Merriam, 1998, p. 75). I piloted my interview schedule for each stakeholder group I engaged with as part of this study with others who worked in similar positions who were not part of the study. This entailed interviewing an ETBI representative who supports ETB *post-primary* schools in ethos-related matters, a teacher who worked part time on the development of the revised GMGY curriculum, as well as a principal and a teacher from two different CNSs with diverse school communities I knew were well-versed in ethos-related matters. I learned a great deal from the pilot interviews. Firstly, my pilot interviews and initial interviews in the case study school significantly impacted my overall research question. Until that point, my overall research focus was on conceptualisations and enactments of "*a 'multi-denominational'* ethos" in response to a diverse school community. However, I quickly realised that I had to rephrase my focus to conceptualisations and enactments of "*the CNS ethos*" as when I referenced "multi-denominational", participants immediately spoke to the religious/belief aspect of the

CNS ethos only (I return to this in the next chapter). Secondly, I learnt from my pilot interview with the principal and teachers not to jump straight into questions on conceptualisations of ethos. When reflecting on the pilot interview, many of them stated that while the latter part of the interview felt much more conversational, the initial questions on ethos reminded them of the initial questions asked in interviews for teaching and leadership positions in the CNS model. They shared that this made responses more formal than conversational. Therefore, I ensured that I spent more time on generic questions about participants' careers to date, educational experiences etc., prior to easing into questions on ethos in subsequent interviews.

The following section provides details on how the data from semi-structured interviews were analysed using Braun and Clarke's 'Reflexive Thematic Analysis' (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

4.3 Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study were evident in the following areas – sample size, participant profiles, and the absence of minoritised voices.

The study captures a small number of perspectives on how the CNS ethos is conceptualised and enacted in response to diverse school communities. It also captures these perspectives at a specific moment in time and in a particular 'unusual' (Yin, 2018) school context. While limited by sample size, the findings are nonetheless rich and nuanced. As evidenced by the recommendations, the study provides invaluable insights into ways to progress the work on the CNSs in the area of ethos. The focus of this study was not to generalise but to provide 'thick' descriptions (Chapter Five) of how the CNS ethos is conceptualised and enacted by some key stakeholders, teachers and school leaders in the CNS model. It is hoped that these findings and their analysis will

stimulate new insights, understandings and explanations for teachers, school leaders and policymakers in multi-denominational/equality-based/diverse school contexts. Further research capturing how the CNS ethos is conceptualised and enacted across a wider variety of CNSs (both greenfield[34] and reconfigured schools[35]) would provide more generalisable insights.

The preference to employ purposive 'theory-based' and 'snowball' sampling targeting those with the most insights into the phenomenon in question does not capture the experiences of other key stakeholders and school staff who are not as invested in and informed about ethos-related matters. Although the data gathered was rich and divergent, further research using 'random' or 'stratified' purposeful sampling (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 159) could offer important insights into the phenomenon.

Given my current role and professional experiences to date, I was particularly interested in gathering the perspectives of certain key stakeholders, school leaders and teachers in the case study school on the CNS ethos. However, due to considerable time restraints, I chose not to include the perspectives of minoritised parents and children in this study, which is a significant limitation. Future research in the case study school and the CNS model could focus on the perspectives of minoritised parents and children on how they conceptualise and experience (rather than enact) the CNS ethos.

4.4 Data Analysis

This section outlines my rationale for utilising 'Reflexive Thematic Analysis' (Braun and Clarke, 2019; Richards, 2022) to analyse the data in this study. It provides details of the

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[34] Referring to schools which were newly established in an area of demographic growth
[35] Referring to schools which have transferred from religious patrons to the CNS model

various phases I went through prior to writing up my report in a 'Findings and Discussion Chapter'.

Prior to deciding that 'Reflexive Thematic Analysis' was the most appropriate form of analysis for this study, I spent some time reading about the various forms of thematic analysis (TA) available, such as 'coding reliability', 'codebook' and 'reflexive' forms of TA (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 333). I was drawn to Reflexive TA because of its theoretical flexibility (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 78), which was compatible with my ontological and epistemological positions as a constructionist and social constructivist. The 'reflexive' element inherent in this form of TA was also attractive, considering my position as an 'insider researcher' (Richards, 2022, p. 149) and the measures I needed to take to overcome the challenges faced by insider researchers (returned to later in the chapter). The use of NVivo, a sophisticated computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) package provided me "with an audit trail which is visual evidence of the processes employed during data analysis" (Bonello and Meehan, 2019, p. 496) (see examples in Figures 9 and 10).

Following the decision to use NVivo and Reflexive Thematic Analysis, I attended training provided by DCU on using NVivo. Through this training, I set up my data analysis on NVivo using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of data analysis (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Braun and Clarke's Six Phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis

ORGANIZE

☰ Coding ⌄

⌄ Codes

Notable Quotes

Phase 2 Systematic Data Coding (Open Coding)

Phase 3 Generating Initial Themes from Coded and Collated Data (Developing Categories)

Phase 4 Developing and Reviewing Themes (Coding On)

Phase 5 Refining, Defining and Naming Themes (Developing a Thematic Framework)

Phase 6 Writing the Report (Analysis and Write Up)
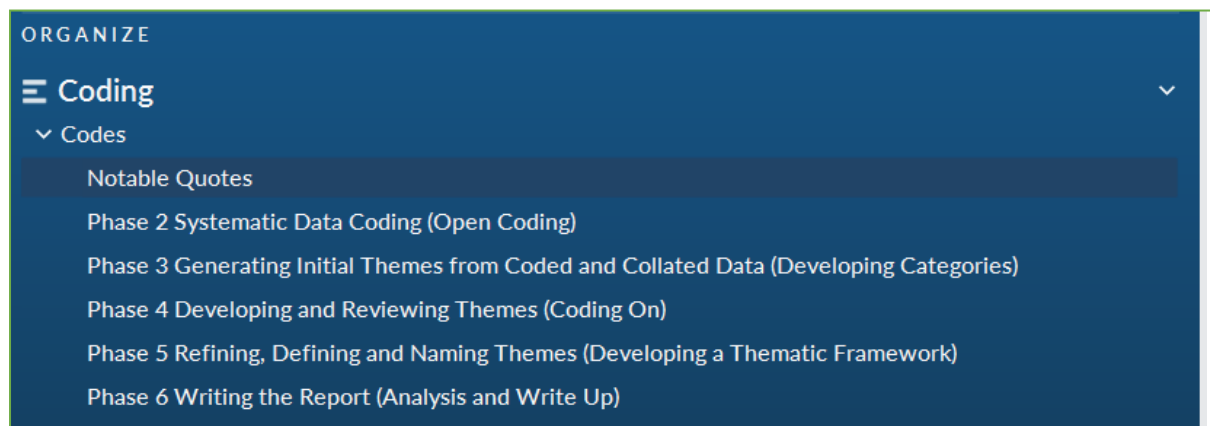
I had several crucial decisions to make prior to analysing the data. Firstly, I had to decide whether to use an 'inductive' (data-centric) or 'deductive' (theory-centric) form of TA (Braun and Clarke, 2006, pp. 84-85). As I was more interested in understanding the data generated by my research participants rather than themes generated by previous research on the topic, data analysis was mainly carried out in an 'inductive' way (ibid., 2006). However, as I developed my theoretical framework and engaged extensively with the literature prior to my fieldwork, the theories and literature naturally influenced my interview questions and approaches to data analysis. This reflects Braun and Clarke's (2013, p. 175) assertion that even in inductive forms of TA "analysis is always shaped to some extent by the researcher's standpoint, disciplinary knowledge and epistemology". For example, while staying loyal to the raw data, my findings chapter is structured using Norman's Framework on Ethos (2003) (see Figure 14). Secondly, I had to decide whether to use 'semantic' (explicit) or 'latent' (interpretive) codes (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Codes generated were mostly 'semantic' and simply gave a brief description of what participants were saying e.g., "drawing on children's experiences", "GMGY as a key vehicle for enacting the CNS ethos". However, more 'latent' codes were also used, drawing on my theoretical framework e.g., 'providing a culturally responsive

curriculum', 'liberal and Critical Multicultural Education' (See Figure 11). The influence of my theoretical framework on my analysis of the data is congruent with arguments that themes "do not spontaneously emerge from coding and categorising data" (Richards, 2022, p. 150). Those who claim the researcher to be passive in the data analysis process deny "the active role the researcher always plays in identifying patterns/themes, selecting which ones are of interest, and reporting them to the readers" (Braun and Clark, 2006, p. 80). The next sub-section briefly outlines my journey through the six phases of Reflexive TA.

4.4.1 Phase One – Familiarising yourself with your data

The data were gathered during September and October 2021. Collecting the data myself was the first essential step in ensuring that I was familiar with the data from the outset. As well as having the interviews transcribed verbatim, I listened back to them repeatedly in my spare time and read and reread the transcripts to ensure that I was very familiar with the data. All transcripts were uploaded to NVivo and categorised according to participant group i.e., 'Key Stakeholder' and 'School-based Staff'.

4.4.2 Phase Two – Generating Initial Codes

As coding is at the heart of the data analysis process (Richards, 2022, p. 156), I spent a great deal of time (November 2021-January 2022) going through each interview, line by line, assigning each line with an initial code. Some data were assigned to a number of codes (both semantic and latent). Figure 11 demonstrates the vast number of initial codes I generated from initial readings of the transcripts. Each code was defined when the code was identified initially to set parameters around which data would be assigned to which code (Appendix J).

Figure 11: Initial Codes in Phase 2 of Data Analysis

Phase 2 Systematic Data Coding (Open Coding) Name	Files	References	Created on	Created by	Modified on	Modified by	
Ethnicity	12	27	27/10/2021 10:01	SC	26/11/2021 12:39	SC	
Intersectionality of Diversity	1	2	06/11/2021 10:07	SC	26/11/2021 12:39	SC	
Language	10	24	27/10/2021 09:57	SC	26/11/2021 12:39	SC	
Religion and Belief	13	61	27/10/2021 09:58	SC	26/11/2021 12:39	SC	
SEN	2	3	06/11/2021 10:24	SC	26/11/2021 12:39	SC	
Sexual Orientation	13	42	27/10/2021 09:57	SC	26/11/2021 12:39	SC	
Social Class	13	40	27/10/2021 10:00	SC	26/11/2021 12:39	SC	
The White Irish in the School	6	17	11/11/2021 12:10	SC	26/11/2021 12:39	SC	
Ensuring Representation of the Diversity in the School Community	13	34	27/10/2021 10:37	SC	26/11/2021 12:31	SC	
Ethos as a Result of both Top-Down and Bottom-Up Influences	10	34	21/11/2021 09:23	SC	26/11/2021 12:21	SC	
Experience as an enabler to enacting the CNS Ethos	11	18	27/10/2021 10:29	SC	26/11/2021 12:39	SC	
Fear	13	36	21/11/2021 09:18	SC	26/11/2021 12:26	SC	
GMGY as a Key Vehicle in Enacting the CNS Ethos	13	44	19/11/2021 10:38	SC	26/11/2021 12:40	SC	
Initial Teacher Education	11	26	27/10/2021 09:40	SC	26/11/2021 12:33	SC	
Knowledge of the Irish Education System	4	7	12/11/2021 16:33	SC	26/11/2021 12:42	SC	
Liberal and Critical Multicultural Education	14	52	19/11/2021 10:33	SC	26/11/2021 12:42	SC	
Links between the CNS Ethos and Intercultural Education	14	67	21/11/2021 09:24	SC	26/11/2021 12:24	SC	
Monocultural Nature of the National Curriculum	4	8	26/10/2021 16:11	SC	26/11/2021 12:23	SC	
Motivation to teach in the CNS model	12	15	26/10/2021 15:52	SC	26/11/2021 12:32	SC	
Parent Voice	0	0	27/10/2021 09:30	SC	26/11/2021 12:43	SC	
Perceptions of other schools types vs CNS model	10	25	27/10/2021 18:37	SC	26/11/2021 12:23	SC	
Perceptions of the School	5	10	27/10/2021 11:38	SC	26/11/2021 12:43	SC	
Providing a Culturaly Responsive Curriculum	12	23	20/11/2021 06:59	SC	26/11/2021 12:24	SC	
Racism	3	5	11/11/2021 16:06	SC	26/11/2021 10:10	SC	

Name	Files	References	Created on	Created by	Modified on	Modified by	
Perceptions of the School	5	10	27/10/2021 11:38	SC	26/11/2021 12:43	SC	
Providing a Culturaly Responsive Curriculum	12	23	20/11/2021 06:59	SC	26/11/2021 12:24	SC	
Racism	3	5	11/11/2021 16:06	SC	26/11/2021 10:10	SC	
Recruitment of Staff	2	3	06/11/2021 10:32	SC	26/11/2021 12:45	SC	
Relationships	8	16	13/11/2021 11:09	SC	26/11/2021 12:45	SC	
Teacher Expectations	3	3	06/11/2021 09:42	SC	26/11/2021 10:16	SC	
Teacher Identity	0	0	29/10/2021 17:56	SC	20/11/2021 07:21	SC	
The Evolution of the CNS Ethos	11	64	21/11/2021 09:24	SC	26/11/2021 12:20	SC	
The evolution of the GMGY Curriculum	4	11	19/11/2021 10:47	SC	26/11/2021 12:20	SC	
The Impact of COVID-19 on Enacting the CNS Ethos	7	13	27/10/2021 11:13	SC	26/11/2021 12:34	SC	
The Impact of the Participants' Identity on their Ability to Respond to a Diverse	13	49	20/11/2021 11:03	SC	26/11/2021 12:32	SC	
The Influence of Leadership on the Ethos of the School	0	0	27/10/2021 10:59	SC	26/11/2021 12:34	SC	
The values underpinning the CNS Model	12	50	21/11/2021 09:25	SC	26/11/2021 12:57	SC	
Understandings of a 'multi-denominational' ethos	5	10	21/11/2021 09:26	SC	26/11/2021 12:21	SC	

4.4.3 Phase Three – Generating Initial Themes

During Phase Three, I considered how the initial codes generated during Phase Two could be combined into "patterns of shared meaning underpinned by a central concept" (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 342). Much of this work was carried out on paper through the drawing of mind maps. This was a very brief phase and quite quickly led to Phase Four.

4.4.4 Phase Four – Reviewing Themes

Phase Four involved the refinement, discarding and collapsing of themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 91). In line with Richard's (2022, p. 157) argument that "at each step of analysis, concepts become more abstract", the theme names became more conceptual than descriptive in nature. Figure 12 pictorially represents the themes that were generated at this phase of analysis.

Figure 12: Phase Four of Data Analysis

4.4.5 Phase Five – Defining and Naming Themes

Before defining and naming my final themes and in line with Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 86) assertion that writing is an integral part of the analysis process rather than something that takes place at the very end, I started writing about my data at this point. Inspired by Keane's (2022, p. 263) concept of "preparatory memos", I 'storied' my data by summarising what the participants said about each of the themes identified at this point without applying my theoretical framework. As advised by my supervisors, this allowed the data "to breathe" and to let speak for itself. Having all the raw data extracts under each theme and sub-theme enabled me to define the themes and identify what was interesting about them and how they related to my research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 92).

After the raw data was summarised under each theme and sub-theme, and in order to "move up the conceptual ladder" (Mihas, 2022, p. 224), I developed a more analytically orientated understanding of my storied data by developing something similar to a "conceptual memo" (Keane, 2022, p. 265) where I asked myself "what is going on here and why?" (Example in Appendix K).

Data analysis indicated that participants' perspectives on conceptualisations and enactment of the CNS ethos appear to be consistent with Norman's (2003) Framework on Ethos. The themes generated in the research aligned closely with the expressive, organisational and instrumental goals comprising his framework. This is significant in the context of a study on ethos, considering arguments that it is highly resistant to empirical research due to its elusive nature, (Donnelly, 2000; Graham, 2012). Norman's Framework (2003) enabled me to present the analysed data in a structured and coherent way that directly addresses the research questions.

Figure 13: Themes and Sub-Themes

Norman's (2003) Goals	Themes	Sub-Themes
Expressive Goal	Conceptualisations of the CNS Ethos in the Case study School	• The Role of Ethos in the School • The Values Underpinning the School's/CNS Model's Ethos • Initial Conceptualisations of the CNS Ethos • Conflicting Perspectives on 'Multi-denominational' as a Descriptor for the Model
Organisational Goal	Developing Ethos through Fostering Partnerships with Parents	• Conceptualisations of 'Community' in the Case study School • Recognising and Tackling Barriers to Minoritised Parental Involvement in Decision-making For a

		• Issues Raised by Certain Minoritised Parents with the Original GMGY Programme • Resolving the Issues through Intensive Negotiations • Dilemmas and Compromises: Balancing the Demands of Certain Parents and the School's Egalitarian Expressive Goals
Instrumental Goals	Striving to Affirm Diversity in the Curriculum	• Affirming Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Diversity in the Classroom • Liberal egalitarian or Critical Approaches to the Curriculum? • Silences and Discomforts in Responding to the Realities of the Experiences of Children from Working Class Backgrounds

		• Reflexive Practices as a Vehicle to Address Dissonances between Policy and Practice

4.4.6 Phase Six– Producing the Report

Chapter Five of this study is the product of the data analysis process (the report). The theoretical framework underpinning this study was applied to the 'storied' data as a means of analysis. The following section unpacks the ethical considerations in this study.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

The key first step I had to undertake prior to conducting my fieldwork was obtaining permission to proceed from DCU's Research Ethics Committee (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 151). Formal approval to proceed with this research project was granted on 1st March 2021. The process of gaining ethical approval prompted me to foresee any potential ethical issues that could arise throughout the study. It required me to think about how research participants could be made vulnerable due to participating in the research and how I could protect them from such vulnerability. I also had to consider my role as Director of Schools in ETBI with responsibility for developing the CNS model and ethos related issues in ETB schools and the potential impact on the integrity of the research.

Given my interest in and previous experiences of the phenomenon at the centre of this study, the potential for bias in selecting literature, asking interview questions and interpreting the data was significant (Bell and Waters, 2014). To address potential bias, I carefully followed the key steps outlined in DCU's Research Committee Guideline

Statement on Insider Research (2017, pp. 3–4) on addressing bias concerns. Reflexivity was key to maintaining my integrity as a researcher (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Throughout all stages of the research process, I was conscious of the need to be reflexive about the knowledge I was co-constructing with participants (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 37). I was cognisant of ensuring that I listened with interest and openness to the research participants when articulating their views, perspectives, and experiences on the research questions. When asking probing questions, I ensured that I was not attempting to coerce them into confirming my positionality in relation to the research. I also had to ensure that I followed up on responses that contradicted my preconceptions and that made me challenge my own beliefs about certain topics (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, p. 83). I kept a research journal which I most often used during and immediately after the semi-structured interviews to provide more context to the interview, noting what might need to change before my next interview and any other ideas that were prompted by the interview.

In considering the ethics of this study, I identified that research participants from the case study school were potentially vulnerable for two reasons. Firstly, I considered issues of asymmetries of power given my position as Director of Schools in ETBI (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 88). Secondly, given the small sample size involved in the research, participants could be identifiable. I strived to overcome issues relating to asymmetrical power relations in a number of ways. Firstly, I strived to avoid the potential for "implicit coercion" (Fleming, 2018, p. 314) during the recruitment phase of the study by using both 'theory-based' and 'snowball' recruitment strategies (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 159). The majority of the participants in my study were recruited using a 'snowball' sampling strategy i.e., they were recruited indirectly by other participants. Therefore, they could have unanimously declined to participate in the study. In relation to the participants I

recruited using 'theory-based' sampling, the potential for implicit coercion into participating in the study was increased. I addressed this by reminding these participants on numerous occasions that participation was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Secondly, I strived to overcome the issues inherent when there are asymmetrical power relations by building a good rapport with participants and gaining their trust (Fleming, 2018). To do this, I waited until national restrictions put in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic allowed for schools to have external visitors before I gathered my data. This enabled me to spend some time with participants before the semi-structured interview. During this time, I built a relationship of trust with participants by reminding them that the study aimed to give voice to their perspectives rather than being a performance evaluation. I also reminded them that there were no right or wrong answers to my questions as I was only interested in their perspectives on the topics we were talking about (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 94). Trust with research participants was enhanced by reminding them that I, too, grappled with questions of how best to respond to the needs of a diverse school community in my role as teacher/GMGY Coordinator/principal (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, p. 90). Karenieli-Miller, Srier and Pessach (2009, p. 282) argue that a measure of the insider researcher's success in building a rapport with participants is the quality of the data gathered. The depth and richness of the data I gathered demonstrated to me and my supervisors that I was successful in addressing the asymmetries of power between me and the participants in the study.

I strived to overcome the potential for research participants to be identified by anonymising the research participants and the case study school. The school and all research participants have been assigned pseudonyms. Specific details that may make the school identifiable have also been either redacted or not included in the thesis. Although several steps were taken to ensure that the school and research participants were

unidentifiable, participants were informed in the Plain Language Statement that this could not be guaranteed; however, every effort would be made to protect their anonymity.

I adhered strictly to DCU's 'Code of Research Practice' throughout the research process (Dublin City University, 2021). In addition, I met regularly with my thesis supervisors throughout all stages of the research process to keep them informed of any ethical issues that arose and seek guidance on how to address them.

4.5.1 Validation of Data

I implemented several strategies to safeguard the rigour of this research project which I will outline under the headings of credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, cited in, Golafshani, 2015, p. 601)

4.5.1.1 Credibility

Coe (2017a, pp. 45–46) argues that validity in qualitative research is best understood in terms of how credible the interpretations of the data are. I took a number of key steps to ensure that the reader is confident that my study is credible. Firstly, through the use of theory-based and snowball sampling, I ensured that my research participants were knowledgeable about the CNS ethos (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). I also waited until the situation with COVID-19 allowed me to carry out the data collection in the school rather than via Zoom. Becoming familiar with the research context ensured that I did not reach conclusions based on research participants' responses to interview questions alone without knowing the broader context within which they are operating (Mertens, 2015). After each interview was transcribed (See example of transcribed interview excerpt in Appendix L). I emailed the full transcript to research participants (member checking), asking them to review for accuracy and giving them an opportunity to re-consider their responses to questions (Stake, 1995). This allowed participants to review and alter any of

the responses they were not comfortable with being included in the study (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, p. 107). Finally, to increase the credibility of my data analysis procedures, my supervisors, both experienced qualitative researchers, acted as "critical friends" by coding one of my transcripts early on in the thematic analysis process (Richards, 2022, p. 163). We discussed the similarities and differences between our codes and what might have caused the differences. This process was extremely helpful in enabling me to address the biases I brought to the data analysis process.

4.5.1.2 Confirmability

The concept of 'confirmability' in qualitative research corresponds to 'objectivity' in quantitative research (Mertens, 2015). As a social constructivist, I am fully aware of the influence my values and philosophical assumptions have on every aspect of this research project (Richards, 2022, p. 152). I am also aware of my professional role as a champion of the CNS model and the impact that may have on how I conducted this study and interpreted the data (Fleming, 2018, p. 315). I have attempted to be as open as possible in Chapter One and earlier in this chapter concerning my philosophical stances so that the reader understands my positionality in relation to this study. I engaged intensively with my research supervisors throughout the data collection and analysis process. During that time, they challenged me to consider how my values and personal and professional identities affected the data collection process, my analysis and my conclusions. As responsive interviewing requires continuous self-examination of my own understandings and reactions to what participants were saying (Rubin and Rubin, 2012), I read extensively about issues of subjectivity and bias. To address the potential of positive bias as a result of my professional role within the CNS model, the use of critical theories in my theoretical framework enabled me to critically examine the data from these perspectives.

Fleming (2018, p. 316) argues that while not unique to the insider researcher, the possibility of reaching conclusions prematurely is significant for the insider researcher, affecting the study's confirmability. I addressed this in a number of ways. Firstly, by using Braun and Clarke's 'Reflexive Thematic Analysis' (2006, 2013) rather than other analysis strategies such as Codebook Thematic Analysis, where themes are generated at the beginning of the analysis process, themes were not generated until the last stages of the data analysis process. This ensured that data analysis was mainly inductive in nature until the later stages of the data analysis process where the study's theoretical framework was applied to the data. Another strategy I used to overcome reaching premature conclusions based on my experiences and knowledge as an insider researcher was the effective use of 'critical friends' (Fleming, 2018, p. 316). My supervisors played a central role as 'critical friends' in this regard.

4.5.1.3 Dependability

The concept of 'dependability' in qualitative research corresponds with 'reliability' in quantitative research (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, cited in Mertens, 2015, p. 272). A preliminary draft of this chapter prior to engaging in data collection acted as a "case study protocol" (Yin, 2018, pp. 93-96) ensuring the data collection was carried out appropriately and in line with best practice. In addition, I kept comprehensive field notes throughout the data collection process.

4.5.1.4 Transferability

In selecting the case study school, I was cognisant of its potential to connect to the broader group of cases (Ashley, 2017, p. 116) or other CNSs with similar contexts. By providing in-depth, 'thick' descriptions (Mertens, 2015) of the case study context (Chapter Five) and the experiences of the research participants, I am enabling others who engage with

the study to draw their own comparisons based on their pre-existing knowledge of their own case (Slevitch, 2011; Mertens, 2015). Coe (2017a, p. 52) describes this as a form of 'naturalistic generalisation' where the research "provokes new insights, understandings, connections and explanations, which the reader may apply to their past experiences, their constructions of reality and their explanations of phenomena". In addition to my endeavour to enable those who read the thesis to map this study onto their own experiences and contexts, I will facilitate several workshops based on this study with practitioners (including CNS policymakers) in the CNS model. This will allow them to reflect on their conceptualisations and enactments of the CNS ethos in responding to the needs of their diverse school communities, as well as the findings and recommendations which emerge from this study. By doing so, I will ensure that this qualitative study has implications for other similar settings within the CNS model (Mears, 2017, p. 188).

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the conceptual framework and research design used in this study. I explicated my philosophical assumptions and acknowledged how they influenced the research. Following this, an overview of my theoretical framework and how it was applied to the data was provided. The study's methodology was explained, which included a rationale for the use of a single-case study and semi-structured interviews. The process for recruiting the case study school and research participants were then outlined. The data analysis process was described with consideration of how the data was validated through considerations of credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability. In the next chapter, the findings from this research are presented and discussed.

Chapter Five – Findings and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This study critically examines how the CNS ethos is conceptualised by key stakeholders in the CNS model and how it is conceptualised and enacted by staff members in one diverse primary school. This chapter aims to discuss and critically analyse the key findings from this research. Data analysis, primarily carried out in an inductive (data-centric) manner with elements of deductive (theory-centric) analysis, indicates that participants' perspectives on ethos broadly reflect Norman's (2003) Framework on Ethos i.e., expressive, organisational and instrumental goals. This is demonstrated in the below table which delineates the three overarching themes which structure this chapter.

Figure 14: Relating Themes to Norman's (2003) Framework on Ethos

Theme	Norman's (2003) Framework on Ethos
Theme 1 - Conceptualisations of the CNS Ethos in the Case study School	Expressive Goals
Theme 2 - Developing Ethos through Fostering Partnerships with Parents	Organisational Goals
Theme 3 - Striving to Affirm Diversity in the Curriculum	Instrumental Goals

As previously indicated, within this overarching structural framework, the data is analysed using a range of liberal egalitarian (e.g., Liberal Multicultural Education) and critical theories e.g., hegemony (Gramsci. 1971), *habitus*, capital and 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 2000) and Critical Multicultural Education (e.g. Ladson-Billings, 2014). While both liberal and critical theories feature throughout this chapter the use of critical

theories is predominant. Each section draws on liberal egalitarian perspectives (particularly the first section's analysis of the values underpinning the CNS ethos), however, critical theories enabled a deeper and more critical analysis of the data throughout the chapter. Gramsci's theory of 'hegemony' informs the analysis of Section One. Bourdieu's theories of *habitus*, various forms of capital and symbolic violence feature heavily in Section Two. Section Three draws on theories relating to critical forms of multicultural education to analyse the data.

Given Norman's (2003, p. 3) assertion that the expressive goals (values) claimed in a schools' ethos statements "can be displaced somewhat by the curriculum and organisational structures in the school", his Framework provides a comprehensive and useful set of conceptual tools which can be used to illuminate and critically examine consistencies and dissonances between how research participants conceptualise and enact the CNS ethos.

5.2 Conceptualisations of the CNS Ethos in the Case study School

Given the combination of both 'theory-based' and 'snowball' purposive sampling used to recruit research participants (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 159), it is perhaps unsurprising that all participants are articulate and informed in their understandings of the CNS ethos and how it can be enacted in response to a diverse school community. While this section draws on data from all interviews with key stakeholders and school-based staff, the sub-section addressing the initial conceptualisations of the CNS ethos draws on specific participants who worked in the model during its early years. This section examines the role of ethos in school life from the perspectives of the research participants. It outlines how participants conceptualise the values underpinning the CNS ethos prior to critically examining the evolution of the CNS ethos in the case study school

over time. Finally, this section addresses conflicting perspectives on the use of the term 'multi-denominational' as an overall descriptor for the CNS model.

The following sub-section explores participants' perspectives on the role of ethos in the school.

5.2.1 The Role of Ethos in the School

As argued in Chapters One and Three, ethos is notoriously difficult to define (Allder, 1993; Brown *et al.*, 2011; Irwin, 2012; Faas, Smith and Darmody, 2018a). Therefore, it is important to establish participants' overall understanding of its role in school life more broadly prior to ascertaining their understanding of the CNS ethos specifically.

Given the lack of one shared definition of ethos across the academic literature (as outlined in Chapter Three), it is unsurprising that participants in this study do not provide one shared definition of the concept. Despite this, all participants demonstrate an understanding of the concept broadly consistent with the literature on ethos. Carmel, who was the principal of the school for thirteen years, describes ethos in the following way:

> It's the bedrock of everything. You have nothing if you don't have your ethos… Your ethos is your compass, in terms of how everything works in your school, how you look at things. It's everything! Everything has to radiate down from the ethos (Carmel, Former Principal).

Other participants illustrate their understanding of the concept similarly by using words and phrases such as "it's your roadmap" (Finbar, Current Principal), "our foundation" (Chloe, Deputy Principal), and "the lens through which every aspect of school should be viewed, planned for, reflected on and realised" (Heather, ETBI Representative). Such descriptions reflect the literature that defines ethos as the values, beliefs and practices underpinning all aspects of school life (Fischer, 2010; Faas, Smith and Darmody, 2018a; Liddy, O'Flaherty and McCormack, 2019), or its organisational *habitus* (Smith, 2003).

This is of particular significance in a diverse school community considering the role a school's *habitus* plays in including or excluding minoritised groups (Darmody, 2013, p. 403). How the CNS ethos, as conceptualised and enacted by the research participants, responds to a diverse school community is the main focus of this study.

Reflecting the 'expressive goals' of Norman's (2003) Framework on Ethos, the next sub-section elaborates on the values articulated by the research participants when considering the ethos of their school and the CNS model more broadly.

5.2.2 The Values Underpinning the School/CNS Model's Ethos

All participants foreground respect for diverse identities when articulating their understanding of the CNS ethos. Common across all responses are references to how the school's ethos strives to be inclusive of all children, parents and teachers, regardless of any aspect of their identity. The following quotations are reflective of how all participants conceptualise the CNS ethos:

> The words that come to mind when I think our ethos, the big ones are 'diversity', 'equality', and 'respect', 'inclusive'… It would focus on differences, but differences in a good way (Geraldine, Teacher).
>
> An 'equality-based' school, a school that respects diversity, a school that has a place for everybody, a school with high standards (Carmel, Former Principal)
>
> It's very much about making every member of the community feel valued and respected and included in the school community (Lynn, Teacher)

Conceptualising ethos as a way of ensuring that all members of a diverse school community are "valued and respected" (Lynn, Teacher), where difference is seen "as something that is really valuable" (Michelle, GMGY Coordinator) is significant considering Faas, Foster and Smith's (2018, p. 606) assertion that an inclusive ethos is central to the development of positive intercultural environments.

When considering the CNS ethos, many of the research participants reference the importance of "community" as a value. The connection between ethos and fostering meaningful relationships with parents is articulated strongly across the data. Indeed, Michelle argues that the name of the model itself demonstrates the commitment inherent in the CNS ethos to working with the school community:

> 'Community' as well is a really big thing. Like it's in our name (Michelle, GMGY Coordinator).

In emphasising the importance of community, Barry (Teacher) maintains that building relationships between staff, children and parents is the most important aspect of ethos. Tim shares a similar view and also emphasises the importance of relationships:

> ...to me, ethos is about relationships. It's about connections, the web of connections because school is a connection between parents and staff and the children and the wider community. Our say particular ethos of a school will determine how those relationships are built (Tim, Teacher).

The emphasis many participants place on the importance of relationships is reflective of the 'organisational goals' comprising Norman's (2003) Framework on ethos.

References to "high standards" across the data also reflect arguments that the equity agenda goes hand in hand with excellence in teaching and learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Brown and Shaked, 2018). A school environment that affirms diversity is imperative in communicating to minoritised children that they are valued (Kavanagh and McGuirk, 2021, p. 204). Descriptions of the ethos as valuing difference and respecting diversity is also noteworthy, considering the potential for 'symbolic violence' against minoritised groups whose *habitus* are not reflected in a school's ethos (May, 1994). Such incidents of 'symbolic violence' send a subtle yet powerful message of domination and subordination to minoritised groups (Bryan, 2010, p. 255). Indeed, many participants, as discussed in the next paragraph, demonstrate an awareness of this potential in the Irish education system, which is dominated by mono-religious schools.

Many participants speak about the CNS ethos by comparing it to their experiences as students and teachers (mostly on school placements[36]) in denominational settings. Reflective of the literature on religious diversity in Catholic schools (Hession, 2015; CPSMA, 2016; Veritas, 2018; Mullally, 2019), some participants indicate an awareness that values such as 'inclusion' are not unique to the CNS model and are promoted in schools with a Catholic ethos also. However, these participants also argue that there is a difference between how values such as 'inclusion' are conceptualised in Catholic and CNS contexts. Heather claims that 'inclusion' in the CNS model is conceptualised "from an equality lens", which aims to:

> ensure that dominant groups are not prioritised or have a stronger voice over those of minorities…. that all children and families are represented within the formal and hidden curriculum (Heather, ETBI Representative).

In comparison, she argues that 'inclusion' in Catholic schools is conceptualised based on "Catholic social teaching" and as a "peripheral inclusion" where families from different religions are welcome in the school "but they're not equally represented or supported". She considers it as "inclusion by necessity" as many Catholic schools naturally have high levels of diversity given their overrepresentation in the system[37]. Heather's comparison between conceptualisations of 'inclusion' in both school types appears to place them on a spectrum of inclusion, with Catholic schools on one end and CNSs on the other.

Similarly, Lynn, a recently qualified teacher, recalls how the lectures in her ITE college on the Catholic Patron's Programme 'Grow in Love' had "elements of inclusivity, but not in the same regard as CNS schools or Educate Together schools". Tim also maintains that "the values that underpin Christian schools can often overlap with those of the CNS" but again contrasts how they are conceptualised in both models. He argues that Catholic

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[36] A mandatory part of teacher education where student teachers spend a period of time garnering teaching and learning experiences in real-life contexts.

[37] 89% of primary schools in Ireland are managed by Catholic patrons (McGraw and Tiernan, 2022, p. 6).

schools' understandings of 'respect' and 'inclusion' can often "isolate members of the community" who are not of the Catholic faith. He maintains that "a multi-denominational ethos aims, although it may not get fully there all the time, it aims to include everyone regardless of their background or faith". Participants' assertions that CNSs share many of the same values as Catholic schools but conceptualise them in different ways is consistent with Hession's (2015, p. 46) contention that while religious and secular school types share many of the same values and commitments, "they differ significantly in the emphasis placed on certain values relating to the understanding of reality and of the human person and the purposes of education proposed by the school".

The experiences of denominational settings recounted by these participants reflect Kavanagh's (2013) findings that discourses of 'tolerance' and 'accommodation of others' are predominant in Catholic schools. While she found many inclusive practices (in the form of liberal approaches to multicultural education) in operation in Catholic schools, the tensions raised by their overarching Catholic ethos in responding to diverse communities led her to conclude that "denominationalism is entirely incompatible with interculturalism" (ibid., 2013, p. 278) as it "promotes privilege and inequity" and "fails to respect the human rights and philosophical convictions of children and parents from secular and humanist perspectives" (ibid., 2013, p. 313). Similarly, O' Donnell (2015, p. 255) questions the ability of schools whose ethos prioritises one group over another to respond effectively to diverse school communities. Attempts at including children from minoritised religious/belief backgrounds, as described by participants, are akin to Taylor's concept of "patronising recognition"(Taylor, 1997, p. 80, cited in Irwin, 2010, p. 453), which effectively 'other' these children. Stapleton (2018) argues that the 'othering' of students from minoritised religious/belief backgrounds in denominational school settings is reflective of a hegemonic, normalised culture where non-dominant groups are

marginalised. In contrast, participants' conceptualisations of the CNS ethos' expressive goals are reflective of Mulcahy's (2000, p. 93) argument that schools with a multi-denominational ethos can play a key role in preparing children to live in pluralist societies. Conceptualising the CNS ethos in this way indicates a deep cognisance of the importance of ensuring that the school's ethos (*habitus*) reflects the lives of all school community members in order for them to feel genuinely valued (O'Loinsigh, 2000; Robinson and Diaz, 2006; Darmody, 2013).

The inclusive expressive goals or values articulated by research participants are further developed by some participants (particularly Tim, Stephen, Heather and Finbar), who explicitly compare the values underpinning the CNS ethos and the values of interculturalism and intercultural education. When probed on the use of this language, these participants explain how the CNS ethos and intercultural education are inextricably linked. Barry (Teacher) claims that intercultural education is about treating people from diverse cultures, religions, and languages equally. Therefore, he maintains that "they're hugely intertwined, so much so that they're one of the same to a large extent". Similarly, Geraldine (Teacher) maintains that the positive focus on celebrating 'difference' in both the CNS ethos and intercultural education connects the two concepts. Tim is of the view that there are commonalities between the rationale behind the establishment of the CNS model and the rationale for the provision of intercultural education. He maintains that CNSs were established in order to bring pluralist communities together:

> Of course, the ethos is a direct result of interculturalism in an area. The CNS ethos is creating those relationships and those connections with people from many different faith backgrounds, cultural backgrounds (Tim, Teacher).

As articulated by these school-based participants, the connections between the values underpinning the CNS ethos and intercultural education, are not limited to the case study school alone. Heather argues that "teachers should be taking an intercultural approach

through all strands of GMGY". Stephen, the NCCA representative who played a central

role in writing the revised GMGY Curriculum for Community National School, explains

how the Intercultural Education Guidelines[38] (NCCA, 2005) informed his work

significantly:

> When I was writing the Goodness Me! Goodness You! curriculum, I had the Intercultural Education Guidelines beside me open on the desk at all times…Because the two (referring to the CNS ethos and the IEGs), they speak to each other. There's no doubt about that…The aim of intercultural education is to celebrate and recognise diversity in all its forms. That's what GMGY tries to do as well (Stephen, NCCA Representative).

The influence of the Intercultural Education Guidelines on Stephen's work is evidenced

in how the GMGY Curriculum defines 'multi-denominational' education in GMGY's

Glossary of Terms:

> (multi-denominational schools) promote culturally responsive education and uphold and respect the equality of beliefs and values held by children, parents, staff and members of the wider community. These schools aim to develop culturally responsive teachers and curricula, promote culturally responsive and inclusive school environments, and enable children and parents to be active members of the school community… (NCCA, 2018a, p. 39).

The connections between the CNS's ethos and intercultural education made by these

participants and the NCCA/ETB documentation are similar to connections that have been

made internationally between multicultural education and different forms of 'common'

schooling (Callan, 1997; Dhillon and Halstead, 2003; Halstead, 2007). These connections

are based on the shared commitment of both common schooling and multicultural

education to respecting diversity and promoting equality (Levinson, 2009). This

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[38] In response to calls from Irish primary schools for guidance on how to respond to the needs of more diverse classrooms, the NCCA produced Intercultural Education Guidelines (IEGs). The guidelines aim to support teachers in creating an inclusive environment and to raise awareness of "issues that arise from increasing linguistic, cultural and ethnic diversity in Ireland" (NCCA, 2005, p. 9). The IEGs define Intercultural Education as "education that respects, celebrates, and recognises the normality of diversity in all aspects of human life, promotes equality and human rights, challenges unfair discrimination, and provides the values upon which equality is built" (ibid., 2005, p. 169).

connection will be returned to in the next sub-section when discussing the term 'multi-denominational' as a descriptor for the CNS model.

The multiple references from all participants to respecting religious/belief, linguistic, cultural and people "from all types of backgrounds" when describing the ethos of the CNS model demonstrates a broad conceptualisation of the identities the ethos of the school/CNS model strives to respond to. These assertions are broadly mirrored in the ETB/NCCA documentation on the CNS ethos and diversity (as summarised in Appendix A). Responding effectively to such a broad range of diversities is significant given the life-long impact a school's ethos has on individuals (Williams, 2000). However, as Sleeter and Montecinos (1999, p. 114) argue that such egalitarian language comes easy to Westerners, this study critically examines how these values are conceptualised and enacted in the case study school.

While current conceptualisations of the CNS ethos include a broader range of identities, key stakeholders and staff indicate that this was not always the case. Such assertions are reflective of the national journey outlined in Chapter Three. The next sub-section delineates this journey from the perspective of research participants.

5.2.3 Initial Conceptualisations of the CNS Ethos

This sub-section unpacks participants' perspectives on how the CNS ethos was conceptualised in the case study school and at a national level in the model's/school's early years. The main participants who speak about how the CNS ethos was initially conceptualised in the case study school are Carmel (Former Principal), Finbar (Current Principal) and Michelle (GMGY Coordinator). These participants have all been working in the school for a minimum of eight years and have significant experience working in the school. While other school-based participants were working in the model during this

time, they did not speak to the initial conceptualisations of the CNS ethos to the same extent as these specific participants. A possible explanation for this is that Carmel, Finbar and Michelle have all played key roles in the development of the CNS ethos from the outset, both within the school and nationally, by being part of broader CNS/GMGY Networks[39]. Finbar, as well as being the current principal, was the GMGY Coordinator for a number of years along with Michelle prior to taking up his current leadership position. Stephen (NCCA Representative) and Heather (ETBI Representative) bring a national perspective to the discussion. However, as they were both teachers and GMGY Coordinators in different CNSs during the initial years of the model, they speak to the initial conceptualisations of the CNS ethos from those perspectives. The discussion is further supported by other teachers in the school where relevant.

Heather, Stephen, Carmel, Michelle, and Finbar believe that while the model was being established and for several years after its inception, ethos discussions at a local and national level were predominately limited to religious and belief diversity issues only. This contrasts with the broad range of diversity variables the CNS ethos currently strives to respond to and indeed the broad range of variables which existed when the discussions were taking place (although not emphasised in national discussions on ethos). Reflecting on the original focus of the CNS ethos as outlined in the press release announcing the establishment of the model[40] (DES, 2007), Stephen states that "when the ethos was first conceptualised, it was 100% conceptualised around religion". Although he is critical of this, he argues that the Minister's limited focus on religion is "totally understandable

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[39] Carmel, Finbar and Michelle were active members of the national committee established by the NCCA to inform the redevelopment of the GMGY Curriculum. Carmel was also an active member of the CNS Principals' Network which regularly discussed issues relating to ethos and GMGY.
[40] The press release stated that CNSs would be "open to children of all religions and none" where "religious education and faith formation during the school day for each of the main faith groups represented" would be provided (DES, 2007).

because all ethos in Ireland for years and years and years, since the history or since the beginning of the primary education system has been defined around religion". Heather asserts a similar view to Stephen and states that it is "understandable" that ethos was initially centred around religion as "the Irish primary education system has very much developed along denominational lines, and it has been centred around religion". As articulated by both key stakeholders, the religious/belief diversity focus was possibly inevitable given the perceived hegemonic relationship between religion and education in Ireland (Irwin, 2015). Although the CNS model was established to offer more choice in a primary education system dominated by religious-run schools, the consequences of the Catholic Church's hegemonic influence on schooling in Ireland may have limited imagined alternatives to denominational education at that time. The emphasis on religion in the Minister's press release could be considered reflective of what Gramsci calls a "common sense" (Gramsci, 1971) view by Irish policymakers that education and religion are inextricably linked. However, as outlined in Chapter Three, the initial narrow focus may also be explained by the demands of the Catholic Church that faith formation for Catholic children would be required in CNSs in order for them to support the divestment of some of its schools to ETBs (McGraw and Tiernan, 2022, p. 174). This demand was taken seriously by CNS policymakers at that time as they saw the support of the Catholic church as essential in order for the model to grow (NCCA, 2018b; McGraw and Tiernan, 2022)

Congruent with Lea's (2010, p. 33) assertion that hegemonic processes are not "watertight", Carmel describes how despite the emphasis on religion at a national level in the CNS model, her focus was on much broader identity issues reflective of the diversities present in her school community from the outset. She recalls attempting to

broaden the focus of national discussions regarding the CNS ethos with some CNS policymakers at that time and the resistance she experienced as a result:

> I suppose I always thought it was about equality. It's about people feeling respected. Respect, I suppose that is key to it all, that people are valued, the children are valued for who they are and that they feel proud of who they are, growing up in life, that the parents feel that they have a place in Irish society and that they're not 'othered' or seen as strange or different. I do think equality is what it's all about really…We did have that discussion along the way about why did it have to be religious? Why couldn't it be more equality-based or that? Again and again, I was told that it was in the Constitution that it had to be that way. We had to look at religion (Carmel, Former Principal)

The Irish Constitution appears to have been used by the CNS policymakers Carmel engaged with on this issue to shut down discussions about how the CNS ethos could be conceptualised more broadly. Citing the Constitution as a rationale for a continued focus on religion in CNSs is interesting as in Article 42 (1) of the Constitution there is a requirement for schools to provide a minimum "moral, intellectual and social education" (Bunreacht na hÉireann, 1937). It does not mandate the provision of religious education. However, Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather (2012, p. vi) argue that religious patrons rely significantly on religious education to satisfy the Constitution's requirement for the "formation of ethical behaviour" in schools. Again, despite the establishment of the CNS model being seen as a potential means of disrupting the hegemonic private and religious control of Irish education, CNS policymakers, including the Minister, at that time appear to have made the same hegemonic associations between moral education and religious education as denominational patrons.

Both key stakeholders and school staff working in the model at that time also reflect on how initial conversations about the CNS ethos centred around the GMGY programme only. Stephen outlines how "GMGY was seen as the vehicle through which the Minister's vision (as outlined in the press release) could be realised". Finbar shares Stephen's

assertion concerning GMGY being the main focus of discussions regarding the CNS ethos:

> We originally only thought of the GMGY programme in terms of our ethos. I suppose when we were starting off, this is our ethos, GMGY is our ethos. That's what we were… we were like that's what makes us different, and we were all on the GMGY bandwagon (Finbar, Current Principal).

The initial focus on GMGY as the main vehicle for CNSs to enact the CNS ethos is understandable given the lack of any other ethos-related policy documentation available (apart from the Minister's press release) (McGraw and Tiernan, 2022, p. 150). However, the emphasis on the original GMGY programme compounded the religious-centric focus of the model, given that it was then developed as a "faith and belief programme" emphasising the important role religion and beliefs was to continue to have in CNS children's schooling (NCCA, 2014, p. 5). This is significant as the CNS model, and the GMGY programme were developed as what Gramsci (1971) might term 'counter-hegemonies' to an education system dominated by religious schools and faith formation programmes. However, it could be argued that the continued emphasis on GMGY (a faith and belief programme) did little to disrupt the hegemonic prioritisation of religious identities over any other identity variables in the Irish education system. This is significant considering that the rationale for the establishment of the CNS model was to respond to the diversification (not just in terms of religion) of Irish society.

Although Carmel did raise concerns about the continued emphasis on religion in the CNS model on occasion, she, as well as the other participants who speak about this time, generally accepted the narrow conceptualisation and GMGY programme, as well as the provision of sacramental preparation for Catholic children within the school day (as was CNS policy at that time). They attribute this general acceptance to three limiting factors

- their experiences in Catholic ITEs, their Catholic and mono-cultural upbringing and a lack of relevant CPD in how to respond to diverse school communities.

Although the primary ITE landscape in Ireland has changed in recent years, with more secular options now available (McGraw and Tiernan, 2022, p. 44), all participants in this study, including more recently qualified teachers, attended Catholic ITEs as well as Catholic primary and post-primary schools. Many participants recall spending a significant amount of time in their ITE colleges learning how to promote a Catholic ethos and deliver a Catholic faith formation programme. Michelle, the current GMGY Coordinator, describes how as well as spending three hours per week learning about the Catholic patron's programme and ethos in the ITE college she attended, "all five of my school placements were done in Catholic schools". Except for Lynn, who did one school placement in a CNS, all participants share similar experiences to Michelle's. Stephen recalls being "blissfully ignorant" to appropriate approaches to teaching in diverse school contexts when he started teaching in a CNS as a result of the Catholic-centric focus in his ITE institution. Other participants, despite qualifying relatively recently, also recall the general lack of input concerning responses to identities other than those described as white, Irish and Catholic:

> When I went through college, diversity and intercultural education was probably one lecture and that was it (Tim, Teacher).

> When I was in college, multicultural education wasn't a thing we did. I did an 18-month course, which doesn't exist now, but it was all very condensed. There was nothing on multi-denominational, EAL, DEIS. We got nothing! (Jill, Teacher).

Lynn, who qualified as recently as two years ago, also describes having lectures in the Catholic programme "Grow in Love" exclusively for the first three years of college. Input on either CNSs or Educate Together was offered as an optional elective in her fourth year of college. She also recalls the general Catholic ethos of the college by stating:

> …we went to mass and our lecturers were usually religious people, in the Catholic religion and it was very heavily weighted on the Catholicism (Lynn, Teacher).

These assertions are reflective of McGraw and Tiernan's (2022, p. 156) argument that as most teachers have been trained in denominational settings "there has been little training for pre-service teachers in multi-denominational settings". The mono-religious educational experiences described by participants reflect the findings from Devine's (2013) study, which concluded that the *habitus* of school leaders had been significantly influenced by the Catholic institutions they attended and therefore limited their ability to respond to diversity appropriately. This could be an inevitable consequence of a mono-religious educational experience considering Bourdieu's (2020) assertion that one's *habitus* (values, beliefs, and attitudes) is formed as a result of how one is socialised by one's life experiences. Given that schools are one of the most powerful "socialisation domains" in a person's life (Darmody, Smyth and McCoy, 2012, p. 12), it could be argued that the Catholic *habitus* of the schools and ITE institutions attended by the research participants conditioned them into assuming that religious education and faith formation for Catholic children are a natural occurrence in any school context. The normed status of religion and faith formation for Catholic children in their previous educational experiences possibly led them to accept the initial conceptualisations of the ethos and approaches taken in GMGY as unproblematic, or the 'way things are done' as reflective of the *status quo*.

Like other participants who worked in the model at the time, Barry ascribes his non-problematisation of the initial narrow conceptualisations of the CNS ethos to his "coming from a rural background, going to the local primary school, being very entrenched in my local rural Catholic community and parish". As a result of his mono-cultural and mono-religious educational experiences, he describes initially viewing the provision of sacramental preparation for Catholic children within the school day "as a much more

compromising middle ground" than what he considered to be the radical approach taken in the 'equality-based' Educate Together model where faith formation takes place outside the school day. He outlines how, although he believed at the time that there needed to be more choice for parents than Catholic schools; he was drawn to a multi-denominational model:

> where it still looked like a Catholic traditional primary school in ways with the 'Mr' and 'Mrs' and the uniform and, at that stage, communion being catered for and welcomed. I suppose that's what I was familiar with growing up. That was what drew me to it (Barry, Teacher).

This quote from Barry reflects May's (1994, p. 24) assertion that one's *habitus*, which is made up of one's social and cultural experiences to date, has an exceptionally powerful influence on the internalised frameworks one uses to comprehend the world. His own positive educational experiences as a white, Irish, Catholic child in a rural, traditional primary school appear to have attracted him to a model that did not overly disrupt the *status quo.* The familiarity Barry felt with the model's use of formal titles for teachers (as is the case in most Catholic schools) and the provision of sacramental preparation, which is a fundamental part of school life in Catholic settings, initially "drew" him to this alternative educational offering. However, he describes how, over time and with the benefit of experience and reflective discussions on ethos in his school, the issues he now saw inherent in the continued prioritisation of religious identities over others, and the provision of faith formation for Catholic children, began to make him feel differently about the place of religion in the CNS model.

Similarly, Heather (ETBI Representative), like many other participants, maintains that the initial emphasis on "supporting children in the development of their belief or religious identity specifically" on a national level began to be questioned as teachers and school leaders began to engage in CPD relevant to multi-denominational and intercultural

education and gain more experience teaching in diverse school settings. She outlines how this increase in theoretical knowledge and practical experience sparked a debate amongst school leaders and teachers about existing policies and practices at both school and national levels:

> When the teachers and the school leaders really started to become involved in and interested in this area of ethos, a lot of them, including myself, engaged in professional development around this area and started to upskill. We started to become critical in terms of how we were realising this multi-denominational ethos (Heather, ETBI representative)

Stephen shares a similar view and considers his engagement in a Master's in education as fundamental to his understanding of:

> diversity in education, policies around diversity in education, and culturally responsive leadership and things like that which definitely rose my own level of awareness and made me question my own practice and the practices in my school a lot more… (Stephen, NCCA representative).

He also claims that as teachers in the first CNSs gained experiences in attempting to respond to diverse school communities, they began to realise that there were far more identity variables to consider than just religion:

> People started to realise that there has to be more to a multi-denominational school than just religion. There are more things arising in a diverse school than what religion to a person is. There is things like bullying and anti-racism and there is issues around identity-based issues (Stephen, NCCA Representative).

From the Participant Profiles in Chapter Four, and the data from interviews, it is apparent that many of the research participants have engaged in postgraduate courses in areas relevant to multi-denominational and intercultural education since joining the model. Both Heather and Stephen argue that engaging in relevant CPD led to teachers and school leaders in the CNS model becoming "more critical" and questioning their own practices in terms of how they were narrowly conceptualising and enacting the CNS ethos. Such assertions are reflective of Rhedding-Jones' (2010, p. 73) argument that engaging in reflexive practice is of particular importance to teachers who have had mono-cultural

educational experiences. Devine (2013) notes the impact such limited experiences have on their *habitus w*hich may have a direct impact on their ability to respond to diverse school communities. The limiting factors outlined in this sub-section in terms of participants' ability to recognise the issues inherent in the initial focus of the CNS ethos and GMGY curriculum from the outset were arguably partially overcome as a result of participants' engagement in postgraduate studies in relevant areas. Heather and Stephen's assertions regarding the impact of relevant CPD on the ability of teachers and school leaders to question the initial over-focus on religion in the CNS model is reflective of Kavanagh and Dupont's (2021, p. 564) argument that engaging in relevant studies enables teachers to "challenge the supremacy" of the hegemonic narratives that inform their worldviews. This is of particular importance given that the research participants in this study reflect the broader Irish teaching population i.e. white, Irish, settled, Catholic backgrounds (Heinz and Keane, 2018). The evolution in practices and attitudes towards the place of religion in CNSs has raised questions over the continued use of 'multi-denominational' as an overall descriptor for the model. The next subsection explores the differing perspectives of some research participants on this key term in the lexicon of the CNS model.

5.2.4 Conflicting Perspectives on 'Multi-denominational' as a Descriptor for the Model

The data indicates both school-based staff and key stakeholders' conceptualisations of the CNS ethos have broadened considerably since the model was established in 2008. Chapter Three examined how the GMGY curriculum was revised to support the broader conceptualisation of the CNS ethos at a national level. Many participants in this study speak about how the revised GMGY curriculum supports them in responding to various

aspects of the children's identities and not just the religious/belief element. The comments below are reflective of participants' sense of this evolution:

> I think the programme today is fantastic. I'm a big fan of it. I think it's really good that the 'Beliefs and Religions' is only a quarter of the programme. When we get new staff, we provide CPD because most of them would have heard of GMGY through teacher training college but not really in-depth. So, we stress to the new teachers that the religious part of it is only 25% which is completely different to your Catholic programme. It really lets the ethos of our school thrive (Michelle, GMGY Coordinator).

> I think it (the development of four strands) was a positive change because it (religion) is one part of the children, but I think it was more GMGY was more based on self-identity and going into the different areas to see what makes you (Amber, Teacher).

It is apparent from the aforementioned quotes that the broadening of the CNS ethos and the GMGY curriculum to include four strands have been welcomed by participants. Amber, Heather and Jill speak passionately about the role of each strand in supporting teachers to respond to different aspects of children's identities. Interestingly, when Heather speaks about the 'Beliefs and Religions' strand, she states:

> The 'Beliefs and Religion' strand provides a great structured way, through engagement in multi-denominational religious education; for the schools to explore the 'multi-denominational' aspect of the ethos (Heather, ETBI Representative).

Heather's assertion that the 'Beliefs and Religions' supports teachers in exploring the multi-denominational "*aspect*" of the ethos is significant given that the term 'multi-denominational' is still used as an overall descriptor for the ethos of the CNS model in various CNS policy documentation, and by the researcher when describing the model in his professional capacity (Conboy, 2017, 2018; NCCA, 2018a). As stated in Chapter Four, the term 'multi-denominational' was also notably absent from the pilot interviews and initial interviews with participants. When probed about this, some school-based participants raise concerns over its continued use as an overall descriptor for the model.

Tim outlines how he believes that the presence of the term 'denominational' in the descriptor immediately brings religion back as the main focus of the model:

> The first port of call in people's minds when it comes to multi-d is religion and or no religion… 'Multi-*denominational*' has to do with someone's religion. You're either Catholic or you're Muslim, or you have no particular religious background (Tim, Teacher).

Michelle also expresses discomfort with using the term 'multi-denominational' and states, "I don't like that our school is described in terms of what we do with religion". Although she believes that the religious/belief aspect of the child's identity is very important and should be celebrated in school, she asks, "but should it be the biggest part of it?" before concluding, "I don't think so". Although the two key stakeholders use the term 'multi-denominational' more frequently than school-based staff to describe the CNS ethos, they both express differing understandings of the term. Consistent with her comment on 'multi-denominational' being an 'aspect' of the CNS ethos rather than the ethos in its entirety, Heather argues that the concept is "so contestable" and agrees with many school-based participants that "it does not capture the ethos of the model in its broadest sense or in its entirety". In contrast, Stephen states that the term 'multi-denominational' is ultimately the most appropriate term to describe CNSs. When asked what that term means to him, he conceptualises it in the following way:

> CNS has a 'multi-denominational' ethos and what that means is that there is equality of recognition for all pupils within the school and that regardless of the child's identity that they will be on an equal footing to everyone else in the school (Stephen, NCCA Representative).

Stephen's conceptualisation of a 'multi-denominational' ethos is consistent with the influence he states the Intercultural Education Guidelines had on the revised GMGY curriculum and the GMGY's broader definition of 'multi-denominational' education as a form of 'culturally responsive education' (NCCA, 2018a, p. 39).

These differing conceptualisations of 'multi-denominational' education reflect McGraw and Tiernan's (2022, p. 175) argument that "whether people like it or not, religion continues to define the system". Differing understandings of the term also reflect Mahon's (2017, p. 28) assertion that 'multi-denominational' remains ambiguous despite the growth in the sector. Although other writers on 'multi-denominational' education claim that the term is conceptualised differently depending on different multi-denominational patrons (Coolahan, 2000; Darmody, Smyth and McCoy, 2012; McGrady, 2013), the data in this study indicate an inconsistency in how it is conceptualised internally within the CNS model itself. This is potentially problematic as although there is broad agreement between school-based staff, key stakeholders and CNS policy that the ethos has broadened beyond religions and beliefs; the overall descriptor may not be reflective of this reconceptualisation. How the model could go about addressing this issue will be considered in the next chapter.

5.2.5 Conclusion to Section One

This section unpacked how research participants currently conceptualise the CNS ethos. It critically explored how it was originally conceptualised and the factors that contributed to its initial narrow and religious-centric focus. Analysis suggests that the prominence given to religion and beliefs during the initial years after the model's inception resulted in a unidimensional conceptualisation of the CNS ethos, which limited the school's ability to respond to the wide range of diversity present in the school. Current conceptualisations of the ethos, as articulated by the participants, indicates that the CNS ethos now strives to respond to diversity in its broadest sense. However, issues remain concerning inconsistencies regarding support for the continued use of 'multi-denominational' as an overall descriptor for the model and how that term is conceptualised.

While it is apparent that experience and relevant CPD contributed to participants' broadening their conceptualisation of the CNS ethos, it would be an oversimplification to suggest that CPD and critical reflection alone led to this outcome. The next section builds on Section One as it critically analyses the central role parents, and in particular certain minoritised parents, in the case study school have played (and continue to play) in the evolution of how the CNS ethos and GMGY curriculum are conceptualised and enacted in response to diverse school communities both in the case study school and at a national level.

5.3 Developing Ethos through Fostering Partnerships with Parents

This section critically examines participants' perspectives on the role of parents in the development of the school's ethos. It explores how potential barriers to the meaningful inclusion of minoritised parents in school life are addressed. It unpacks the significant role certain minoritised religious parents in the case study school had on the development of conceptualisations and enactments of the CNS ethos and GMGY curriculum in the case study school and CNS model more broadly. Finally, it critically explores how the involvement of parents from conservative religious backgrounds has created dissonances between the egalitarian values espoused by participants and their approaches to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ identities.

5.3.1 Conceptualisations of 'Community' in the Case study School

All participants demonstrate a cognisance of the importance of involving parents in school life particularly regarding issues relating to ethos and GMGY. While this democratic approach has had significant positive influences on the evolution of the GMGY curriculum and its approaches to religious/belief diversity, it has also raised

significant issues concerning LGBTQ+ identities. This section examines the opportunities and dilemmas high levels of parental involvement have presented to the case study school.

Many participants outline the central role parents play in shaping the school's ethos. Jill (Teacher), when speaking about the importance of ensuring that parents are valued and "treated as partners in their children's education", maintains that the high levels of parental involvement in the school has "literally shaped the school". References to parents as "partners" and playing an active role in "shaping" the school are reflective of Kavanagh's (2021, p. 222) definition of "partnership", which she defines as "providing opportunities for all members of the school community to be involved in the decision-making process".

As outlined in the first section of this chapter, it is apparent from the data that treating parents as partners in education is a core aspect of how participants conceptualise the CNS ethos. The natural connections participants make between the CNS ethos, and such relationships are interesting as Kavanagh (2021, p. 219) argues that building meaningful relationships between all school community members is an "essential prerequisite" to the promotion of an inclusive educational environment. Amber (Teacher) maintains that in terms of parental partnerships, "we really try to represent and get the voice from everybody because we don't have say one predominant group and then everybody else is on the periphery". This is significant given Blackmore's (2010, p. 58) contention that efforts at recognising and respecting the identities of minoritised groups are rendered somewhat meaningless unless those same groups experience genuine forms of partnership in schools. This is a challenge in diverse contexts as power asymmetries between dominant and minoritised groups are generally accepted as the norm (Baker *et al.*, 2009, p. 57). Kitching (2010, p. 219) argues that minoritised groups in Ireland have

been welcomed but not as equal partners in Irish society. The case study school provides interesting insights into how minoritised parents might work as equal partners with the school. It does so as participants demonstrate a cognisance of the potential barriers many minoritised parents face that inhibit them from playing a meaningful role in the school. Participants also express a commitment to overcoming these barriers, which will be examined in the following sub-section.

5.3.2 Recognising and Tackling the Barriers to Minoritised Parental Involvement in Decision-Making Fora

Similar to Kavanagh's (2013, 2021) finding from an Educate Together school that promoted critical forms of multicultural education, analysis of the data indicates genuine commitments to empowering minoritised parents to act as partners in their children's education by proactively addressing identified barriers.

Participants mainly attribute the reluctance of many parents from minoritised groups to actively engage with the school's formal structures to three main issues – language barriers, a lack of knowledge of the Irish education system and a lack of financial and education capital.

Firstly, and similar to the findings of previous Irish studies using critical theories in their theoretical frameworks (Darmody and McCoy, 2011; Devine, 2011; McGinnity, Darmody and Murray, 2015), by far the most frequently cited barrier to parental involvement outlined by participants is English language proficiency. Given the level of linguistic diversity in the school, Michelle and Finbar describe the school's concerted efforts to overcome this obstacle by providing English language classes for parents. In addition to English language lessons, the school has also established an initiative where the names, pictures, and contact details of parents willing to act as translators or give

parents information about the school in their home language are displayed in the school's reception area. Finbar, Chloe and Michelle outline how this initiative has been beneficial for those parents who have not yet acquired proficiency in the English language as they try to navigate a new education system in a foreign country. These efforts by the school reflect Darmody and McCoy's (2011, p. 159) argument that schools should make a concerted effort to activate minoritised parents' social and cultural capital through the provision of English language classes and by providing them with the information they need about the Irish education system. However, O'Toole (2011, p. 159) argues that promoting the acquisition of the English language to acquire cultural capital may diminish efforts to preserve and celebrate the home languages of minoritised groups in the school suggesting the need for a balance to be considered and achieved.

Secondly, Carmel maintains that as many of the parents from minoritised groups lacked a knowledge of the Irish education system, they could not actively engage with the school's formal structures. She states:

> I suppose I felt that a lot of the parents in our school had really no understanding of the Irish education system. I felt that the educational outcomes for their children were going to be very poor unless we could draw them in and engage them in their children's education…to make them feel valued and give them some understanding of what we were doing and how we were doing it (Carmel, Former Principal).

Carmel's rationale reflects the literature which argues that a lack of cultural capital (knowledge of the system) can negatively impact educational outcomes for children (Jæger, 2009, p. 1946). It is also reflective of Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992, p. 127) argument that only those whose *habitus* are reflected in the social world they encounter find themselves, "as fish in water", navigating that social world effortlessly. To support minoritised parents to feel like "fish in water", Carmel sought to develop parent-school relationships. She spent a great deal of time bringing minoritised parents into the school

as often as possible for various school celebrations, coffee mornings and meetings. Meetings centred around the norms of the Irish education system with "meetings about literacy, numeracy, about parenting because we had a lot of child protection issues in the school".

Similarly, Chloe (Deputy Principal) argues that parents from minoritised groups tend to elect parents from the dominant group (white, settled, native English speakers) into formals roles on the PA and BoM as they want people who understand the norms and culture of the school system to represent them effectively. This assertion is in line with the literature that suggests that parents from minoritised groups tend to "accept and take as natural" (Maton, 2014, p. 68) their lack of representation and power in such structures. While this was the case in the first years of the school's existence, this trend has changed in recent years, with the position of Chairperson of the PA and both Parent Nominees on the BoM (all democratically elected positions) being taken up by parents from minoritised ethnic and religious groups. Finbar (Principal), Chloe (Deputy Principal) and Michelle (in her capacity as HSCL Coordinator) describe encouraging parents from minoritised groups to put themselves forward for election onto the school's democratic fora. Finbar considers his encouraging a mother from a minoritised group to stand for election and the subsequent support he, Chloe and Michelle have put in place to support her in her role as "my biggest success story" to date since he took up the role of principal. Such an assertion demonstrates the commitment of the school's leaders to empowering minoritised ethnic and religious groups to take up formal positions in the school.

The impact of the CNS ethos on Finbar, Chloe and Michelle's conceptualisations and enactments of the CNS ethos in terms of parental involvement is reflective of Faas, Smith and Darmody's (2018c, p. 465) argument that a school's multi-denominational ethos is "a driving force" for leadership practices in CNSs. It also reflects findings from broader

Irish studies which argue that a school's ethos directly impacts leadership practices and the level of inclusion/exclusion minoritised groups experience in schools as a result of such practices (Devine, 2013; Kavanagh, 2013).

Finally, another barrier identified by participants to parents from minoritised groups getting involved in the school's formal structures is the level of economic resources available to them. Tim argues that a lack of economic resources affects minoritised ethnic groups and parents from the dominant Irish group from working class backgrounds in the school equally:

> The financial capital can sometimes have a massive influence on how forward someone can be because we'd have parents from white, Irish background, but who would be from low socio-economic areas. They wouldn't have the confidence to speak in an open forum (Tim, Teacher).

He maintains that parents from minoritised ethnic and religious groups who are highly educated and hold well-paid jobs are much more likely to get involved in the school's formal structures. Tim's views reflect the literature which indicates an inextricable correlation between those who are best resourced financially having the most success educationally (Baker *et al.*, 2009; McCoy, Quail and Smyth, 2014)). Parents who have high levels of financial and education capital appear to "transubstantiate" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 16) these capitals into the social capital required to speak in open fora confidently. Similarly, Jill argues that parents "who have two and three" low-paying jobs or those that don't have the capacity to work are absent from the school's formal democratic structures:

> A lot of them are in a very difficult position. I feel like they're automatically excluded from being on the Parent's Council or anything like that, because they're just not in the position to do it (Jill, Teacher).

Supporting this assertion, Michelle, who spends a significant amount of time working with the PA in her role as HSCL Coordinator, claims that while she believes that the PA

is reflective of the school's religious and ethnic diversity, "we probably have never had any member of the Travelling community or someone from lower socio-economic background" on the PA. Similarly, Finbar describes how the two Parent Nominees on the school's Board of Management (BoM)[41], while from minoritised religious and ethnic backgrounds, both hold high-status jobs as a doctor and academic in a university. Some parents from middle-class minoritised religious and ethnic groups appear to have learnt the "unwritten rules" valued by the *habitus* of the school, which has enabled them to move further than others in the social field (Thomson, 2014, p. 67). This finding is consistent with Devine's (2019, p. 18) assertion that migrant children whose parents have "strong economic, social and cultural capital" fare better than migrant children whose parents do not possess such capitals. The absence of parents from the Traveller community or working class backgrounds whose *habitus* may not align as well with the school's is significant as Jay (2003, p. 7) maintains that children from these groups are taught the hegemonic values and cultural norms of the dominant group if they are absent not represented on the school's organisational structures. This is significant in a multi-denominational context considering the importance its ethos places on the inclusion of all members of the school community. It is also interesting in the context of the findings of an ESRI study (2012) which compared different school types at primary level[42]. It found that 'multi-denominational'[43] schools had higher proportions of children from professional backgrounds than Catholic schools and that they attracted less children from the Traveller community than Catholic schools (Darmody, Smyth and McCoy, p. v).

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[41] BoMs in Ireland are comprised of eight members. two patron representatives, two staff nominees, two parent nominees and two community members. The parents are nominated to the BoM following an election of the schools' parent body

[42]Catholic, Minority Faith (e.g., Church of Ireland), Educate Together, Community National Schools.

[43] At the time of the study, Educate Together described themselves as 'multi-denominational'.

Unlike some studies in denominational schools, which found an undervaluing of the linguistic and cultural capitals possessed by parents from minoritised linguistic, ethnic and religious (Darmody and McCoy, 2011; Devine, 2011; McGinnity, Darmody and Murray, 2015), findings in this study indicate a genuine commitment to empowering minoritised parents from different ethnic and religious backgrounds to act as partners in their children's education. These concerted efforts have had a significant impact on parents from particular minoritised groups playing key roles in decision-making fora in the school, e.g., GMGY, Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Committee (this will become more apparent later in this section) and democratic structures, e.g., the Parents' Association (PA) and Board of Management (BoM). However, the data also indicates that while minoritised ethnic and religious groups are considered to have a "well-formed habitus" (Moore, 2014, p. 100) by the school staff, those from working class backgrounds or Travellers are less likely to be encouraged to put themselves forward for formal roles on the school's democratic structures. This finding is in line with the literature that claims that the *habitus* of schools tends to reflect the middle-class *habitus* of the staff who work there (Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Baker *et al*., 2009; Lea, 2010). The lack of encouragement given to parents from working class backgrounds and Travellers to take up positions on the school's formal structures is reflective of Bourdieu's (1977, p. 483) assertion that schools are essentially middle-class institutions which value certain forms of cultural and social capital over others (May, 1994, p. 24). It may also indicate forms of unconscious deficit thinking towards these particular groups (Lea, 2010, p. 38). Staff could reflect on this in order "to challenge the supremacy of hegemonic ways of knowing and doing things" (Kavanagh and Dupont, 2021, p. 564) by engaging in a process of 'unlearning' (O'Toole, 2019, p. 45). This is imperative considering arguments that such deficit thinking is deemed a form of 'symbolic violence'

from a Bourdieusian perspective (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu, 1996). Despite this challenge the school faces in including all minoritised groups in the school's formal structures, the next sub-sections explore the significant role parents from minoritised ethnic and religious communities, in particular, have had on how the school and the CNS model more broadly have conceptualised and enacted its ethos.

5.3.3 Issues Raised by Certain Minoritised Religious Parents with the Original GMGY Programme

For reasons outlined in the first section, participants who worked in the model initially generally accepted the original approaches to GMGY. However, Carmel, Finbar, and Michelle recall growing increasingly uncomfortable with the programme over time. This was mainly because of more and more parents from certain minoritised religious/belief backgrounds expressing their dissatisfaction with both the core religious education element and the BST element of the programme. Carmel summarises the main issues that were raised and states:

> They had a problem with it being developed in a Catholic College of Education…They felt that it was Catholic-centric…that they were indoctrinating...disrespectful of their religion…There were just so many things (Carmel, Former Principal).

Both Carmel and Finbar also describe how some of these parents believed that some of the information about their religion in the programme was factually incorrect, which they found "insulting". Similarly, Michelle outlines how some minoritised religious parents believed that "a lot of the lessons were very Christian-centric".

These assertions reflect the findings of a report compiled by the NCCA (Appendix M[44]) in its review of the original programme. The NCCA interviewed parents, teachers, and

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[44] The relevant excerpt from this report is included in Appendix M. The excerpt has been edited and redacted to ensure that the case study school remains anonymous.

CNS policymakers as part of the review. The section of the review that addresses the issues that arose in the case study school states:

> The parents reported that incorrect information had been used in some of the content pertaining to ████ and this had resulted in the misrepresentation of their religion. Christian references were reported by the parents to have been used in a large proportion of GMGY lessons (NCCA, 2018b, p. 25).

The perceived over-representation of the Christian faith and the misrecognition of some minoritised religions were particularly egregious as one of the primary aims of the CNS ethos and GMGY programme was to respond to increased levels of religious diversity in Irish society. Misrepresentations like these have the potential to "inflict harm" on minoritised groups who may develop a distorted view of themselves as a result (Taylor, 1997, p. 25). However, counter to literature which describes minoritised groups "consenting" to such misrecognition as a result of the hegemonic narratives that have conditioned them to believe that such misrecognition is inevitable and a form of 'common sense' (May, 1994; Jay, 2003; Jones, 2006; Maton, 2014), this particular group of parents were unprepared to accept what could be considered a form of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1996). The continued concerns being raised by these parents in the case study school eventually led to the suspension of the GMGY programme.

5.3.4 Resolving the Issues through Intensive Negotiations

Stephen outlines how the findings from various pieces of research at the time highlighted the issues raised in the case study school and across the model more broadly with the original GMGY programme (Faas, Smith and Darmody, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Mullally, 2018). According to Stephen, this was a "turning point" and a "wake-up call" for CNS policymakers who were largely proponents of the original approaches. These pieces of research highlighted that the issues with the original GMGY programme were not isolated to the case study school alone and eventually prompted CNS policymakers to

call for a revision of the GMGY programme entirely. Stephen, who played a key role in revising the GMGY curriculum, outlines how CNS policymakers recognised the need for the GMGY curriculum to be reintroduced in the case study school with the support of all parents. As a result, during its redevelopment, the NCCA was requested to engage with the parents in the case study school. Stephen, and other NCCA colleagues, engaged intensively with a GMGY Committee that was established in the school comprising of parents from various religious and belief groups and the school's GMGY Coordinators (Finbar and Michelle at that time).

Stephen, Michelle and Finbar describe a process of ongoing and intensive engagement with these parents over two years to get a revised GMGY curriculum reinstated. Finbar recalls how occasionally the process felt "painstaking" and "like pulling your hair out kind of stuff where you'd literally read them every book page by page, PowerPoint by PowerPoint, song by song for weeks and weeks and weeks until we got it over the line". Carmel and Stephen describe wondering whether an agreement would ever be reached. However, all participants in that group demonstrated a strong commitment to working through every issue until a resolution was reached. Michelle and Finbar claim that the efforts to get an agreement with parents were worth it as the revised GMGY curriculum is now in operation in the school, with no parents choosing to opt their children out of these lessons. Involving parents in this way is reflective of Finbar's general attitude towards the role of parents in the development of ethos in the school. While he argues that teachers "are the experts" in the state curriculum[45] and can confidently deliver that based on their own expertise and ongoing training, he argues that "with the ethos, I think

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[45] The 'state' curriculum is separate to the Patrons' Curriculum

you have to be open to interpretation, and you have to be open to improve and to move it on and change things" based on feedback from parents.

The central role of parents from a minoritised religious groups[46] played in informing the redevelopment of the GMGY curriculum and continue to play in terms of ethos contrasts significantly with previous research that has taken place in denominational settings where parents from minoritised backgrounds play less of a role in the school (Darmody and McCoy, 2011; Devine, 2011; McGinnity, Darmody and Murray, 2015). The prevailing positive attitude towards minoritised religious groups in the school and seeing them as "knowledgeable and capable" resources (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 161) ensured their rightful place at the table in negotiating the redevelopment and reintroduction of GMGY into the school. Also, in contrast to the literature, parents in the case study school from minoritised backgrounds did not "fatalistically" accept a subordinated position in the school (Freire, 2000, p. 64). Instead, they used the 'capital' available to them to influence school and national policy concerning GMGY. The school's commitment to these democratic structures are reflective of liberal egalitarian forms of equality (Baker *et al.*, 2009). The meaningful inclusion of voices that normally do not have political influence on policies that affect them align with more radical egalitarian approaches to democracy (Baker *et al.,* p. 39). Such democratic approaches are reflective of an 'Aristotelian' conceptualisation of ethos as it emerges from the school rather than being imposed by the patron (Platonic approach) (Norman, 2003, p. 5). The school's 'anti-positivist' (Donnelly, 2000, pp. 135–136) approach to ethos development is antithetical to the "paternalistic" and "custodial" visions of ethos prevailing in the Irish education system

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[46] Although the issues with the GMGY curriculum were predominately raised by parents from one particular minoritised religious group, parents from a number of religious and non-religious world-views were on the committee established to oversee the reintroduction of a revised GMGY curriculum in the school.

dominated by religious patrons (Hogan, 1984; Fischer, 2010). Although many theorists advocate for such bottom-up approaches to ethos (Coolahan, 2000; Murray, 2000; Pring, 2000; Norman, 2003), the inclusion of minoritised voices in ethos-related matters has also presented tensions and dilemmas for the school concerning aspects of the GMGY curriculum and RSE policy. These tensions and dilemmas are critically examined in the following sub-section.

5.3.5 Dilemmas and Compromises: Balancing the Demands of Certain Parents and the School's Egalitarian Expressive Goals

While the discourse concerning parental involvement is predominately positive across the data, tensions and fault lines exist. One significant dilemma centres around balancing participants' desire to maintain the support of the parents who had issues with the original GMGY programme while at the same time ensuring the positive inclusion of LGBTQ+ identities in the school's formal and hidden curricula. Given the values of 'equality', 'inclusion', 'celebrating diversity in all its forms', participants claim to underpin the CNS ethos (as outlined in the first section), participants unanimously describe how responding to LGBTQ+ identities is the most challenging issue they face in enacting the CNS's egalitarian ethos. Most school-based participants outline how they "avoid" and "shy away" from explicitly including discrete lessons relating to LGBTQ+ identities out of fear of offending children and parents from certain minoritised religious groups. Indeed, the words "fear" and "afraid of offending" are common in every interview in relation to this issue. As a result, Jill considers the school's approach to LGBTQ+ identities as "absolutely awful".

Such fears align with Logan's (2016, p. 381) assertion that teachers (albeit in an American school context) often deem the inclusion of LGBTQ+ content into the curriculum as "too

risky". The risk for the case study school indicated by the data is the risk of losing the support of the certain parents from minoritised religious groups again.

Those who worked in the school during the initial turbulent years are particularly aware of this:

> We are on tenterhooks, and we don't want the whole thing to fall apart again, I definitely don't because there's so much more work that went into it…. If you go in all guns blazing, they'll all want to pull out of it (Finbar, Current Principal)

> We have to be careful because of our past…because of our history (Michelle, GMGY Coordinator)

To address past mistakes (the perceived misrepresentation of some minoritised religious identities in the original GMGY programme), the school makes significant efforts to ensure that the voice of minoritised religious communities is heard on relevant policy-making committees. Stephen (NCCA Representative) outlines how the inclusion of minoritised religious voices on the GMGY Committee was important to ensure that "we were not gone too far" considering that "it's a westernised curriculum…there's westernised values in there". Carmel outlines how, as there was a "wide variety of different ethnic backgrounds around the table" on these committees, getting agreement was like "pulling teeth" as there were significant differences between the perspectives of parents and teachers from the dominant group and committee members from minoritised religious beliefs. While the parents and teachers from the dominant cultural group pushed for the positive inclusion of LGBTQ+ identities in the GMGY and RSE curricula, Carmel describes the parents from "quite conservative religious groups as being "completely allergic" to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ content in either curriculum:

> To give you an example, in terms of same-sex families, and actually, it was an Irish parent that said, "Well, my sister is lesbian, and I hope that someday she will find a partner and she will have children and I would like my children to see that and I think it's only right". I was so grateful that somebody else had said it (Carmel, Former Principal).

Reflective of O'Flaherty *et al.'s* (2018, p. 325) argument that schools are "sites of polycultural contestation", Michelle describes the inevitability of 'culture clashes' in such a diverse school context. She outlines how, similar to some minoritised religious parents in the UK who have campaigned against the inclusion of LGBTQ+ materials in the curriculum (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2021; Kitching, 2022), parents from conservative religious backgrounds on the committee objected to suggestions by teachers for the inclusion of different family types in GMGY lessons in 2nd class[47]. She maintains that as a result of having "a very high number of parents from a religion that can be in conflict with some of our human rights", the school has to take a very careful approach to LGBTQ+ issues. The avoidance of affirming LGBTQ+ identities out of fear of offending parents from certain religious backgrounds is consistent with Neary, Irwin-Gowran and McEvoy's (2016, p. 19) assertion that religion is "largely understood to be in constant tension" with teaching about LGBTQ+ identities.

Finbar recalls a disagreement between a parent from a minoritised religious background and an Irish non-religious parent on the GMGY committee concerning this issue:

> It was a complete clash of this same-sex marriage, and this is completely anti-same-sex marriage. I suppose in a way they listened to each other. There were arguments as well, but the ▆▆▆▆ (minoritised religious) side of things was, "Well, that's not what we teach our children. In fact, that's what we teach our children that can't happen." Then this lady (non-religious) was coming up and she started laughing and something like "You're so in the past, and you're so anti-everything and whatnot" (Finbar, Current Principal).

Although Finbar states that he "100% doesn't agree with them (the parents from certain minoritised religious/belief backgrounds) on those thoughts, we still have to respect that that is what they believe". Finbar appears to appreciate the deeply embedded *habitus* of these parents and its impact on their views on such issues. Similarly, Geraldine argues

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[47] Children in 2nd class normally range between 7-8 years of age.

that although she disagrees with the position of these parents on LGBTQ+ identities, she does not believe that it is her place to challenge their views. Baker *et al.* (2009, p. 26) consider such positions to be in line with the liberal egalitarian view that although one might "deeply disapprove of the values of others", no attempt should be made to critique the values of others. These positions also align with McLaughlin's (2008, p. 236) argument that 'common schools' must exercise "a principled forbearance of influence" in relation to the private sphere. However, Baker *et al.* (2009) argue, from their radical egalitarian perspective, that one shows more respect for diverse views by critically engaging with them rather than treating non-dominant views as 'other'. Participants' descriptions of not trying to convince these parents to take on the dominant group's values counter concerns raised by Halstead (2007, p. 831) about the possible assimilationist element of 'common' schooling.

Carmel expresses a sense of regret that these challenges remained unresolved when she left the school:

> Can I just say about equality? Reflecting on my time in the school, I do think there were certain things that we didn't do well and I didn't do well. I am really sorry about that… I found that very hard as well with the parent community sometimes. People (referring to some parents) had their own concept of equality, but it wasn't equality on all levels. The way people wanted equality, as in, they wanted their religious beliefs to be respected, which is completely correct…But it was like as if there was all these various rows going down in straight lines, and they never crossed over. They seldom crossed over and they didn't encompass other forms of equality, such as gender or sexuality (Carmel, Former Principal)

Finbar also argues that having such a diverse school population places certain limitations on how the school can enact its ethos:

> There are limitations to a multicultural school. There's no doubt about that. That's our limitation… That's, probably the most tricky thing about our ethos and our school and GMGY (Finbar, Current Principal)

Finbar's references to the significant challenges inherent in multicultural contexts reflects Parekh's (2006, p. 343) assertion that "multicultural societies throw up problems that

have no parallel in history". It is unsurprising that these issues were not resolved (and remain unresolved) by the time Carmel left a number of years ago, given Parekh's argument that efforts to respect diverse views while at the same time creating a sense of shared values "is a formidable political task" that "no multicultural society so far has succeeded in tackling" (ibid., 2006, p. 343). This is particularly the case for those whose values and cultural norms are dissonant with those of the dominant culture (Irwin, 2012, p. 9). Given the high level of parents from conservative religious backgrounds in the case study school, school leaders and teachers find themselves striving to strike a balance between respecting diversity in all its forms and the need to respect certain religious views (McLaughlin, 1994, 2005a, 2008; Modood, 2007). The concerns raised by participants about the delicate balance required to be struck to accommodate rather than assimilate these parents are also reflective of McLaughlin (2005), who asserts that common schools in pluralist societies are presented with very specific and challenging dilemmas. They strive to reconcile the competing values of their school communities while at the same time respecting the common school's mandate to respect diversity.

The case study school attempts to overcome such challenges by ensuring that a wide variety of voices inform the policies that are most likely to bring about controversy. The purposeful inclusion of a wide variety of perspectives on these committees is an example of what Baker *et al.* (2009, p. 35) consider a radical egalitarian approach to the private sphere where the values held by staff and parents from the dominant group in society are not universalised (Parekh, 2006, p. 128) and the values of both the dominant and minoritised groups are put on the table for discussion. However, there is a paradoxical outcome to the radical egalitarian approach to the inclusion of minoritised voices on decision-making fora in the school i.e., the invisibilisation of LGBTQ+ identities in the curriculum. The complexity of balancing the competing demands of certain parents from

conservative religious backgrounds and the CNS's egalitarian ethos, which strives to affirm all identities (as outlined in Section Three), is significant in the case study school. The fact that this tension remains unresolved is unreflective of McGraw and Tiernan's (2022 p. 163) assertion that approaches to values conflicts in CNSs are resolved simply by articulating to conservative religious groups that CNSs are 'state' schools and therefore "religious beliefs are superseded by established State law". Instead, the school attempted to find a compromise that would satisfy members of the dominant and minoritised groups on these committees.

In slightly different ways, the participants involved in these committees outline the compromises reached to resolve these tensions. Some participants outline how the RSE committee agreed that teachers would not directly teach about LGBTQ+ identities, but if asked about these identities, teachers would acknowledge them positively and respectfully. It was also agreed that if a child speaks disrespectfully about a member of the LGBTQ+ community, teachers would actively challenge this view as such behaviour goes against the school's mantra of "we respect all religions and beliefs that are respectful of others":

> We wrote down exactly what we would say in explanation of the terms such as gay in our policy… this sounds awful… in terms of explaining terminology… We had that written in the policy that should this come up, that this is what we'd say and that if a child brings up same sex families or uses the term gay in a negative way we would use the explanations written down. It was child-led, the way if a child brings up something about same-sex families that that would be discussed and that. It wasn't just ignored, but it was, not dealt with as openly as I would like (Carmel, Former Principal).

> We said that the teacher wouldn't teach explicitly about these marriages but if the child says 'some people have two mammies' the teacher would say 'yes and that's great and some people have two daddies and that's great and some people have one mam and that's great' so that was the compromise we reached (Michelle, GMGY Coordinator).

Participants consistently describe how although they do not take a proactive approach to teaching about LGTBQ+ identities as they do to other diversity variables (as unpacked in the next section), they respond positively if a child talks about LGBTQ+ identities in a derogatory way. This compromised approach could be described as what Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2021, p. 273) term an "anti-homophobic" (with an emphasis on anti-discrimination) rather than a "counter-heteronormative" approach (emphasis on disrupting the privileged status of heterosexuals) to LGBTQ+ identities. This approach is also consistent with Neary, Irwin-Gowran and McEvoy's (2016) finding that teachers in Irish schools, both denominational and multidenominational, had a 'zero-tolerance' approach to homophobia, however, educating about LGBTQ+ identities was far more complex.

Baker *et al.* (2009, p. 109) argue that although consensus may not be reached on issues of moral disagreement on committees including non-dominant and dominant perspectives, the compromises agreed upon can be accepted by all in the knowledge that their perspectives were taken on board. However, this does not appear to be the case in this study, as participants consistently express frustration with the "watered-down" and "awful" approaches to responding to LGBTQ+ identities that were agreed upon at these committee meetings. Many participants express a deep desire "to do more… much more" (Chloe, Deputy Principal) in relation to LGBTQ+ identities. Indeed, some participants name the contradiction in the school having an egalitarian, 'multi-denominational' ethos yet still facing the same constraints of religious schools in terms of LGBTQ+ identities (Lynch and Lodge, 2002):

> It's almost contradictory where you think, "Wow, okay, we're not tied by a beliefs programme or a religious programme or we're not pushing a Catholic ideology or anything like that." On paper it should be, we should have pride flags everywhere, we should, along with our other flags that are up there as well. I know some secondary schools have that, but I feel like at the minute we're still bound by

cultures that are not possibly accepting of say LGBT people (Chloe, Deputy Principal)

I do think that it's very unfair when you think that we're supposed to be equality, diversity, all those things are supposed to be to the fore. There are children of course in the class with these backgrounds as well, and they're not being given their voice…on my behalf, I'm not comfortable with that, because I'm afraid of offending somebody (Sarah, Teacher)

The tensions between the values espoused by participants and the CNS model, as outlined in the first section, and the conservative approaches to LGBTQ+ identities are also reflective of Norman's (2003, p. 2) assertion that expressive goals "can be displaced somewhat by the curriculum and organisational structures in the school". He argues that due to a myriad of influences or "counter forces" at work in schools, the reality of practices can be significantly different from the expressive goals espoused in ethos documentation.

Weaker approaches to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ identities in the case study school, regardless of the rationale, are dissonant with the espoused ethos as articulated by participants. Such 'fault lines' (Smith, 1987, cited in Rusch, 2004, p. 18) have a significant impact on LGBTQ+ children as they "can cause the alienation of those students who are only weakly involved in the instrumental order" of the school (Norman, 2003, p. 2). Some participants provide examples of children they feel are impacted negatively by the school's approach to LGBTQ+ identities. Michelle outlines how a child in 6th class has recently identified as transgender. While she is confident that the teacher and school management are supporting the child well, she regrets that the school does not explicitly address this identity in the curriculum so that all children can understand the transgender child better. Mark describes how although LGBTQ+ identities are not taught about yet "we have had children that I would be aware of that they might be gay, but that's not talked about". Similarly, Chloe expresses concern about the potential number of children from LGBTQ+ identities in the school that go unrecognised and how the

school is "doing them a disservice" by not addressing these identities more proactively. Jill states:

> Statistically, there's obviously so many children in every class that are dealing with this in their personal lives at home, but that's one thing. I'd say equality is not necessarily catered for (Jill, Teacher)

From a critical theoretical perspective, the almost 'invisibilisation' (Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Swartz, 2009) of these identities, regardless of the rationale, can be seen as a form of 'symbolic violence' against this community as it deprives them of a legitimate space and language to explore this aspect of their identity (Robinson and Díaz, 2006; Baker *et al.*, 2009). The consequences of this "institutional invisibility" (Lynch and Lodge, 2002, p. 186) are significant for children, particularly those who may now or in the future identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community as they are not equipped with the "rich human languages of expression" (Taylor, 1997, p. 32) required to explore their identities. The fear around addressing LGBTQ+ identities in the curriculum may also send a powerful message to LGBTQ+ teachers that this aspect of their identity must be concealed from parents in the school (Egan and McDaid, 2019). Indeed, Jill explicitly expresses a concern that, although the leadership in the school would not be of this view, LGBTQ+ teachers could never reveal that aspect of their identity to parents in the school. This is significant given the fear that LGBTQ+ teachers still have about disclosing their sexuality in Catholic schools (Egan and McDaid, 2019; Ó'Cadhain, 2021; Roche and O'Brien, 2022). As a result, LGBTQ+ teachers may seek out positions in the case study school assuming, that by working in a multi-denominational context, they are guaranteed to be able to openly bring their whole selves to work.

5.3.6 Conclusion to Section Two

Reflective of Norman's (2003) assertion that a school's "organisational goals" are a central consideration of its ethos, a key vehicle used by the school to enact its ethos in response to its diverse community is empowering minoritised groups to actively participate in the day-to-day life of the school and its formal democratic structures. The inclusion of minoritised voices on key policy committees has had a transformative impact on how the school and CNS model approaches religious/belief diversity more broadly. However, the inclusion of certain minoritised voices on ethos-related policy committees has also inadvertently challenged the values of parents and teachers from the dominant group in Irish society and the egalitarian values espoused by participants. This is an area the school still struggles with as it strives to enact the CNS ethos while simultaneously avoiding offending those from conservative religious backgrounds. This finding is also consistent with other studies carried out in Ireland which found that while schools with a multi-denominational ethos have more freedom to affirm LGBTQ+ identities because of their egalitarian ethos, this does not always translate into practice (Neary, Irwin-Gowran and McEvoy, 2016; Egan and McDaid, 2019). These findings suggest a more nuanced relationship between school ethos and responses to LGBTQ+ identities than what might be assumed. This issue will be addressed in the recommendations section of the next chapter. The next section critically examines how participants enact the CNS ethos by using the formal and hidden curricula.

5. 4 Striving to Affirm Diversity in the Curriculum

Congruent with Norman's (2003, p. 3) assertion that it is imperative that a school's organisational and instrumental goals align with its expressive goals (values), all participants speak about the importance of ensuring that the school's diverse population

is reflected in and celebrated[48] by the school's formal and hidden curricula. This section critically examines how participants strive to achieve this through the positive representation of the school's diverse community in the curriculum and in whole-school celebrations. It also critically examines areas of discomfort for participants in responding to certain diversity variables.

5.4.1 Affirming Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Diversity in the Classroom

Consistent with the associations participants make between the CNS ethos and intercultural and "culturally responsive" education (NCCA, 2018, p. 39), all school-based participants speak proudly of how they represent the cultural, religious and linguistic diversity present in their school in both the formal and hidden[49] curricula. However, some participants illustrate the challenge they face in achieving this by describing the national curriculum documents and published books as unrepresentative of the school's diverse population. Geraldine (Teacher) considers the published books available to the school as Christian-centric with a normalised focus on "all the Irish celebrations, Halloween, Christmas, Easter…That's not being fair to all the religions and beliefs in our school". Jill (Teacher) outlines how teachers are cognisant of the mono-cultural nature of the national curriculum when planning for lessons and "are always trying to see how we can make this (the curriculum) apply to our kids …how can we have our ethos in mind when looking at the curriculum". There is evidence across the data of teachers' efforts to provide a culturally relevant curriculum, with some stating how "we're all very conscious to make sure that the images we show or things we're talking about are reflective of the children that are in front of us" (Amber, Teacher) or being conscious of different skin

[48] Consistent with conceptualisations of the term 'celebrate' in CNS/ETB documentation, participants use this term in ways consistent with liberal egalitarian rather than critical perspectives of the concept.
[49] In terms of the 'hidden curriculum', participants refer most often to the physical environment and whole-school celebrations rather than all aspects of the hidden curriculum.

colours when making resources (Geraldine, Teacher). Lynn (Teacher) summarises the participants' rationale for ensuring that the children are represented in classroom resources. She states:

> I think it's important because it's just to make the children aware that they are valued in this community, that they're seen in the community and it's not just the peach paint in the palate. It's the variety of colours that we have in the classroom. I suppose it is important for teachers to be mindful of that and to really make the effort to make the children comfortable and welcomed and accepted in the classroom (Lynn, Teacher).

Efforts at making the curriculum (instrumental goals) representative of the diverse school community are congruent with the expressive goals of providing an intercultural and "culturally responsive education" (NCCA, 2018a, p. 39). Teachers make a conscious effort to challenge the "Eurocentric…mono-cultural content and ethos of the prevailing system of education" (Parekh, 2006, p. 225). Efforts at altering the curriculum to represent minoritised groups demonstrates an awareness that "the curriculum for instruction have all been colonised and thus constructed in the dominant, Eurocentric image" (Pirbhai-Illich, Pete and Martin, 2017, p. 10). Efforts to counter this reality is significant given Andrews' (2019, p. ix) argument that "Eurocentic ideas and practices can only ever do the opposite of challenging the racist order". These actions are reflective of arguments that there is a natural link between common forms of schooling and multicultural education (Callan, 1997; Dhillon and Halstead, 2003; Halstead, 2007).

However, Jill points out that being culturally responsive is more challenging than ensuring that children from different ethno-racial backgrounds and religions are represented in the curriculum. She gives the example of the music curriculum which she describes as "completely Western-centric" and unreflective of the musical experiences many of the children who attend the school have at home:

It's European songs, but we're teaching European structures, European notation that it's not just the content. The actual way we're going about it is still coming from a Western point of view. We have children from India, Japan who also have their own music notation styles, but that's not included. I feel like it's not just the content, but that the whole curriculum itself is so Western European. We have to find examples, whether it's stories or something in history. We have to find things that are not readily available in curriculum documents or support documents. We have to go out of our way to try and find things, to make those lessons more relevant to our children (Jill, Teacher).

Mark (teacher) expresses a similar concern about the music curriculum and is of the view that the curriculum is monocultural and unreflective of the school's diverse community:

They're all white, they're all men, they're all playing classical instruments. What about different aspects of music from around the world and stuff? (Mark, Teacher).

Jill and Mark's assertions are reflective of Mellizo's (2017, cited in Murphy and Ward, 2021, p. 106) argument that "many music educators are conditioned into approaching the teaching of music from a westernised way of understanding, regardless of setting…often rely on western notation". They are also reflective of more critical interpretations of culturally relevant pedagogies.

Geraldine describes an example of how teachers are conscious of ensuring that the school's diverse school population is represented in the curriculum. She outlines the school's response to the annual magazines "Sonas" and Súgradh"[50] sent to teachers by the publisher every year to encourage them to purchase the magazines for the children. However, they have been deemed unsuitable for sending out to parents in the case study school as staff believe they are mono-cultural and Christian-centric.

The challenge some teachers articulate in making the national curriculum more relevant to a diverse school community supports previous research, which found that Irish-produced textbooks tend to be unreflective of Ireland's diverse society (Moloney and

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[50] Christmas magazines produced by the national publisher 'Folens' annually

O'Toole, 2018) and privilege white Catholic people while at the same time exoticising minoritised groups (Kavanagh, 2013).

In terms of the 'hidden' curriculum (Nieto, 1999), many participants describe how the school places great emphasis on creating a vibrant, inclusive environment through displays that represent the diverse school community.

> I suppose to create an inclusive learning environment to show that, for the displays anyway, to show children that like their ethnicity is valued or their religion is valued, that they're a part of the community and they're accepted and respected in the community. Just to show that we are a community and we're all different, but we're all valued and accepted I suppose (Lynn, Teacher).

> It was more like the 'hidden curriculum' or the day-to-day experience of the students and the beautiful displays (Michelle, GMGY Coordinator)

This is evident to the researcher during the time spent in the school when collecting data. A considerable amount of work is invested into classroom and corridor displays. These displays showcase the school's inclusive ethos by explicitly referencing the school's values and depicting children and families in a culturally representative way. Ensuring that the curriculum (both formal and hidden) are reflective of the school's diverse population is counter to findings from previous Irish research, which found that the curriculum reflects the identities of the dominant group only (Darmody, 2011a, p. 225). Indeed, Baker *et al.* (2009, p. 154) argue that one of the main inequalities experienced by minoritised groups in Irish schools is an inequality of respect and recognition, which may cause these children to view themselves in a deficit way (Lynch and Lodge, 2002, p. 131). The efforts made by teachers in the case study school demonstrate an awareness of how important the curriculum is in communicating to minoritised children that they are valued (Kavanagh and Dupont, 2021, p. 559), and the role that ethos plays in developing positive, multicultural school environments (Faas, Foster and Smith, 2018, p. 606). Such efforts are significant given the positive impact they have on the self-esteem of minoritised children (Parekh, 2006; Robinson and Diaz, 2006), their motivation to learn

(Devine, 2009), and the role that the positive recognition of one's identity plays in identity formation (Taylor, 1997, p. 25). Efforts made by the school to ensure that its diverse school community is reflected in the formal and hidden curricula could be described as an example of a counter-hegemony that challenges the curriculum's mono-cultural nature (Parekh, 2006, p. 225).

As outlined in Chapter Four, all participants in this study are from Ireland's dominant cultural and linguistic group. According to Kavanagh, Waldron and Mallon (2021, p. 7), the privileged positions Irish teachers have in society can mean that they are far removed from the lived realities of minoritised children. This reality can make the provision of a culturally relevant education particularly challenging. The following sub-section examines how teachers in the case study school strive to overcome this by utilizing the children's knowledge and lived experiences in the classroom.

5.4.2 Drawing on the Children's Knowledge and Lived Experiences

One of the key ways teachers in the case study school ensure that the curriculum reflects the reality of the lives of the children in their class is by drawing on their knowledge and experiences. This is particularly the case in how teachers respond to the children's religious/beliefs and cultural and linguistic diversity.

Many teachers demonstrate an appreciation for minoritised children as valuable and legitimate knowledge sources. They also utilise the knowledge and lived experiences these children have to overcome their lack of knowledge of different religious/beliefs and cultural diversity while remaining sensitive to the right of children to not speak to their specific backgrounds if this makes them uncomfortable.

All participants appear to be aware of their limitations in terms of providing a culturally relevant curriculum to such a diverse school community as they come to the diverse case study school "embedded in their own *habitus*" (Darmody, 2013, p. 394), which have been informed by their possibly limited social and cultural experiences (May, 1994; Bourdieu, 2020). Amber (Teacher) outlines how she surmounts her fear of "not knowing everything" about different minoritised identities as she became more skilled in "getting the children to share, and to even dig deep and see what things mean for them, what makes up their self-identity" allowed for richer discussions. Sarah (Teacher) also shares that as a result of her "rural" background and monocultural educational experiences, "I don't really know much about the outside world apart from the holidays I've been on" and therefore relies on the children's "wealth of knowledge" and experiences to teach about religions and cultures that she is unfamiliar with. Lynn (Teacher) considers these approaches as effective ways of "using the assets you have in front of you, which are the children's wealth of knowledge" to overcome her limitations in knowledge. Such assertions are reflective of the teachers' "asset-based" (Cochran-Smith, 2009, p. 456) view of the experiences and knowledge children from minoritised backgrounds bring to the classroom.

The use of "democratic pedagogical approaches" (Kavanagh, 2021, p. 222) by teachers in the case study school is counter to recent Irish studies, which found that traditional teacher-centric pedagogies dominate over approaches which draw on input from children (Kavanagh, 2013; Skerritt, Brown and O'Hara, 2021). Pirbahai-Illich, Pete and Martin (2017, p. 15) argue that culturally relevant teachers utilise the funds of knowledge available in the classroom "rather than positioning minoritized students as deficient". Similarly, Ladson-Billings (1995, p. 160) maintains that culturally relevant teachers "utilize students' culture as a vehicle for learning". Many participants speak in particular

about the 'My Stories' strand in GMGY which encourages children to dialogue with each other about their identity(ies). This is possibly unsurprising as the approaches taken in this strand have been recognised by other researchers as "a good example of how curriculum can support children in developing a sense of who they are as individuals while also seeking to nurture a sense of belonging within their relationships and communities" (Ó'Cadhain, 2021, p. 182).

Kavanagh (2021, p. 223) contends that the use of such approaches in schools "supplant traditional understandings of teachers as active depositors of knowledge and children as passive knowledge recipients and in doing so, disrupt unequal teacher-child power relations" (Kavanagh, 2021, p. 223). These efforts, which are congruent with the expressive goals of the school's ethos (as articulated in Section One), are significant given Lynch and Lodge's (2002, p. 131) assertion that when the perspectives and life worlds of minoritised children are invisibilised by teachers from the dominant group, children begin to view themselves through a deficit lens.

Another significant way that many teachers demonstrate a commitment to utilising the children's funds of knowledge is their use of the children's home languages in the classroom. Finbar outlines how there are fifty-two different languages spoken within the school community. As high levels of linguistic diversity have been present in the school from the outset, Chloe believes that responding to it is "just the norm" and part of everyday practice for teachers working in the school. Michelle outlines how the school's current EAL policy is based on the premise that linguistic diversity is an asset and that children should be encouraged to use that asset in school. This "asset-based" (Cochran-Smith, 2009, p. 456) view of the children's linguistic capital is evident in many participant interviews with teachers describing being "in awe" (Amber, Teacher) of the children because of their "amazing" linguistic abilities.

Finbar considers the children's home languages as "a living identity within the school". This is evident in the number of strategies participants use to actively incorporate the children's first languages into the school's daily life. One of the more significant initiatives that participants reference is the "Young Interpreters Programme" established by Michelle five years ago. It involves teachers of junior classes identifying children struggling to communicate in English to Michelle, who then finds a "buddy" from a senior class who speaks their home language. The older children visit the junior classes once per week for thirty minutes to check in with the child, read a dual-language book and talk about school life. Participants report the older children feeling pride in their linguistic capabilities and the younger children looking forward to this opportunity to speak their home language to older children each week.

In line with other research carried out in CNSs, which found that respecting mother languages was a way of enacting the CNS's inclusive ethos (Faas, Smith and Darmody, 2018a, p. 13), the majority of participants demonstrate an evident appreciation for the children's 'linguistic capital' (Bourdieu, 1991). Michelle actively expresses to the children her respect for their ability to speak different languages:

> Even talking to the kids about having this dual identity…and just hearing from them how they negotiate these different worlds, they are speaking different languages at home…We would say to them "You guys are amazing! You have something we don't have. I can't communicate in Romanian, you can!" They love that idea.

Similarly, Amber describes her deep appreciation of the children's linguistic abilities. Such positive attitudes and practices towards linguistic diversity are reflective of the inextricable link between intercultural education and the positive promotion of linguistic diversity (Cummins, 2015). This is particularly significant in the context of the CNS ethos as Ní Dhiorbháin (2021, p. 155) argues that such "a plurilingual approach to language teaching" is a key mechanism through which a school can promote a social justice agenda.

However, there were inconsistencies in school-based participants' attitudes towards the use of children's home languages. Both Sarah and Geraldine, who have been teaching in the school for over seven years, demonstrate a lack of awareness of the school's plurilingual EAL policy. Geraldine outlines how she only became aware of the importance of the child's first language from a course that she did externally to the school last year. She laments that "that's taken me fourteen years to realise what a value that could be". When asked about the role of the child's first language in the classroom, Sarah outlines how children in her class do not use their home languages apart from on "Self-Expression Day", where children are encouraged to share their home languages. While she is of the view that, on the one hand, it would be good if children were given more opportunities to speak their home language in class, she is also concerned that it could lead to behavioural issues where children are communicating in a language she does not understand:

> It would be nice to see it on one sense, but I suppose I am teaching sixth class, so from a behaviour point of view, if there were a few of them speaking a language that I didn't understand, I would be a bit nervous about what the conversation, what they were talking about, or that kind of thing. I suppose that needs to be thought of as well and monitored. It would be nice if they did have the opportunity maybe to teach their friends a phrase, or two (Sarah, Teacher).

Such an attitude that immediately associates the use of home languages with possible behavioural issues reflects a deficit in thinking about children's home languages. According to Cummins (2015, p. 458), such attitudes are "the antithesis of intercultural education" and, therefore, an inclusive ethos, as they send a clear message to children that the school does not value their home languages.

Although Amber demonstrates a positive attitude towards the children's use of their home languages in the classroom, she does not seem to share the same rationale for a plurilingual approach as her other colleagues:

176

> If the children have the syntax on all the aspects in their home language, they can more easily transfer that into another language. Whereas if they're in that developmental stage of learning their home language and then there's another language and they don't have the structure or the processing of that language skills development in one language, it can get very confusing for them (Amber, teacher)

The differences in rationale between Amber, who focuses on the more technical linguistic rationale for the inclusion of home language, and other colleagues who recognise the importance of the children's home language in their identity formation, reflect O'Toole's (2011, pp. 72–73) distinction between the 'technical' and 'symbolic' aspects of home-language recognition. The inconsistencies in attitudes and practices towards children's home languages and the rationale behind their usage evident in a small sample of teachers in the school raises questions about the impact of the EAL policy across the entire school. Regardless of these inconsistencies, the data indicates that overall, the school's initiatives in response to EAL learners are significant. However, Kitching (2010, p. 221) argues that there is a tendency in Irish education policy to focus on EAL issues at the expense of more fundamental equality issues experienced by minoritised learners. He argues that an emphasis on EAL strategies over more critical forms of multicultural education "closes down any call to explore racialisation or competitive structures in school achievement". While the case study school clearly responds to other forms of diversity other than linguistic, Kitching's assertion does raise questions regarding the exploration of the structural inequalities experienced by minoritised groups in the school's community. This is critically examined in the next sub-section.

5.4.3 Liberal Egalitarian or Critical Approaches to the Curriculum?

Congruent with my epistemological position as a 'social constructivist' where I believe that knowledge is "constructed by mutual negotiation" between researcher and research participants (O'Donoghue, 2007, p. 10), following extensive engagement with participants on how the school's ethos is harnessed to respond to its diverse school

community, I presented the core tenets of literature on Critical Multicultural Education to participants. As an 'insider' researcher who locates his axiological positioning along a continuum between liberal and radical egalitarianism, rather than firmly rooted in one over the other, I felt able to discuss critical forms of multicultural education with participants in a non-threatening way. The questions which framed these discussions are outlined in my 'Interview Schedules' (Appendices E, F, G, H). The following comments are reflective of the general responses from all school-based participants as to whether the school takes more liberal egalitarian or critical responses to diversity:

> I would say we're definitely towards the celebratory side… I don't feel that I look at the critical side of diversity. I would focus more on the celebration of diversity… I don't think as a school we're encouraged either to be overly critical. (Sarah, Teacher).

> I think we're very high on the celebration scale. Definitely, 100%. I think we shy away from critique (Chloe, Deputy Principal).

As many participants stated that the rationale for avoiding a 'critical multicultural approach' was a fear of offending parents, I had to clarify for them that 'critical' approaches advocate for the examination of issues such as unequal power relations, racism and the causes of inequalities rather than 'criticising' someone's beliefs or cultures. However, these participants still maintained that they avoided such discussions where possible. Such assertions align with what Baker *et al.* (2009, pp. 34-36) consider as a liberal egalitarian approach to religions and beliefs as the private sphere is exempt from egalitarian scrutiny or challenge from this perspective.

There are two exceptions to this general narrative. Jill argues that children themselves, particularly during discussions in GMGY, want to talk about issues of (in)equality and (in)justice:

> …the children will put up their hands, and they'll want to talk about what's going on in Afghanistan, or 'Black Lives Matter', or Palestine. They do want to talk

> about that stuff… about the climate too. I feel like 'Thinking Time' is the space, the area that you can give them to discuss those things (Jill, Teacher)

Jill's assertion reflects Austin's (2019, p. 122) argument that "young people are increasingly showing interest in issues that will have an impact on their own lives and on the future of the planet". Although Jill describes how she has grown comfortable facilitating such discussions in GMGY, she maintains that other teachers would be "terrified" of "bringing up the more difficult questions". However, for her, it is a priority for children to "question themselves…to question everything around them". Lynn, who is one of the newest members of staff, is of the view that in addition to looking at the positive aspects of different religions, beliefs and cultures, it is important to engage in more critical discussions:

> …there is definitely scope to do that (critical examination of equality issues) within GMGY through maybe 'Thinking Time', maybe walking debates about whether we think the equality between men and women or equality between I suppose girls that not allowed to go to school in say the Middle East. They are topics that should be discussed for sure… I definitely think it's important to celebrate aspects of the religions and cultures but also to look at them critically as well. (Lynn, Teacher)

Although Lynn is of this view, she also states that as she is relatively new to teaching GMGY, she has not yet had an opportunity to engage with children on such issues. Lynn also gives some examples of practices which could be considered counter to critical approaches to culturally relevant pedagogies. She describes doing a "béaltriail[51]" information sheet that she sourced on the internet with her class that required the children to fill out information about their mothers and fathers and their job titles. She outlines how this raised questions from children such as "Do I just write my dad's job or my stepdad's job as well?" and other questions regarding what to write if the child's parent does not work. Lynn gives these examples to demonstrate how openly the children

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[51] An oral examination in the Irish language

communicated their non-traditional families to her. However, the assumption of a nuclear family with both parents working reflects Darmody's (2011a, p. 225) argument that the curriculum itself reflects the backgrounds and experiences of the dominant group.

Heather expresses a concern that while she believes teachers in CNSs are taking an intercultural approach to GMGY and the curriculum more broadly, she maintains that they are avoiding any critical forms of intercultural education:

> I think a lot of teachers are taking an intercultural approach, but they're taking a celebratory intercultural approach… They're really focused on the representation side of things, which is great because representation is important, but it's not the only thing we do, and it's not the main thing we do either within Community National Schools. I think it's a very easy intercultural approach to take to make sure everybody is seen and visible or represented within the learning environment of the school (Heather, ETBI Representative).

She describes how when asking GMGY Coordinators how she can support them in preparation for the next academic year, "the first thing they'll talk about is getting the GMGY calendar ready"[52]. They do not seek support or resources to take a more critical approach to religious/belief diversity. On the other hand, school-based participants almost unanimously (except for Jill and Mark) speak proudly about the school's whole-school celebrations, such as 'Self-Expression Day' and 'Community Day'. Planning for such days "takes up a significant amount of time" at planning meetings when teachers are discussing how to incorporate the school's ethos into the curriculum (Amber, Teacher). These days are considered important by many participants as they provide opportunities for children and parents from minoritised backgrounds to "see all of the different cultures and food and whatnot…giving parents a sense that we're appreciating them as well" (Chloe, Deputy Principal). They are also seen as an educational opportunity for parents and teachers from the dominant group as "some of the parents (from

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[52] ETBI shares a calendar of different events marking various religious days, cultural events, social movements etc. with CNSs each year

minoritised groups) were very brave and got up and spoke about their culture…we learned a lot about the different cultures" (Geraldine, Teacher). Jill raises concerns about how children from the dominant group are celebrated on these days. She recounts a story where, as a result of the school not celebrating "the kids from Ireland at all", one child from the dominant ethnic group proudly announced to her that his great grandad was English "just because he felt he needed to offer something that wasn't just Irish".

From a critical theory perspective, these celebratory days are highly problematic. Darmody (2011b) argues that a school's reliance on such one-off events to affirm the cultural capital of minoritised groups is an indication that they adhere to liberal forms of multicultural education. This form of multicultural education has been described by Irish researchers using critical theories as "weak" and "tokenistic" (Bryan, 2009a; Bryan and Bracken, 2011; Kavanagh, 2013; O'Toole, 2019). Participants' views of these days as opportunities to show minoritised groups that "we" value "them" supports Bryan's (2010, p. 255) assertion that these days naturally dichotomise the school community into the 'celebrator' or 'valuer' and those who are to be valued. Similarly, Pirbhai-Illich, Pete and Martin (2017, p. 9) assert that discourses of "us-them" and "natural-exotic" have the effect of "othering" minoritised groups. The participants' positioning themselves as the 'valuers' of diversity and the minoritised groups consenting to the participation in such events could also be considered an outcome of the hegemonic narratives that have led to their unquestioned, 'common sense' privileged or subordinate positions as the 'valuer' or 'valued' (May, 1994; Jones, 2006; Bell, 2016). This is significant as "an embodied sense of 'them' and 'us' can leave children on the margins of society feeling like outsiders" (Devine, 2019, p. 15). The legitimised and accepted unequal power relations between the dominant school staff and minoritised parents at such events could be considered a form of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p. 4) as they indicate a rhetoric of

celebrating diversity while simultaneously perpetuating the views of children from the dominant group (O'Toole, Joseph and Nyaluke, 2019, p. 185). According to some critical theorists, they distract from a focus on engaging children critically in discussions about policies and practices that impact on minoritised children's lives and communities (Bryan, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 77).

Despite such critiques, Finbar (Current Principal), Chloe (Deputy Principal) and Michelle (GMGY Coordinator/HSCL Coordinator) outline how these days provide opportunities for school leaders to engage with minoritised groups. They also use these days as an opportunity to encourage parents from minoritised religious and cultural groups to get actively involved in the school's decision-making fora. Therefore, although the celebrations themselves are considered problematic from a critical multicultural perspective, one of the positive outcomes of these events is the involvement of historically marginalised groups in the school's democratic and decision-making structures. An outcome considered by radical egalitarians as the creation of an inclusive "participatory form of politics" that disrupts the unquestioned, hegemonic absence of minoritised groups from policy-decision fora (Baker *et al.*, 2009, p. 39).

Unlike Heather, who is concerned about teachers in the CNS model taking liberal multicultural approaches to the curriculum, Stephen argues that it is inadvisable for teachers to take critical approaches in GMGY because of the age range it is targeting:

> I think what you have to be very conscious of is the age that this curriculum is pitched at… If you look at junior cycle religious education, there is a real level of criticality there, where they are critiquing really some religious practices, in relation to women's rights or whatnot. I would argue that because the children who are using GMGY are a bit younger, it could be somewhat problematic to have that level of criticality… (Stephen, NCCA Representative).

Heather, Jill and Lynn see 'Thinking Time' as a key opportunity to engage in more critical conversations with children. Stephen, however, is of the view that this strand lends itself

to more "exploratory and discursive" discussions on diversity issues which prepares them to engage in more critical discussions at the post-primary level. Similarly, Michelle argues that taking any form of critical approaches to religions/beliefs and cultural practices in particular "might be a dangerous thing" to ask teachers in the case study school to do, given the history of issues parents have had with the original GMGY curriculum. Austin (2019, pp. 133-134) recognises teachers' concerns about taking critical approaches to the curriculum with younger children. While she advocates for age-appropriate approaches to critical global justice education, she also argues that children have a right to know about issues which directly affect their lives and how they can "personally play a part in helping shape the future" (ibid., 2019, p. 134). Similarly, Robinson and Díaz (2009, p. 7) argue, from a post-structural perspective, that many early childhood educators hold modernist perspectives of children which "perpetuate hierarchical power relationships between adults and children". These teachers deem critical pedagogies "developmentally inappropriate" for younger children. However, Robinson and Diaz (2009, p. 7) challenge this view as they argue that young children "play a critical and active role in the constitution and perpetuation of social inequality, through their perceptions of the world". Therefore, they claim that these already formed hegemonic narratives must be challenged. Stephen and Michelle's views are also possibly dissonant with the GMGY curriculum which, states that "there is an emphasis on critical thinking" (NCCA, 2018a, p. 13) across all four strands and that the "dialogical pedagogy" underpinning the curriculum is used to enable teachers and children to "critically interrogate the topic of study, express and listen to multiple voices and points of view, and create respectful and equitable classroom relations" (ibid., 2018, p. 36).

Congruent with GMGY's definition of 'multi-denominational' education as a form of 'culturally responsive education' and conceptualisations of the CNS ethos as a form of

intercultural education (as outlined in the first section), all participants recognise the link between the CNS ethos and forms of culturally relevant pedagogies. However, in line with Robinson and Diaz's (2006, p. 70) assertion that Liberal Multicultural Education is the predominant form of multicultural education used in schools, it is apparent that the case study school focuses on promoting a more liberal interpretation of culturally relevant pedagogy. This approach focuses on including and positively representing its diverse school community in the formal and hidden curricula over critical engagement with equality issues. The positive consequences of ensuring that children's identities are reflected in the curriculum were discussed in the previous sub-section. However, Ladson-Billings (1995; 2014) argues that teachers who focus only on developing children's "cultural competence" over developing their "broader socio-political consciousness" have misconceptualised culturally relevant pedagogies. This is significant as she argues that these discussions enable children to "critique cultural norms, mores and institutions that produce and maintain social injustices" which are arguably important components of an education that promotes democratic values (ibid., 1995. P. 162). It is argued that such a lack of commitment to "conscientisation" serves the interests of the dominant group only (Freire, 2000, p. 77) as it ensures the perpetuation of existing unequal power relations between dominant and subordinate groups (Jay, 2003; Apple, 2019). Indeed, Bryan (2009c, 2009b, 2010; Bryan and Bracken, 2011) argues that a lack of critical approaches to diversity is a form of 'symbolic violence' that gives the illusion to minoritised groups that they are being included while simultaneously being disempowered to do anything about the inequalities they experience.

The next sub-section examines the school's approach to issues of social class. This is a significant issue for the school, given its status as a DEIS school warrants specific attention.

5.4.4 Silences and Discomforts in Responding to the Realities of the Experiences of Children from Working Class Backgrounds

Although participants draw on the knowledge and experiences of the children, a practice lauded by critical multiculturalists (Freire, 2000), teachers describe drawing on the positive aspects of their experiences only. Indeed, all school-based participants and the NCCA representative describe their discomfort with addressing any issues relating to social class in particular. When asked about responses to children and families from working class backgrounds, all school staff immediately refer to the work of the school's HSCL Coordinator (currently Michelle) as part of the school's DEIS programme. They outline a host of measures she puts in place to support families who are the most disadvantaged economically. These measures range from financial support for uniforms, school trips, stationary, etc., to classes in the English language and art. Michelle describes spending a great deal of time working with parents of children whom teachers have identified as requiring additional support at home. She attempts to compensate for the lack of financial, cultural and social capital possessed by newly arrived families by supporting them to access social services by filling out the required documentation etc. However, beyond describing the work of the HSCL Coordinator, most participants appeared to be surprised that there were any questions in the interview concerning *curricular* responses to social class issues. Indeed, apart from LGBTQ+ identities, which have already been addressed, participants indicate that 'social class' is an identity marker that they find the most challenging to address in the GMGY curriculum or the general curriculum more broadly. Participants' tendency to draw on the positive and colourful aspects of the children's lives only is reflective of Haverty *et al's.* (2019, p. 86) concern that children's funds of knowledge can be used "as a means for avoiding more complex questions" which masks the issues affecting their lives.

Discussing curricular responses to social class inequalities with Stephen during his interview prompts him to reflect on a possible missed opportunity to incorporate content relating to social class in the revised GMGY curriculum:

> When we were looking at the whole GMGY curriculum, it's so interesting to think back now because that (social class) didn't come up. It was cultural diversity. It was linguistic diversity. It was religious diversity. There was some awareness of that identity diversity in relation to LGBTQI issues, but not to the same extent as the others…The socio-economic status didn't ever get mentioned. You know what? Just didn't. When you think back, as I said, a lot of our communities, and a lot of our schools are in disadvantaged areas (Stephen, NCCA Representative).

Similarly, when teachers were asked about how they incorporate this aspect of the children's identity into their teaching, many school staff admit to having never considered addressing this aspect of the children's lives before, despite the school having DEIS status:

> That is something we are totally guilty of not doing. We don't. When I think about it, it is mad that we don't, because we are in an area where children from lower socio-economic backgrounds are all around us (Barry, Teacher)

Michelle responds in a similar way when asked whether teachers utilise classroom-based social class responses similar to approaches to other minoritised identity markers by stating, "you know what? I don't think so". Some participants outline how they avoid discussions relating to social class issues as they deem it too sensitive considering the number of children in their class who are affected by poverty:

> That was nearly seen as more controversial than some of the other topics we were doing, because it was so real for the children right there and then. It was raw, and there was like, "Children are living this, do you think would we not be opening up a whole host of pain by actually discussing it in school?" We didn't go there as much as we could have (Stephen, NCCA Representative).

Similarly, Chloe (Deputy Principal) states that the rationale for avoiding issues relating to social class is "there is a set level of sensitivity there" and teachers avoid it as they don't want children from working class backgrounds to feel "any embarrassment" or feel that they have to talk about their situation in front of the whole class.

Deeming discussions in relation to social class too "controversial" and "sensitive" is in line with the findings of critical theorists who argue that teachers avoid any form of "dangerous discourse" (Nieto, 1999, p. 208), claiming that they are "too destabilising" (May and Sleeter, 2010, p. 4) to the classroom. Carmel's (Former Principal) argument that the school does not highlight issues of social class "as we want children to be equal... (we) gloss over that and pretend that everyone is equal here" is reflective of the concerns of critical theorists. They claim that liberal egalitarians ignore the deeply ingrained power inequalities that lead to inequality (Lynch, 1999; Baker *et al.*, 2009) and the role that schools play in perpetuating them (Darmody, 2011a, p. 224). However, in contrast to participants who maintain that discussions regarding social class may upset the children, Heather, who identifies as being from a working class background, is of the view that it is the *teachers* who are uncomfortable in having these conversations rather than the children:

> I think as teachers, and I hate using the term *"primarily from White middle-class backgrounds"* because yes, I am White, but I'm not from a middle-class background. They often don't go there because it makes *them* uncomfortable. They forget that the children who we are not talking to about these issues are uncomfortable anyway. They are uncomfortable and they see the difference and they know it's there. By ignoring it, that's how you're undervaluing, from my perspective, their identity… you might be teaching in a multi-denominational school and trying to support an equality-based agenda, but do you actually want to see change? If you do, then you'll put aside your own comfort and try to make the children in your class more comfortable around their families and their community (Heather, ETBI Representative).

While some school-based participants outline that in lessons regarding different types of homes in geography, various types of accommodation for homeless people are included, they also describe avoiding discussions around the causes of homelessness. Given the significant levels of poverty experienced by children in the school (as outlined by participants), it is concerning that there are so few opportunities for children to engage in discussions on an issue that profoundly affects many of their lives. Lynch (2018, p. 8)

considers the avoidance of providing a safe space to discuss issues of social class as a way for teachers to "invisibilise economically-related injustices". This is significant as, from a radical egalitarian perspective, such avoidance deprives children of the language required to recognise the inequalities they are experiencing and to do something about it (Freire, 2000; Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Apple, 2019). It may also lead children to view themselves through a deficit lens (Lynch and Lodge, 2002, p. 131) if the school itself becomes a place where certain identities are denied (Lynch, 1999, p. 17). It is also reflective of findings from previous research, which argues that intercultural education practised in Irish schools avoids naming the issues most relevant to minoritised children and in particular, issues of poverty (Kavanagh, 2013, p. 288). Such assertions mirror Bourdieu's (1977, p. 483) contention that schools are essentially middle-class institutions which transmit the dominant hegemonic culture onto minoritised social groups.

When discussing the potential for GMGY to address issues of social class, Heather, who attended DEIS primary and post-primary schools, recalls feeling "aggravated" as she often felt that the families in the schools were "talked about as opposed to talked to". She advocates for a critical multicultural approach which she sees as something that can enable people to:

> recognise their position within society, to reflect on it and collaborate with others who don't hold that position, and to consider collectively what they or their peers want to do about that

Heather's suggested approach to social class issues is reflective of May and Sleeter's (2010, p. 9) contention that teachers "acting as a partner" should engage in a critical and political dialogue with children to enable them to recognise the inequalities they experience and explore ways to take action to address it. Given Heather and Stephen's assertion that many CNSs have DEIS status and are in disadvantaged areas, the findings from this study are significant. They highlight the need for a conversation at the school

and national level concerning appropriate responses to the realities of social class inequalities experienced by many children attending CNSs.

This chapter has raised some concerns about the dissonance between participants' egalitarian conceptualisations of the CNS ethos (as outlined in the first section) and how they are currently enacting the ethos (through both organisational and instrumental goals). However, many participants demonstrate an awareness of the issues inherent in the "invisibilisation" of certain minoritised groups (members of the LGBTQ+ community and those from working class backgrounds) in their practice and avoidance of critical forms of multicultural education. The next sub-section examines the role of reflexive practice in addressing these concerns.

5.4.5 Reflexive Practice as a Vehicle to Address Dissonances between Policy and Practice

One of the key issues raised by many participants when discussing critical forms of multicultural education and the inclusion of all minoritised identities is their view that there is a lack of guidance or discussion about such issues at both CNS and school levels. Such assertions are significant considering arguments that teachers from the dominant group do not have the conceptual understandings required to deliver critical forms of multicultural education that is transformative for minoritised children (Sleeter and Montecinos, 1999; McLaughlin, 2003; Bryan and Bracken, 2011; O'Toole, 2019).

While Heather advocates for teachers to take more critical approaches to multicultural education, she acknowledges the lack of support teachers receive to enable them to do so. Although she provides some content on critical approaches, she recognises that it is not enough:

> Within one of the webinars for GMGY implementation, we do have a section on 'celebratory interculturalism'. It's good to have it in there, but it's a drop in the

ocean. It's about 10 minutes within five hours of input (Heather, ETBI Representative).

As a result of the lack of guidance, Heather maintains that while teachers in CNSs are "recognising similarities and differences" between different groups, they are not examining causes of discrimination and inequality within schools and broader society and examining ways they can be overcome. The lack of focus on critical forms of intercultural education in the CPD provided regarding the CNS ethos reflects May and Sleeter's (2010) assertion that proponents of Critical Multicultural Education have not provided enough concrete examples of how teachers can deliver this form of multicultural education. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997, p. 29) argue that for teachers to develop the conceptual tools required to unpack issues of power, privilege and identity, they need to engage deeply with critical forms of intercultural education. The lack of CPD in this area also deprives teachers from the dominant group of opportunities to engage with the 'unlearning' needed "in order to carry out the perspectival shift" that is required to engage with critical forms of intercultural education (O'Toole, 2019, p. 45). This is an important consideration for the CNS model, given both Heather (ETBI Representative) and Stephen's (NCCA Representative) assertion that the next step for the development of the CNS model is taking a more critical approach to GMGY and the broader curriculum:

> They (CNSs) only have their foot in the door in terms of being multi-denominational and again, at the front step, they are taking these liberal approaches and celebratory approaches to diversity. I do think they're aware that they need to do more. I think they're on a journey… I think if you were to ask that question in another ten years, I would say that many of our schools are engaging and taking a critical approach to intercultural education (Heather, ETBI Representative).

How this transition from a more liberal to critical approaches to the curriculum may come about will be returned to in the concluding chapter as part of the recommendations of this study.

Many participants indicate that although they are individually aware and concerned about the consequences of the avoidance of critical forms of multicultural education, the invisibilisation of specific identities and the potential impact of their own biases on minoritised groups, they have not collectively considered these issues as a staff. Chloe (Deputy Principal) states that "we definitely don't give the staff time to reflect" on issues such as privilege, power and the possible influence the teachers' (dominant) identities have on their ability to respond to a very diverse school. Similarly, Lynn states:

> you wouldn't look at how, as a staff, as a predominantly white Irish staff, how we were biased prior to teaching GMGY. I suppose we haven't as staff (Lynn, Teacher).

Barry (Teacher) also maintains that "there's a huge education piece missing" in terms of addressing his view that many teachers in the case study school "have no idea of our privilege a lot of the time… We have no idea of the issues that children and parents face".

Sarah, Jill and Mark also outline how, although they have spoken to other staff members about their fear about including LGBTQ+ identities in the curriculum, they have not examined this issue as a staff. The lack of formal opportunities to engage in reflexive conversations about these issues is significant given the positive impact such discussions had on broadening how the CNS ethos and GMGY curriculum were conceptualised and enacted in the initial years (as outlined in Section One).

Finbar, Geraldine, Carmel and Chloe question whether conversations around the CNS ethos are still prioritised at staff meetings as they were in the early years. They recall how in the initial years, as there were numerous new staff coming to the school each year, conversations about ethos dominated staff meetings and induction programmes. However, they outline how as the staff has stabilised in recent years, there are fewer new staff joining. This has shifted the focus of staff meetings to other issues, and now there is more reliance on new teachers picking up on the ethos through "osmosis" (Carmel,

Former Principal). Although such assertions reflect arguments that the school's organisational *habitus* gradually socialises newcomers to its values and norms over time (Glover and Coleman, 2005; Byrne and Devine, 2018), the lack of critical conversations about such issues may hinder the further development and deepening of the CNS ethos in the school. Most staff members reference the impact of COVID-19 on the school's ability to discuss areas related to ethos. They describe the school being "in survival mode" (Mark, Teacher) since the start of the pandemic. However, the same teachers express hope that the school can refocus on its ethos and the ways it enacts it when restrictions relating to Covid-19 are lifted.

Significantly, Carmel (Former Principal) raises a similar concern at a broader CNS level. She outlines how by the time she retired, CNS principals and policymakers had reduced the amount of time they dedicated to discussing the CNS ethos collectively, although there were new principals coming on board every year:

> I know that was something that I felt very concerned about maybe before I retired, the way that we were now an established model and where did ethos stand in the CNS model?... I did wonder for the CNS model because we stopped talking about it…. It (the ethos) was established, and I thought new schools coming on board… I wondered how much of an understanding or a buy-in had they got to the ethos now. Eventually, will the schools just end up like all other primary schools within the country? Just vanilla, but more multicultural? I think that's something that the schools have to try to negate (Carmel, Former Principal).

Although many participants express a desire to engage in more critical conversations about diversity, this will not be possible unless opportunities are provided to develop the conceptual understandings required to engage in critical pedagogies (Bartolomé, 2010, p. 48). Indeed, Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997, p. 29) argue that individuals who wish to engage in critical forms of education must engage continuously with relevant learning opportunities that allow them to discuss issues of identity and power. Teachers also need

to be provided with opportunities to consider their deficit thinking before engaging critically with children on equality issues (Bartolomé, 2010, p. 48).

5.4.5 Conclusion to Section Three

Both school-based participants and key stakeholders make considerable efforts to overcome the challenges of a national curriculum which participants perceive to be mono-cultural by ensuring that the GMGY curriculum, the broader taught curriculum and the classroom environment reflect the school's diverse cultural, religious and linguistic population. All participants demonstrate a particular awareness of the positive impact culturally relevant approaches have on children from minoritised groups. The use of democratic pedagogical approaches that elicit the children's cultural, religious and linguistic knowledge and experiences appears to be one of the main ways participants ensure that classroom life reflects of the children's lived realities. However, when discussing critical forms of multicultural education with participants, it becomes apparent that discussions on the causes of inequalities and ways of overcoming them are not common practice in the case study school. The analysis also suggests diverging views on the role of critical forms of multicultural education amongst key stakeholders.

Reflective of Robinson and Díaz's (2006, p. 8) assertion that even teachers committed to equality and social justice issues place different diversity variables in a hierarchical order, an obvious hierarchy emerges in terms of the diversity variables teachers are comfortable responding to and those they are not. Critical analysis suggests that teachers feel capable of providing curricular responses to religious/belief, language and cultural diversity, albeit in apolitical ways, that avoid critical engagement with equality issues (Lynch, 2018). However, this is not the case for all identity variables considered in this study. Baker *et al.'s* (2009) assertion that the most common groups to experience non-

recognition in schools are those from working class backgrounds and members of the LGBTQ+ community (as discussed in Section Two). Teachers in the case study school feel uncomfortable providing a curricular response to these groups out of "fear" of offending particular groups and the potential sensitivities inherent in such discussions. Analysis suggests a lack of opportunities for the whole staff to consider these fears collectively. These issues will be addressed in the recommendations section of the next chapter.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter critically examined how research participants currently conceptualise the CNS ethos. It explored how conceptualisations have evolved over time from the perspective of certain participants and examined diverging views on the term 'multi-denominational' as an overall descriptor for the CNS model. Drawing on critical and liberal egalitarian theories, it then critically examined how the CNS ethos, as conceptualised by research participants, is enacted in response to a diverse school community. Many consistencies and some dissonances between conceptualisations and enactments were identified. The next chapter, the final one, will return to these findings and consider their implications on future policy, practice and theory.

Figure 15 outlines a summary of the key findings discussed in this chapter.

Figure 15 – Summary of Key Findings

Key Finding 1 – Conceptualisations of the CNS ethos have broadened from religious-centric in nature to understandings broadly aligned with Norman's Framework on Ethos (2003).

- Reflecting the hegemonic relationship between religion and education in Ireland, the focus of discussions around the CNS ethos and GMGY in the case study school's/CNS model's initial years was predominantly on responses to religious/belief identities.

- Undertaking relevant CPD and gaining experience of working in a diverse school context led to participants questioning the over-emphasis on religious/belief identities.

- Many participants are of the view that the egalitarian values underpinning the CNS ethos are not unique to the CNS model. However, they believe that they are conceptualised differently across different school types.

- Participants see a directly link between the aims of the CNS ethos and the aims of liberal forms of intercultural education.

- There are conflicting perspectives on the continued use of 'multi-denominational' as an overall descriptor for the model.

Key Finding 2 – Parents from middle-class, minoritised religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds have a significant influence on how the CNS ethos is conceptualised and enacted in the case study school.

- Hegemonic unequal power relations between dominant and minoritised religious, cultural, and linguistic groups are challenged in the case study school.

- Participants actively strive to identify and overcome the barriers parents from minoritised backgrounds may face in fully participating in school life as a result of a lack of cultural or linguistic capital.

- The *habitus* and various forms of capitals (economic, cultural, and social) of middle-class parents from minoritised religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds are recognised and valued more than the *habitus* of working class parents from either dominant or minoritised ethnic groups in the case study school.

- Parents of some minoritised religious backgrounds were unwilling to accept the misrepresentation of their religious beliefs in the original GMGY programme and demanded it to be changed.

- The case study school faces a significant challenge in balancing the demands of parents from conservative religious backgrounds and responding to LGBTQ+ identities in ways advocated for by the CNS model. This tension has led to the 'invisibilsation' of LGBTQ+ identities in the school's formal and hidden curricula.

Key Finding 3 – The case study school strives to provide a culturally relevant pedagogy which positively affirms the identities of children from minoritised religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

- Teachers demonstrate 'asset-based' thinking towards children from minoritised backgrounds by using democratic pedagogies. drawing on the children's cultural/linguistic/religious/belief knowledge and lived experiences This approach also compensates for the challenges teachers from the dominant group face in providing a culturally relevant pedagogy in such a diverse school context.

- Teachers predominately employ liberal egalitarian rather than critical approaches to the curriculum.

- Although the school endeavours to affirm diversity in the curriculum, there is evidence of a hierarchisation of the diversity variables recognised and affirmed in the classroom. While the *habitus* of minoritised religious/belief, linguistic and cultural groups are affirmed, this is less so the case for members of the LGBTQ+ community and children from working class backgrounds.

- Teachers demonstrate a deep discomfort with addressing the realities of the lived experiences of children from working class backgrounds.

- Opportunities to discuss the complex challenges inherent in responding to a diverse school community have lessened in the case study school over time.

Chapter Six – Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

One of the main aims for this study was to contribute to the significant gap in the literature regarding the CNS ethos by providing a comprehensive, critical analysis of how it is currently conceptualised by key stakeholders in the CNS model and conceptualised and enacted by staff in one diverse primary school. All published research concerning the CNS ethos has focussed on approaches to religious/belief diversity in the model and its GMGY curriculum (Faas, Smith and Darmody, 2018a, 2018c, 2018b; Mullally, 2018; Malone, O'Toole, Mullally, 2022). This study advances a broader conceptualisation of ethos encompassing its expressive, organisational and instrumental goals. It therefore provides a more nuanced and multi-faceted account of the interplay of variables which shape and mediate the ethos of one CNS as well as illuminating the process of wider CNS ethos-related policy development from the perspective of two key stakeholders.

This chapter reminds the reader of the purpose of each chapter by providing a brief overview of the thesis. It then addresses the study's specific research questions drawing on the analysed findings discussed in Chapter Five. It advances several specific and detailed policy recommendations based on these findings. In doing so, it addresses one of the study's overarching aims, which was to inform future ethos-related policy developments in the CNS model. This is important as CNSs are a relatively new addition to the Irish educational landscape and are a significant departure from the primary education system's hegemonic, privatised and religious-centric nature (McGraw and Tiernan, 2022). The chapter concludes by outlining the limitations of this study and suggesting potential areas of future research. It also outlines how the study

contributes to knowledge and scholarship in the field of multi-denominational education and education more broadly.

6.2 Overview of Study

Chapter One provided a contextual overview and rationale for this study. It presented the research questions and aims, my personal and professional positionalities in relation to the research, definitions of the key concepts underpinning the study and an overview of the conceptual framework. It delineated the thesis plan by outlining the purpose of each chapter. Chapter Two presented the study's theoretical framework and explicated both the liberal egalitarian (e.g., Liberal Multicultural Education) and critical theories (e.g., hegemony, *habitus*, 'symbolic violence', Critical Multicultural Education) underpinning the study. Using the study's theoretical framework, Chapter Three examined the role of ethos in schools and how it is conceptualised in denominational and multi-denominational schools focusing particularly on ETB post-primary and CNSs. It provided a broad overview of empirical research in these settings, drawing mainly on studies that used the theories underpinning this study's theoretical framework (e.g., *habitus*, capital, 'symbolic violence', Critical Multicultural Education). Chapter Four provided a critical overview of the broader conceptual framework and research design. It reflected on the study's ethical considerations, including the steps taken to ensure my positioning as an 'insider' researcher did not undermine the research's credibility, confirmability, or robustness. Chapter Five presented the study's most significant findings under the three main themes generated through data analysis. It provided a critical analysis of the findings drawing on the study's theoretical framework. The following section returns to these findings through the lens of the study's research questions.

6.3 Returning to the Research Questions

This section addresses the two research questions this study set out to examine critically:

1. How do key stakeholders in the CNS model conceptualise the CNS ethos?
2. How is the CNS ethos conceptualised and enacted by staff members in one diverse primary school?

Analysis indicates high levels of congruence between participants' conceptualisations of the CNS ethos. However, some differences in understanding key concepts relating to the CNS ethos are also evident. While there are a wide range of consistencies between how participants conceptualise the CNS ethos and enact it in practice, dissonances between understandings and practice also emerge.

6.3.1 Conceptualisations of the CNS Ethos

Chapter Five provides a detailed, critical account of how the CNS ethos is conceptualised and enacted by participants across three broad themes. This sub-section draws together the analysed findings regarding conceptualisations of the CNS ethos.

Conceptualisations of the CNS ethos have evolved from a solely religious-centric understanding to broader egalitarian understandings of the concept. The egalitarian values of "inclusion", "equality", "respect for diversity", "valuing differences" and "community" dominate participants' discourses around the CNS ethos. It is also evident in the broadening of the areas of school life associated with ethos. Relevant participants describe how conversations regarding the CNS ethos in the early years focused solely on the GMGY programme (a multi-faith programme at that time). Although GMGY remains a central feature of the CNS ethos, analysis indicates that participants' understandings of the areas of school life influenced by ethos are now broadly

consistent with Norman's (2003) Framework on Ethos. That is, expressive goals (values), instrumental goals (formal and hidden curriculum) and organisational goals (the nature of relationships).

While all participants broadly share similar conceptualisations of the CNS ethos, critical analysis indicates significant differences in participants' views on the term 'multi-denominational' as an overall descriptor for the model. Some school-based participants and the ETBI representative question its continued use to describe the model given its theocentric connotations. These participants believe that the religious nature of the term 'denominational' is dissonant with the broader, egalitarian conceptualisations of the CNS ethos today. However, the NCCA representative appears to have reconceptualised the term in a way that captures these broader understandings. This is reflected in the NCCA's definition of 'multi-denominational' education (NCCA, 2018a, p. 39), which aligns the CNS ethos with liberal forms of culturally responsive education[53]. The consistencies and dissonances between participants' conceptualisations and enactments of the CNS ethos will be addressed next.

6.3.2 Enactments of the CNS Ethos

This sub-section examines how the participants' conceptualisations of the CNS ethos are enacted in terms of approaches to the formal and hidden curriculum (instrumental goals) and approaches to parental involvement in the school (organisational goals).

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[53] Liberal forms of intercultural/culturally education are concerned with developing minoritised children's sense of inclusion in school through the representation of their diverse identities in the curriculum. They focus on developing children's 'cultural competence' by drawing on minoritised children's cultural knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Critical forms of intercultural/culturally responsive education prioritise the development of children's 'critical consciousness' in order to bring about change to hegemonic, taken-for-granted relationships of power/subordination between dominant and minoritised groups (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Consistent with the egalitarian values (expressive goals) of "inclusion", "equality", and "respect for diversity" articulated by participants, significant efforts are made to challenge what they perceive to be the monocultural, Euro-centric, and particularly, Christian-centric nature of the state curriculum. This is done primarily by ensuring that the school's diverse cultural, religious and linguistic community is represented in both the formal and hidden curricula. Teachers demonstrate "asset-based" (Cochran-Smith, 2009, p. 456) thinking in relation to minoritised children's funds of knowledge and lived experiences. They also endeavour to overcome the limitations of their own *habitus* in responding to the diversity in their classrooms by using democratic pedagogical approaches which draw on minoritised children's cultural/religious/linguistic knowledge and life experiences. Time spent at planning meetings discussing how teachers can achieve this demonstrates a cognisance of the positive impact the representation of minoritised groups in the school environment has on minoritised children. School-based participants and the NCCA representative broadly share the view that critical approaches to the GMGY curriculum are avoided more broadly.

Curricular manifestations of the CNS ethos are consistent with liberal forms of culturally responsive education promoted in GMGY's definition of 'multi-denominational' education (NCCA, 2018a, p. 39). From a critical theoretical perspective, the NCCA's conceptualisation of culturally responsive education is reflective of more liberal understandings of the concept i.e., developing inclusive classroom environments by ensuring the curriculum reflects diversity but omitting the more critical theory idea of developing the children's 'critical consciousness'. The ETBI representative advocates for teachers to take more critical approaches to the curriculum. To support CNSs in addressing issues of unequal power relations and

discrimination, critical forms of intercultural/culturally responsive education have been introduced to CPD webinars delivered by ETBI regarding implementing the revised GMGY curriculum. These elements aim to raise teachers' awareness of the transformative potential of the GMGY curriculum and the possibilities of taking more politically orientated approaches to equality issues at an age-appropriate level.

Dissonant with the intercultural education advocated for by critical theorists is the school's lack of commitment to engaging in whole-school CPD opportunities on issues relevant to working in diverse school contexts. While analysis indicates that individual participants have engaged in such CPD, the school has, over time, reduced systemic opportunities for all staff to engage in reflexive conversations about diversity issues, cultural clashes, identity, power, privilege and subordination. School leaders indicate an awareness of this lacuna and an appetite to address it.

Dissonant with the egalitarian values espoused by participants and how they are enacted is the school's curricular approaches to LGBTQ+ identities. Although participants espouse the importance of the positive inclusion of all aspects of children's identities, these identities have been somewhat 'invisibilised' in the school's formal and hidden curriculum because of the sensitivities of certain parents from religiously conservative backgrounds. Participants express an awareness of this dissonance and an eagerness for more efforts to ensure that LGBTQ+ children are included in and supported by the school's curriculum. Also dissonant with the egalitarian values articulated by participants are curricular approaches to children from working class backgrounds. While participants endeavour to draw on the lived experiences of minoritised children in terms of their cultural, linguistic, religious/belief lived realities, discussions concerning any socio-economic related inequalities experienced by these children are avoided. This is significant considering the school's DEIS status. The ETBI

representative advocates for teachers to overcome *their* discomfort in addressing such issues. This would ensure that children experiencing such inequalities can discuss and understand their lived realities and are empowered to take collective action.

Prior to the national restrictions as a result of Covid-19, staff members and school leaders describe spending a significant amount of time planning for and executing whole-school celebrations such as 'Self-Expression Day' and 'Community Day', as well as celebrating different religious festivals. The purpose of these days is to communicate to the school's diverse community that the school values their cultural, religious, and linguistic identities. Participants also see these events as a way of building relationships with parents who may be reluctant to approach staff in more formal settings. School leaders use these days as opportunities to encourage parents from minoritised groups to get involved in the school's various democratic and policy structures. Counter to the positive attitudes the majority of school-based participants hold towards these days; the ETBI representative is critical of such an emphasis on whole-school cultural events. Her concerns about schools over-relying on such days as a response to diverse school communities reflect those of advocates of critical forms of multicultural education who consider them tokenistic and superficial (Banks, 1993; Bryan, 2009a).

School leaders demonstrate a genuine commitment to tackling hegemonic unequal power relations by fostering meaningful partnerships with parents from minoritised groups. They encourage parents from minoritised religious and ethnic groups to participate in various democratic and decision-making fora (e.g., Parent Association, Board of Management, ethos-related policy committees). These efforts have been successful, with parents from minoritised ethnic and religious backgrounds being represented on such fora. However, findings also indicate that the *habitus* and various

forms of capital possessed by minoritised parents from middle-class, highly educated backgrounds are valued over those of parents from working class backgrounds. Discourses of "us/them" were also evident when discussing parents from minoritised groups. Although fostering partnerships with parents are prioritised, such discourses indicate a level of deficit thinking and (possibly) unconscious unequal power relations between teachers from the dominant group and parents from minoritised groups on these fora.

Parents' influence on ethos-related issues suggests a ground-up, Aristotelian approach to ethos in the school. The inclusion of members of the dominant and minoritised groups on the GMGY and RSE committees, where moral disagreement is likely, is particularly significant. The school critically discusses both dominant and minoritised values and ideologies rather than unilaterally universalising the dominant group's values. However, this approach has raised significant issues for the school regarding how it includes LGBTQ+ identities in the curriculum, creating a dissonance between practices and the egalitarian ethos espoused by participants, as already discussed.

6.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, several recommendations are made at both school and national levels. I have opted to base my recommendations on my knowledge of the realities of school life (from my former roles as a teacher, GMGY Coordinator and principal) and the policy and structural context at the national level (from my current role). Therefore, while ambitious, the recommendations which follow take cognisance of the reality of school life and the complex governance structures of

ETBs[54]. Rather than making grand and specific proposals on ethos-related policy changes, e.g., to adopt a critical approach to GMGY (a Platonic approach to ethos), I recommend several discussions that need to take place based on the findings of this research (an Aristotelian approach to ethos).

6.4.1 ETB/ETBI-level Recommendations

These recommendations are presented under four broad headings – CNS Ethos Structures, Policy Consultations, Auditing CNS Policies, and Engagement with Relevant Continuous Professional Development.

6.4.1.1 CNS Ethos Structures

Carmel's (Former Principal) concern about the reduced focus on ethos in discussions amongst CNS principals over time flags the need to (re)engage CNS principals on issues relating to the CNS ethos.

ETBI has been working collaboratively and intensively with ETBs over the past two years to develop a robust infrastructure to implement the 'ETBI Patrons' Framework on Ethos' (ETBI, 2021). However, the focus has been on the sector's 252 post-primary schools because of the particular issues they face in enacting a 'multi-denominational' ethos (O'Flaherty *et al.*, 2018; ETBI, 2019). To address these issues, each ETB has appointed an 'ethos coordinator' for one day per week to work with ETB post-primary schools within their ETB on ethos related issues. Each ETB post-primary school has established an Ethos Leadership Team (ELT)[55]. Each ELT has appointed an 'ethos lead'

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[54] I consider the ETB structures to be complex as all 16 ETBs are independent state bodies and therefore independent patrons. ETBI strives to ensure that all ETBs take collective positions on key areas such as patronage.

[55] The purpose of the ELT is to "ensure that the ethos is fully integrated into the operation of the school and is regularly reviewed through the school self-evaluation and planning process, including the implementation of actions relating to ethos" (ETBI, 2021, p. 12).

who regularly engages with an ETB wide 'Professional Learning Community' (PLN). PLNs act as communities of practice on issues relating to ethos in each ETB. ETBI provides ongoing training to Ethos Coordinators to support them in their work with PLNs and individual schools. This study's findings indicate the need to expand the role of Ethos Coordinators to support CNSs also.

A similar ethos infrastructure should be built at the CNS level where each school has an ELT and 'ethos lead' who regularly engages with the ETB's PLN. As the vast majority (if not all) Ethos Coordinators are post-primary teachers, training on primary related issues will need to be provided as a priority. In ETBs with larger numbers of CNSs, a CNS specific Ethos Coordinator should be appointed for one day per week.

The significant role that parents in the case study school played in the redevelopment of the GMGY curriculum and the importance participants place on the role of parents in ethos development signifies the need to listen to parents' voices in matters relating to national ethos-related policies. As will be discussed in the following sub-sections, this study indicates several ethos-related issues that ETBs, as patrons, need to grapple with. Parents' perspectives from both dominant and minoritised groups should be central to ethos-related policy decisions going forward. ETBI should establish a national parent consultation group on ethos-related matters at primary and post-primary levels. This study is concerned with CNSs only, focusing on the primary level. One or two parents from each ETB with a CNS should be invited onto the consultation group. ETBI should ask CNS principals to approach parents from specific backgrounds to ensure that the widest variety informs consultations of perspectives possible (without numbers on the group becoming unmanageable).

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) requires the voice of children to inform policies that affect their lives (Lundy, 2007). Considering this legally binding obligation, ETBI should also establish regional ethos-related consultation groups (if the vision is for face-to-face meetings) or a national consultation group (if the vision is for online meetings). Lundy's (2007) Framework should be used to ensure that this group is inclusive of diverse perspectives, its voice is heard and given 'due weight' to have a real influence on ethos-related policy development.

6.4.1.2 Policy Consultations

Differences in support for the continued use of the term 'multi-denominational' as an overall descriptor for the model needs to be addressed. The term 'equality-based' was used numerous times as an alternative (particularly by the ETBI representative and Carmel, the former principal). However, considering the challenges the case study school faces in recognising certain identity variables, the findings of this research could not recommend the term 'equality-based' specifically. However, this study highlights the need for ETBI to facilitate a sector-wide consultation on the most appropriate term to use going forward to describe the model's ethos. This consultation should include the perspectives of all CNS principals, the Chief Executive/Director of Schools from each ETB and the parent and child ethos-related consultation groups (if established). Prior to engaging with stakeholders, ETBI should undertake or commission a desk-based research project on possible alternative options e.g., 'equality-based', 'secular', 'pluralist'. The retaining of 'multi-denominational' as an overall descriptor should also

be considered, given the likely confusion a change like this could cause for the public[56].
Stakeholders should be given time to consider these distinctions and opportunities to
critically discuss them with each other prior to ascertaining their preferences.

The research highlights differences in the attitudes of key stakeholders and school-
based staff on whether teachers should employ more critical approaches to the
curriculum or not. To address these differences, ETBI should engage with the sector on
the possibility of bringing in more critical approaches to the curriculum, considering the
dominance of liberal practices identified in the case study school. However, given the
confusion the term 'critical' caused amongst many participants, it is imperative to
provide clear definitions when engaging with the sector on this issue. Steinberg and
Kincheloe's (2009, pp. 4–5) "Tentative Positions of Diversity and Multiculturalism"
could be used to differentiate between these concepts. In addition, ETBI should provide
concrete examples of how more critical approaches would impact existing GMGY
learning outcomes and CNS policy. Kavanagh, Waldron, and Mallon's edited book
'Teaching for Social Justice and Sustainable Development Across the Primary
Curriculum' (2021) is a useful resource in this regard. Banks' (1993) Dimensions of
Multicultural Education could also be used as a way of structuring such conversations.
O'Toole, Joseph and Nyaluke's (2019) edited book 'Challenging Perceptions of Africa
in Schools: Critical Approaches to Global Justice Education' provides invaluable
insights into how to "challenge, unsettle and disrupt" (O'Toole, Nyaluke and Joseph,
2019, p. 12) teachers' acceptance of the *status quo*. As outlined in Chapter Five, teacher

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[56] Heather argues that the general public is familiar with the term 'multi-denominational' to describe
schools other than religious schools. Although she has an issue with the term 'multi-denominational', she
has concerns about the consequences a move away from the familiar term may have on the growth of the
CNS model.

reflexivity and critical engagement with these types of critical pedagogies and theoretical frameworks are essential if teachers are to meet the needs of all children.

 A report should be drafted with clear policy recommendations following this consultation. These policy recommendations should travel through the various consultations culminating in approval from the ETBI Chief Executive's Forum[57].

6.4.1.3 Auditing CNS Policies

Based on the outcomes of the two national consultations recommended, ETBI should engage in a root and branch audit of all CNS policy documentation (including the GMGY curriculum) to incorporate key decisions made. Revisions to existing policies and the GMGY Curriculum should be communicated clearly to all staff working in the CNS model. This can be done through a series of webinars and face-to-face meetings. The CNS website and newsletter should also be used to communicate key policy changes.

6.4.1.4 Engagement with Relevant Continuous Professional Development

The impact of teachers engaging in relevant CPD in the initial years after the model's inception is highlighted in the findings of this study. ETBs should continue to encourage and incentivise CNS principals and teachers to engage in relevant CPD on responding to diverse school communities in multi-denominational/secular/pluralist/equality-based contexts.

Considering participants' assertions that there is a general lack of guidance in relation to how the school can respond effectively and critically to diverse school communities, ETBI should also design and implement a systematic CPD programme based on the key

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[57] The Chief Executive (CE) Forum consists of the CEs from all 16 ETBs. Policy recommendations need to be approved by this forum prior to being rolled out nationally.

decisions made after national consultations/policy audits to ensure that all CNS leaders and teachers are familiar with the policy decisions and their rationale. This is imperative as while policies (including the GMGY curriculum) may take more critical approaches as a result of policy consultations, their success in achieving their goals "is subsequently reliant on the skills, expertise, and dispositions of teachers" who implement them, as "any 'disruptive' intention that was present at design phase can be diluted on implementation" (O'Toole, 2019, p. 54). As argued in the previous section, engagement with academics and practitioners with expertise in this area and additionally academics and practitioners from minoritised groups is essential if hegemonic narratives and monocultural curricula are to be challenged in a meaningful way.

6.4.2 School-Level Recommendations

These recommendations are presented under three broad headings – 'Ethos Infrastructures', 'Prioritising Reflexive Conversations on Specific Issues', and 'Auditing the Curriculum and School Environment'.

6.4.2.1 Ethos Infrastructure

Data analysis indicates that whole-school discussions regarding the CNS ethos have reduced significantly as the school has developed. Where discussions on ethos dominated staff discussions at whole-school level in the early years, school leaders now rely on new staff members learning about the CNS ethos from other colleagues. New teachers learn about the school's ethos by engaging with experienced teachers at collaborative planning meetings and from the general tone taken at staff meetings, assemblies and the images displayed around the school etc. However, when reflecting on the research interview, school leaders expressed the need to reinvigorate

conversations around ethos. While the school has a GMGY Coordinator responsible for implementing the GMGY Curriculum, this role must not be confused with an 'ethos lead', as the ethos is comprised of more than just this curriculum (as indicated in this study). The establishment of an ELT in each CNS was recommended earlier. In terms of membership, given the role of the GMGY curriculum in supporting the enactment of the CNS ethos, the GMGY Coordinator should be a member of this group. The group should also comprise of teachers with particular expertise in multi-denominational education/working in diverse school settings. The perspective of an NQT would also be beneficial in informing the ELT's induction programme for new staff. As per other ethos-related groups in the school, parents from minoritised cultural and religious groups should also be represented on the ELT. The perspective of parents from working class backgrounds and members of the Travelling community needs to be included, given the historical absence of such perspectives from the school's policy structures. Their perspectives would also be important for the ELT. Therefore, these groups should be specifically targeted.

The ELT's ethos lead should engage with other ethos leads in their ETB by participating in the ETB's PLN. Members of ETB's PLN would benefit greatly from learning about the inclusive practices in the case study school. The case study school would also benefit greatly from discussing the specific issues it faces in enacting its egalitarian ethos with other ETB primary and post-primary ethos leaders.

6.4.2.2 Prioritising the (re)Introduction of Reflexive Conversations on Specific Issues

The analysis indicates that as well as the need for the (re)prioritisation of ethos-related whole-staff discussions, there is an immediate need for staff to be provided with an opportunity to discuss specific issues around the 'fear' many participants express in

addressing LGBTQ+ identities in the curriculum. Many participants expressed concern about the dissonance between the egalitarian values they hold and know the school/CNS model espouses and their lack of engagement with this identity variable. These participants are also concerned about the negative impact current practices have on children who currently or who may later, identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. School leaders should prioritise providing an opportunity for staff members to discuss current practices regarding LGBTQ+ identities, express any concerns they have, and collectively consider possible solutions. Considering the complexity of this issue and the potential for similar issues to emerge in other CNSs, ETBI should support this school as it addresses this sensitive and emotive issue. Prior to engaging in whole-school discussions, school leaders and ETBI should engage with the groups which represent some of the minoritised religious groups who express concerns about the inclusion of LGBTQ+ identities in the curriculum for advice on the issue. Some of these groups have been vocal in recent times about hate crimes committed against the LGBTQ+ community. These groups could offer insights into how the school/ETBI can best address the concerns of these parents while at the same time responding more effectively to the needs (or future needs) of children/parents from the LGBTQ+ community. A speaker (e.g., a teacher or principal) from another diverse CNS that successfully addresses LGBTQ+ identities should also be invited to speak to school leaders and the staff more broadly on how they have navigated this space.

A more medium-term need indicated by the data is the requirement for school leaders to provide opportunities for reflexive conversations regarding responses to other diversity variables. While the school has developed excellent practices in striving to ensure that school community members are included in the curriculum, there is a need to discuss the lacunae that this study identified. That is the discussion of issues relating to social

class and inconsistent understandings of the school's plurilingual EAL policy. This study also found some differences in perspectives on the school's approach to whole-school celebrations of cultural and religious diversity that need to be addressed at a whole-school level. Parents' perspectives, from the dominant and minoritised groups, on the impact of these events could also be sought (through individual conversations/focus groups led by a member(s) of the ELT) to inform this discussion.

There is ample evidence of the value participants place on the cultural capital possessed by many minoritised groups. However, discussions regarding whole-school celebrations raised issues regarding discourses of "us" and "them" (referring to parents from minoritised groups), which indicate possible unequal power dynamics that should be explored. To unpack any potential deficit thinking or bias amongst teachers/school leaders from the dominant group, relevant CPD is required that addresses issues of privilege and unconscious bias. An engagement with such CPD would provide teachers from the dominant group with opportunities to 'decolonise' the mind (Pirbahi-Illich, Pete and Martin, 2017) and to challenge and 'unlearn' the hegemonic narratives that shape their worldviews (O'Toole, 2019; Kavanagh and Dupont, 2021).

Most research participants have participated in post-graduate studies on issues relating to working in diverse school contexts. However, some participants indicate that the majority of their colleagues have not. School leaders should incentivise staff members to engage in relevant post-graduate studies by providing financial support to those who undertake such studies.

6.4.2.3 Auditing the Curriculum and School Environment

Based on the outcomes of national consultations on liberal and critical approaches to the curriculum, the school should conduct an audit of its relevant policies and practices.

The school's ELT could play a central role in this. As a result of this audit, proposed policy changes will be required to go through the school's regular policy development consultations and approval processes.

6.5 Mar Fhocal Scoir

The quote introducing Chapter Three from Williams (2000, p. 76) reminds us that a school's ethos has a life-long impact on children and "remains in their consciousness" long after the academic knowledge they garnered has been forgotten. I contend that the majority of children from minoritised backgrounds attending the case study school are likely to recall feelings and experiences of inclusion and equality when reflecting on their time there throughout their lives. Would these children recall similar feelings and experiences if they were educated in a school whose ethos only reflected the dominant religion and culture? I contend the answer is 'probably not'.

Could the school/CNS model do more for children from minoritised backgrounds? I contend the answer is 'yes'. The critical theories/theorists informing the theoretical framework underpinning this study remind us of the transformative potential of a school with an egalitarian ethos. As a result of this study, I maintain that the case study school/CNS model has not fully harnessed this transformative potential. This is significant given the role state schools play in supporting multicultural societies (McCormack *et al.,* 2018; Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2021).

Finally, in addition to its contribution to policy and practice, this study makes a significant contribution to knowledge and scholarship, particularly in the under-theorised area of multi-denominational education. This thesis engages with the relationship between the theoretical and policy/empirical literature and multi-

denominational education in a manner that is original. In particular, the thesis demonstrates a certain co-dependency between liberal and radical egalitarianism that is often neglected in the literature which sides with one or the other. This also works against a certain prejudice against multi-denominational education that it is atheoretical or aphilosophical. To the contrary, the example of CNSs in this instance shows how such new pedagogical practices can redraw some of the theoretical, policy/empirical literature which is informed by theory in significant ways.

I intend on translating the contributions to policy and knowledge this thesis makes by utilising my professional positionality as an 'insider' in a positive way. This will maximise the potential arising out of the findings and recommendations of this study. By exposing CNS stakeholders to the theories underpinning the theoretical framework, the analysed data and the suggested recommendations, I hope that the study contributes positively to teachers'/school leaders'/policymakers' thinking or practice regarding the potential of the CNS ethos. It is envisaged that this expanded thinking/practice will positively impact the lives of children from minoritised backgrounds attending a CNS. This could be through an experience or critical conversation they have with a teacher/school leader who understands their ability to transform the lives of minoritised children by providing the appropriate learning environment and knowledge to bring about real change.

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227

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Appendix A – Matrix of Ethos Goals and Identity Variables in Community National Schools

Identity Variable	Expressive Goal	Instrumental Goal	Organisational Goal
General	ETB schools are state, co-educational, multidenominational schools underpinned by the core values of: excellence in education, care, equality, community and resect (statement on characteristic spirit)	In GMGY "the children will have an opportunity to explore and come to an understanding of the concepts of equality, self-identity, citizenship, democracy, justice and human rights…. They will also develop their ethical values in the context of their school and the wider CNS characteristic spirit (NCCA, 2018a, p. 12)	The admission policy and procedures provide equal opportunities for student enrolment in line with the Education (Admissions to School) Act 2018. The school is physically and culturally accessible to all prospective students and their families (Patrons' Framework)
	The ethos of the school is articulated in all school policies and procedures and is central to their development and implementation (Patron's Framework)	Diversity within the school community is meaningfully affirmed on an ongoing basis in both the formal and hidden curriculum and the organisational structures in place in the school.	
	Members of the school community are provided with opportunities to reflect on their potential bias towards certain groups or individuals and the impact such biases have on perpetuating inequality and inequity (Patron's Framework)	Children taught to think critically in the 'Thinking Time' strand. The skills learnt here should translate across all strands.	All students and their families are supported in overcoming potential barriers to having equal access to the curriculum and school life by being provided with appropriate access to facilities, information, services and supports of the school. A Student Council is established and supported to operate effectively for the benefit of the school and its students
	Community National Schools are state schools and as such promote the values of the state. Concepts of		Student voice and choices are promoted and facilitated at a classroom and whole-school level

	respect, citizenship, human rights and equality are all explored by children in the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class (NCCA, 2018b, p. 48)		in order to provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for autonomy and influence. The school endeavours to ensure that students grow in an understanding of the power of their own voice, that they grow in the skills and confidence required to use their voice effectively for the good of themselves and others. The school is particularly mindful to ensure the inclusion of all students in engagement on student voice (Patron's Framework)
		the values of inclusion, respect, equality, human rights and child-centred education are at the heart of the GMGY curriculum (NCCA, 2018b, p. 49)	A Parents' Association is established and supported to build positive relationships between home and school (Patron's Framework)
	If a belief expressed is discriminatory the teacher should challenge that belief appropriately by explaining that the school promotes equality and human rights, and therefore that belief is in conflict with the values promoted by the school. Where possible, an effort should be made to assist the child in overcoming underlying assumptions or stereotypes (Beliefs, Religions and GMGY, p. 4)		
Social Class	In addition to the nine grounds of discrimination named in equality		

	legislation, CNSs include 'socio-economic' background as an aspect of identity that will not be discriminated against.		
Culture		CNSs aim "schools aim to develop culturally responsive teachers and curricula; promote culturally responsive and inclusive school environments; and enable children and parents to be active members of the school community" (NCCA, 2018a, p. 39)
Religion/Belief	In ETB schools, students of all religions and beliefs are treated equally. The school environment and activities do not privilege any particular group over another whilst at the same time acknowledging and facilitating students of all religions and beliefs (statement on characteristic spirit)	Multi-denominational religious education seeks to provide teaching 'about' and 'from' different religions and beliefs. It should be noted that the GMGY curriculum equally addresses teaching about beliefs which are non-religious conceptions of life and the world (NCCA, 2018a, p. 14)	Where parents or leaders of particular religious /belief communities request to facilitate a specific celebration or event for students from their own religion/belief, parents (or students over 18 years of age) opt-in to the event or celebration as opposed to students/parents having to opt-out (Patrons' Framework)
		Religious Education is pluralist in nature and distinct from religious instruction in any particular religions/beliefs. Religious and belief communities are facilitated to provide lessons outside the school day in accordance with relevant ETB policies on the use of school buildings (Patrons' Framework)	When religious and belief symbols are displayed in the school, they are reflective of the religions and beliefs of the entire school community who are consulted on the identification of such symbols (Patrons Framework)
Sexuality			
Language		An important means of affirming and celebrating children's cultural identity is to facilitate and promote the practice of speaking the child's mother tongue in school. Although instruction is only through English and Irish, allowing the	

236

	children use their own language in their learning has many benefits (Guidelines for Meaningful Recognition of Beliefs and Cultures in the Community National Schools, p. 6)	
Intersectionality of variables	In all aspects of school life all members of our school communities are treated equitably regardless of their race, gender, religion/belief, age, family status, civil status, membership of the Traveller community, sexual orientation, ability or socio-economic status (statement on characteristic spirit)	As part of the school curriculum, students learn the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values for wellbeing including the development of social and emotional competencies, *e.g.* effective listening, conflict resolution, cultural sensitivity, tolerance, empathy and mutual respect for individual differences (Patrons' Framework)	Procedures are in place to gather information on students who are at risk, so that early interventions may be provided (Patron's Framework)
	It is the policy of the CNS model to respect, celebrate and recognise diversity in all areas of human life (NCCA, 2018a, p. 5)	The core value of equality is evident in the visual images, resources, and displays used throughout the school environment (Patron's Framework)	Resources of the school are equitably distributed in an attempt to ensure that all students reach their potential. Where necessary and appropriate, students are provided with additional supports and reasonable accommodations.

		Students have equitable opportunities to engage with the curriculum and to participate in the life of the school. Staff actively promote a strength-based approach with high expectations for the participation, achievement, and attainment of all students (Patrons' Framework)	All school committees are reflective of the diversity within the school community.
		In GMGY children learn to "respect, celebrate and value the positive contributions of diversity in Irish society and construct positive ways to support inclusion of diversity" (NCCA, 2018a)	

Matrix of Ethos Goals and Identity Variables in Educate Together Schools

Identity Variable	Expressive Goal	Instrumental Goal	Organisational Goal
General	The Multi-denominational Principle: All children have equal right of access to Educate Together schools. Children of all social and cultural groups and of all religious and non-religious backgrounds are equally respected (Learn Together, 2004)	Through the Learn Together children curriculum children "develop and create an awareness of core values such as co-operation, freedom, happiness, honesty, love, peace, respect, responsibility, kindness, caring, safety and security in a peaceful and tranquil environment" (Learn Together, 2004)	All members of the school community are addressed by their first name (Ethos Quality Framework)
	The Co-education Principle: All children are encouraged to fulfil their potential in a school setting that is committed to equal opportunities for girls and boys (Learn Together, 2004)	Through the Learn Together children curriculum children "further develop the ability to critically question and make informed decisions"	There is no compulsory uniform imposed on the student body.
	The Child-centred Principle: The schools promote a child-centred approach to the curriculum in which the teacher guides and facilitates the child's learning through both formal and informal methods, while encouraging the child to be an active participant in his/her learning. Each child's individual needs are considered and he/she is encouraged to learn at an appropriate pace. There is a constant striving for excellence		The admissions policy and procedures reflect the equality-based ethos in that the admissions process is fair and equitable. The admissions processes are transparent and relatively easy to navigate and where possible, supports are provided to students and families who may otherwise fin(Ethos Quality Framework)d the admissions process challenging

	in all areas of school life (Learn Together, 2004)		
	The Democratic Principle: School Patrons and Boards are committed to working in such a way as to embrace the input of parents, teachers, supporters and children and to enable the highest level of participation and partnership (Learn Together, 2004)		Student voice is promoted through formal democratic structures, and participative processes.
	The fundamental legal concept of Educate Together's patronage is that the Board of an Educate Together school is bound to operate a school that delivers equality of access and esteem to all children, irrespective of their social, cultural and religious backgrounds (What is an Educate Together National School)		A student council/assembly is established and operates according to good practice guidelines in order to maintain a structured partnership with school management, staff, and parents/guardians for the benefit of the school and its students. Training and support are provided to student council/assembly members.
			A parent association/ parent-teacher association is established and operates according to good practice guidelines to build a constructive partnership between home and school.
			Through the Learn Together Curriculum, children "understand how democracy works within the school through the Patron, the Board of Management, the Parent/Teacher Association, the Student Council, the Green Committee etc."
Social Class			

Culture		Learn Together prepares "prepare children to become caring members of a multicultural society with the necessary intercultural skills to enrich such a society" (Learn Together, 2004)	
Religion/Belief	In Educate Together schools, all members of the school community are encouraged to share their religious and non-religious beliefs with the whole-school community. In this way children develop the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to interact critically across different viewpoints within an atmosphere of equal respect…. This model is also distinct from the common perception of a non-denominational or secular model. In such a strictly secular model, religious symbols or practice are sometimes restricted or prohibited in a school, and there is not always an explicit moral and ethical curriculum. In Educate Together schools, Moral and Spiritual development is actively taught through the Learn Together curriculum. Different religious and non-religious festivals are regularly celebrated by the school community to develop	The Ethical Education Curriculum should encourage children to explore their own spiritual identities in a secure setting while also being aware of and respecting the notion that other people may think differently to them. The curriculum should celebrate difference and provide the knowledge, skills and attitudes that children need to enable them to make informed moral decisions and live in a pluralist society that embraces diversity (Learn Together, 2004)	

	understanding and respect for different traditions (Rowe, 2011, p. 2)		
	The model makes it explicitly clear that these schools are for families who are open to their children being exposed to different religious perspectives and advises parents who observe strict religious beliefs that do not allow for this to seek a denominational school in line with their conscience or to home-school their children (What is an Educate Together School, 2015, p. 9). It does, however, commit to working with parents who do not have this option available to them in a sensitive manner		
Sexuality		School leadership promotes gender equality in the provision of opportunities/ subject choices for students, encouraging them to explore their full range of abilities/ career options regardless of their gender or gender identity (Ethos Quality Framework)	
		Gender equality is promoted across the curriculum and in the choice of teaching and learning materials. It is specifically addressed as part of the Ethical	

		Education/Learn Together curriculum where gender issues, gender stereotypes, bias and expectations are addressed (Ethos Quality Framework)	
		Staff generally promote values and actions which challenge gender inequalities and the ways gender interacts with other inequalities. Staff are mindful of gender issues in the language they use and in the(Ethos Quality Framework)ir expectations for learners	
Language			
Intersectionality of variables	The school community generally acknowledge the diversity that makes up the school community and the range of identities among its members including: age; belief system; dis/ability; ethnicity; family type; gender; religious background; sexual orientation, and socio-economic status (Quality Framework)	Learn together aims to "raise awareness in children of issues of human rights, justice and equality in society"	The physical environment of the school reflects the school's values of equality, diversity, participation, access, and respect, as can be seen in: physical access to all areas, the choice of teaching resources, and the visual images and displays throughout the school (Ethos Quality Framework)
	The Educate Together Charter of 1990 affirms that children of all social, cultural, religious and non-religious backgrounds have a right to an education that reflects their individual identity whilst exploring the different values and traditions of the world in which they live (Learn Together, 2004)	Through the Learn Together Curriculum children "become aware of and appreciate diversity in the school, e.g. culture, religion, different families, lifestyles etc"…" explore the concept of discrimination in relation to a specific area, e.g. gender, race and disability"….." critically reflect on stories/poems about people who have encountered discrimination and	There is an understanding of barriers to the participation of underrepresented groups in the formal democratic processes of the school and measures are taken to support participation as a result.

		confronted it positively"…." critically evaluate media coverage of equality and justice issues"	
		Through the Learn Together curriculum, children "begin to become aware of equality issues through celebrations, e.g. "May Day", "International Children's Day", "Anti-Racism Day" and "International Women's Day"	

Appendix B - Ethos Statement for Community National Schools

ETB schools are state, co-educational, multidenominational schools underpinned by the core values of:

- Excellence
- Care
- Equality;
- Community and
- Respect.

As the state provider of education, the ETB sector defines a 'multidenominational' school in the following way:

In ETB schools, all children are given equal opportunities for enrolment in line with the Education (Admissions to School) Act 2018. Once enrolled, our schools strive to provide all children with equal opportunities to engage with the curriculum and school life. In all aspects of school life all members of our school communities are treated equitably regardless of their race, gender, religion/belief, age, family status, civil status, membership of the Traveller community, sexual orientation, ability or socio-economic status.

Our schools provide a safe physical and social environment that reinforces a sense of belonging to the school community and wider society. They strive to enable every child to realise their full potential regardless of any aspect of their identity or background. Our schools promote a fully inclusive education that recognises the plurality of identities, beliefs and values held by children, parents and staff. We prepare open-minded, culturally sensitive and responsible citizens with a strong sense of shared values.

In ETB schools, children of all religions and beliefs are treated equally. The school environment and activities do not privilege any particular group over another whilst at the same time acknowledging and facilitating children of all religions and beliefs.

Appendix C – Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Research Title:

An exploration of the opportunities and challenges presented by the ethos of the Community National School model in one diverse school context.

Clarification of the Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of this research project is to give voice to the experiences of school leaders and teachers in relation to how the ethos of the CNS model has enabled and challenged them in responding to their diverse school community.

Confirmation of Requirements from Participants:

As stated in the Plain Language Statement, participants will be required to participate in a semi-structured interview that will be approximately 60 minutes in duration. Participants may be requested to participate in a follow-up interview that will last no longer than 30 minutes. If national restrictions or local circumstances do not allow for the Principal Investigator (PI) to visit the school, participants will be asked to email him photographs of the school environment relevant to the themes that emerge in the interviews.

*Required

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me) *

○ Yes

○ No

I understand the information provided *

○ Yes

○ No

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study *

○ Yes

○ No

I understand the information provided in relation to data protection *

○ Yes

○ No

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions *

○ Yes

○ No

I understand I may withdraw from the research study at any point *

○ Yes

○ No

I have read and understand the arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations *

○ Yes

○ No

I agree to participate in an interview via Zoom if face-to-face interviews are not possible as a result of COVID-19 restrictions *

○ Yes

○ No

I agree to the Zoom interview being recorded *

○ Yes

○ No

○ I do not agree to being interviewed on Zoom

○ Other: _____

I consent to be contacted by the researcher from time to time via email *

○ Yes

○ No

If you answered yes to the above, please provide your email address below

Short-answer text

I have read and understand confirmations relating to any other relevant information as indicated in the Plain Language Statement *

○ Yes

○ No

I consent to participate in this research study *

○ Yes

○ No

Submit

Appendix D – Letter to Board of Management

Dear Chairperson,

My name is Séamus Conboy and I am currently doing a Doctorate in Education in Dublin City University (DCU). I am also a Director of Schools in Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) and have previously worked as a teacher and principal in the CNS model. ETBI has funded the Doctoral studies as it envisages that learning from the Doctorate will inform how ETBI supports CNSs and ETB Post-Primary schools on patronage related issues.

I am writing to you seeking permission from the Board of Management to conduct research for my Doctoral thesis in your school.

What is the research about and why is it being conducted?

The research aims to explore how a multi-denominational ethos supports and challenges one CNS in responding to its diverse school community. Your school has been chosen as a possible research site as it serves a richly diverse school community and has been central to the development of the ethos of the CNS model.

It is hoped that this research project will provide me with insights into how CNS ethos-related policies and the Goodness Me! Goodness You! (GMGY) curriculum support and challenge schools in responding to diverse school communities. The findings from this research will inform future ethos related-policies and the support materials developed to support the implementation of the GMGY curriculum.

What is involved if the school participates in this study?

The focus of this research in on the experiences of some of the school's leadership team and other school personnel in relation to the opportunities and challenges a multi-denominational ethos presents to them in responding to a diverse school community. To capture this, I would carry out semi-structured with 8 research participants at a time agreed with the school principal between May and November 2021. It is envisaged that interviews would be approximately 60 minutes in duration and would take place after the school day, or at any time that the school's principal deems suitable. Although unlikely, some participants may be requested to participate in a follow-up interview at a later stage. It is envisaged that any follow-up interview would be no longer than 30 minutes in duration.

If national restrictions and local circumstances as a result of COVID-19 allow, I would like to spend 5 days in the school. This would be broken into two periods of 2.5 days. During this time, I would conduct 'non-participant observations' where I would consult with relevant school policies to further inform my interview questions, take informal field notes and conduct the interviews at a time suitable to participants with the permission of the principal. At all times, I will adhere strictly to DCU's Code of Research Practice. If site visits are possible, I would conduct all research in full compliance with the School's COVID-19 Response Plan and and all other relevant documentation.

It is important to note that even if on site research takes place, observations of teachers or children in classrooms is **not** part of the study.

However, if national restrictions or local circumstances do not allow for me to conduct the research on site, the semi-structured interviews would take place online using Zoom.

Following either face-to-face or online interviews, the transcript would be sent to each participant to ensure that it is an accurate reflection of the interview and to provide them with an opportunity to request for any information provided to be redacted from the transcript.

How would participants' privacy be protected?

I would make every effort to ensure that research participants will not be identifiable. At all stages of the research project, pseudonyms will replace the school's and participants' real names. The final thesis will contain no information that could identify the school or any of the participants. However, while safeguards are in place to help protect the identity of the school and the identity of the participants, anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

Participants should also note that any data provided is protected within the limitations of the law. Data provided is subject to subpoena, freedom of information or mandated reporting by some professionals

What are the benefits and risks involved in this research?

It is envisaged that participants in the study would benefit both directly and indirectly from taking part in this research.

Direct Benefits:
I envisage that the participants would experience the following benefits directly:
- An opportunity to tell the story of their experiences of the opportunities and challenges associated with responding to a diverse school community within a multi-denominational school context.
- Learning from a workshop provided by the researcher on the main findings and key recommendations of the research (if the school wishes for this to take place).
- Possible learning from reading the final thesis that will be sent to all participants.

Indirect Benefits:
I envisage that the participants would experience the following benefits indirectly:
- The key findings and recommendations will be presented to CEs and Directors of Schools who are patrons of CNSs. It is envisaged that this workshop will provide CEs and Directors of Schools with greater insights into the possibilities and challenges diverse CNSs face in responding to their communities. This will better enable them to support schools responding to diverse communities within a multi-denominational context. The school's identity would also be kept anonymous at such presentations.

- By experiencing, at a later date, Professional Development opportunities provided by ETBI that will incorporate the key findings and recommendations of this research project.
- The final thesis will be available on DCU's 'Doras' database. This will provide those interested in the themes of the research with increased access to literature on the opportunities and challenges associated with responding to a diverse school community within a multi-denominational school context.

Risks:

This research project is considered 'low risk' as data being collected is not sensitive in nature and is being collected from competent adults who are not considered vulnerable. Participants will be given opportunities to ask questions in relation to the research to ensure that they will not find any aspect of the research upsetting or distressing in any way. Participants are also reminded that they can withdraw from the study at any point.

I believe that the benefits far outweigh the risks and therefore request the Board to approve the study taking place.

Yours faithfully,

Séamus Conboy

Appendix E – Interview Schedule for Participant Group 1

Introductory Questions (career to date, motivations to work in a CNS etc.)

1. Tell me about this school community? Is it reflective of the locality?
2. What does the term 'ethos' mean to you?
3. What is your understanding of the CNS ethos?
4. Has the ethos of the CNS model changed over time?
5. In what ways do you think the CNS ethos today is different to a Catholic ethos or an Educate Together ethos?
   - Do you think the overall CNS ethos has an influence on the ethos of your school?
6. How do you think the GMGY curriculum supports the CNS ethos?
   - Are there any specific aspects of GMGY that support the CNS ethos well?
7. The CNS ethos claims 'equality' to be one of its core values. How do you think this school promotes equality?
   - What does GMGY teach about equality?
8. What aspects of the CNS ethos/GMGY do you feel this school is particularly effective at implementing?
9. What aspects of the CNS ethos/|GMGY do you feel challenge this school?
10. GMGY describes 'multi-denominational' education as a 'culturally relevant' education. Do you think that the curriculum delivered in this school is 'culturally relevant' to the children? How?
11. What aspects of 'diversity' do you think this school responds to effectively?
12. Are there any aspects of diversity you wish this school would respond more effectively to?
13. Some of the literature I have been engaging with claims that schools which strive to be inclusive and equality-based over-emphasise the 'celebration' of diversity and avoid looking politically at the inequalities and injustices experienced by minoritised groups. Do you think that is the case in this school?
14. Some of the literature I have engaged with also argues that a 'celebratory' approach to diversity that blindly celebrates all beliefs and traditions is unadvisable as it limits the possibility of any form of critique of beliefs or traditions that undermine egalitarian values.
    - Do you think that your school takes a celebratory or a critical approach to recognising diversity?
    - How does it take a celebratory approach?
    - How does it take a critical approach?
15. Are teachers encouraged to or facilitated to discuss the inequalities and injustice experienced by the children? Are these kinds of discussions planned for?
16. How prepared do you think teachers are coming to the school to work within the context of a multi-denominational ethos/diverse school setting?
17. What CPD is provided to school staff to support them in working within the context of a multi-denominational ethos/diverse school?

18. Can you tell me about any fora in the school that facilitate parental and student voice?
    - o What is the role of these fora?
    - o How are members selected?
    - o How representative of the parent/student population are they?
19. What challenges do you face in engaging parents from minoritised backgrounds? How are these overcome?

Appendix F – Interview Schedule for Participant Group 2

Introductory Questions (career to date, motivations to work in a CNS etc.)

Main Questions

1. Tell me about the children in your classroom. What kinds of diversity are present?
2. Tell me how you respond to the diversity as a teacher?
3. What does the term 'ethos' mean to you?
4. What is your understanding of the CNS ethos?
5. How you do live that ethos out as a teacher?
6. In what ways do you think the CNS ethos today is different to a Catholic ethos or an Educate Together ethos?
    o Do you think the overall CNS ethos has an influence on the ethos of your school?
7. How do you think the GMGY curriculum supports the CNS ethos?
8. The CNS ethos claims 'equality' to be one of its core values. How do you think this school promotes equality?
9. What aspects of the CNS ethos/GMGY do you feel you are most effective at implementing in your classroom?
10. What aspects of the CNS ethos/GMGY do you feel challenge you the most?
11. GMGY describes 'multi-denominational' education as a 'culturally responsive' education. Would you agree that the curriculum delivered in CNSs is culturally responsive to the children?
12. What aspects of 'diversity' or 'difference' do you think are responded to effectively in your classroom?
13. Are there any aspects of diversity you wish you could respond more effectively to in your classroom?
14. Some of the literature I have been engaging claims that teachers who strive to be inclusive and equality-based over-emphasise the 'celebration' of diversity and avoid looking politically at inequality and injustices experienced by minoritised group. Do you think that is the case in your classroom?
15. Some of the literature I have engaged with also argues that a 'celebratory' approach to diversity that blindly celebrates all beliefs and traditions is unadvisable as it limits the possibility of any form of critique of beliefs or traditions that undermine egalitarian values.
    o Do you think that your school takes a celebratory or a critical approach to recognising diversity?
    o How does it take a celebratory approach?
    o How does it take a critical approach?
16. Do you engage in conversations with children about the forms of inequality and injustices experienced by minoritised groups so that they have the space, language and tools required to recognise them?

17. What does parental involvement look like in your classroom? What are the challenges? How do you overcome these?
18. Are parents and children given a meaningful voice in influencing classroom/school life?
19. Did you feel prepared to teach in a school with a multi-denominational ethos when you first started?
20. What types of professional developed are provided to support you working in a multi-denominational, diverse context? Is this adequate?
21. Do you get/take opportunities to reflect on your ability to implement the CNS ethos/respond to diversity individually or at whole-school level?

Appendix G – Interview Schedule for Participant Group 3 (ETBI Representative)

Introductory Questions (career to date, motivations to work in a CNS etc.)

Main Questions:

1. What does the term 'ethos' mean to you?
2. What is your understanding of the CNS ethos?
3. Has the ethos of the CNS model changed over time?
4. How do you think the CNS ethos today is different to a Catholic ethos or an Educate Together ethos?
5. How much influence do you think the patron has on the ethos of schools under its remit?
6. How do you think the GMGY curriculum supports the CNS ethos?
7. The CNS ethos claims 'equality' to be one of its core values. How do you think this school promotes equality?
8. What aspects of the CNS ethos/GMGY do you feel CNSs are particularly effective at implementing?
9. What aspects of the CNS ethos/GMGY do you feel challenge CNSs?
10. GMGY describes 'multi-denominational' education as 'culturally responsive' education. Would you agree that the curriculum delivered in CNSs is culturally responsive to the children?
11. What aspects of 'diversity' or 'difference' do you think CNSs respond to effectively?
12. Are there any aspects of diversity you wish schools within the CNS model would respond more effectively to?
13. Some of the literature I have been engaging claims that schools which strive to be inclusive and equality-based over-emphasise the 'celebration' of diversity and avoid looking politically at inequality and oppression experienced by minoritised groups. Do you think that is the case in the CNS model?
14. Some of the literature I have engaged with also argues that a 'celebratory' approach to diversity that blindly celebrates all beliefs and traditions in unadvisable as it limits the possibility of any form of critique of beliefs or traditions that undermine egalitarian values.
    a. Do you think that your school takes a celebratory or a critical approach to recognising diversity?
    b. How does it take a celebratory approach?
    c. How does it take a critical approach?
15. Do you think that teachers are prepared to teach in a multi-denominational context when they qualify?
16. How are teachers supported in implementing the CNS ethos and GMGY?
17. Are teachers encouraged to engage in political conversations about the forms of inequality and injustices experienced by minoritised groups, their root causes

and how change could be brought about? Does CPD/GMGY support them to do this?

18. We're now at the end of the interview, is there anything else you'd like to say about anything we have discussed today?

Appendix H – Interview Schedule for Participant Group 4 (NCCA Representative)

Introductory Questions (career to date, motivations to work in a CNS etc.)

Main Questions:

1. What does the term 'ethos' mean to you?
2. What is your understanding of the CNS ethos?
3. Has the ethos of the CNS model changed over time?
4. How does the GMGY curriculum support the CNS ethos?
5. GMGY is described as a Patrons' Curriculum. How much influence do you think the patron has on the ethos of schools under its remit?
6. How do you GMGY differs from the Patrons' Curricula in other school types?
7. The CNS ethos claims 'equality' to be one of its core values. How do you think this school promotes equality?
8. What aspects of GMGY do you feel CNSs are particularly effective at implementing?
9. What aspects of the GMGY do you feel challenge CNSs?
10. GMGY describes 'multi-denominational' education as 'culturally relevant' education. Would you agree that the curriculum delivered in CNSs is culturally relevant to the children?
11. What aspects of 'diversity' or 'difference' do you think GMGY responds to effectively?
12. Are there any aspects of diversity you wish GMGY would respond to more effectively for?
13. Some of the literature I have been engaging claims that schools which strive to be inclusive and equality-based over-emphasise the 'celebration' of diversity and avoid looking politically at inequality and oppression experienced by minoritised groups. Do you think that is the case in the GMGY curriculum?
14. Some of the literature I have engaged with also argues that a 'celebratory' approach to diversity that blindly celebrates all beliefs and traditions in unadvisable as it limits the possibility of any form of critique of beliefs or traditions that undermine egalitarian values.
    a. Do you think that your school takes a celebratory or a critical approach to recognising diversity?
    b. How does it take a celebratory approach?
    c. How does it take a critical approach?
15. Do you think that teachers are prepared to teach the GMGY curriculum when they qualify? What supports do you think teachers require to teach GMGY effectively?
16. Does GMGY provide for the engagement in political conversations about the forms of inequality and injustices experienced by minoritised groups, their root causes and how change could be brought about?
17. If you were to re-write GMGY, what would you do differently?

Appendix I - Plain Language Statement

Introducing the Researcher

My name is Séamus Conboy and I am the Principal Investigator (PI) on this research project. This research project is in partial fulfilment of the Doctorate of Education Programme I am currently undertaking in Dublin City University (DCU). This research project will be supervised by Dr Anne-Marie Kavanagh and Dr Jones Irwin who work in the School of Human Development in DCU.

I am also a Director of Schools in Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) and have previously worked as a teacher and principal in the CNS model. ETBI has funded the Doctoral studies as it envisages that learning from the Doctorate will inform how ETBI supports CNSs and ETB Post-Primary schools on patronage related issues.

What is the research about and why is it being conducted?

The title of this research project is 'Conceptualisations and enactments of a multi-denominational ethos in response to a diverse school community'. The research aims to explore how the multi-denominational ethos of the CNS model supports and challenges one CNS in responding to its diverse school community. XX CNS has been chosen as a possible research site as it serves a richly diverse school community and has been central to the development of the ethos of the CNS model.

It is hoped that this research project will provide insights into how CNS ethos-related policies and the Goodness Me! Goodness You! (GMGY) curriculum support and challenge schools in responding to diverse school communities. The findings from this research will inform future ethos-related policies and the support materials developed to support the implementation of the GMGY curriculum.

What is expected of research participants?

The school's Board of Management has approved this research to be carried out. However, the participation in this research is completely voluntary and participants can withdraw from the study at any time. The focus of this research in on how key stakeholders within the CNS model and school staff in your school conceptualise and enact the CNS ethos in responding ot the needs of your diverse school community. To

capture this, participants will participate in a semi-structured interview with the PI. It is envisaged that interviews would be approximately 60 minutes in duration and would take place during the school day. Although unlikely, some participants may be requested to participate in a follow-up interview at a later stage. It is envisaged that any follow-up interview would be no longer than 30 minutes in duration.

The interview(s) will take place in person if national restrictions and local circumstances allow and will be conducted in a manner that is fully compliant with COVID-19 safety protocols. However, if national restrictions or local circumstances do not allow for face-to-face interviews, they will be conducted online through the use of Zoom.

The interview transcript will be sent to each participant to ensure that it is an accurate reflection of the interview and to provide them with an opportunity to request for any information provided to be redacted from the transcript.

If national restrictions and local circumstances as a result of COVID-19 allow, I would like to spend 3 days in the school over the course of 3 weeks in October 2021. During this time, I will conduct 'non-participant observations' where I will consult with relevant school policies to further inform my interview questions, take informal field notes and conduct the interviews at a time suitable to participants with the permission of the principal. At all times, I will adhere strictly to DCU's Code of Research Practice. If site visits are possible, I will conduct all research in full compliance with the School's COVID-19 Response Plan and and all other relevant documentation.

It is important to note that even if on site research takes place, observations of teachers or children in classrooms is **not** part of the study.

How will your privacy be protected?

The researcher will make every effort to ensure that research participants will not be identifiable. At all stages of the research project, pseudonyms will replace the school's and participants' real names. The final thesis will contain no information that could identify the school or any of the participants. However, while safeguards are in place to help protect the identity of the school and the identity of the participants, anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

Participants should also note that any data provided is protected within the limitations of the law. Data provided is subject to subpoena, freedom of information or mandated reporting by some professionals

What are the benefits and risks involved in this research?

It is envisaged that participants in the study will benefit both directly and indirectly from taking part in this research.

Direct Benefits:

The researcher envisages that the participants will experience the following benefits directly:

- An opportunity to tell the story of their experiences of the opportunities and challenges associated with responding to a diverse school community within a multi-denominational school context.
- Learning from a workshop provided by the researcher on the main findings and key recommendations of the research (if the school wishes for this to take place).
- Possible learning from reading the final thesis that will be sent to all participants.

Indirect Benefits:

The researcher envisages that the participants will experience the following benefits indirectly:

- The key findings and recommendations will be presented to CEs and Directors of Schools who are patrons of CNSs. It is envisaged that this workshop will provide CEs and Directors of Schools with greater insights into the possibilities and challenges diverse CNSs face in responding to their communities. This will better enable them to support schools responding to diverse communities within a multi-denominational context.
- By experiencing, at a later date, Professional Development opportunities provided by ETBI that will incorporate the key findings and recommendations of this research project.
- The final thesis will be available on DCU's 'Doras' database. This will provide those interested in the themes of the research with increased access to literature

on the opportunities and challenges associated with responding to a diverse school community within a multi-denominational school context.

Risks:

This research project is considered 'low risk' as data being collected is not sensitive in nature and is being collected from competent adults who are not considered vulnerable. Participants will be given opportunities to ask questions in relation to the research to ensure that they will not find any aspect of the research upsetting or distressing in any way. Participants are also reminded that they can withdraw from the study at any point.

What about data protection/GDPR Compliance?

Data will be protected within the legal limitations of data confidentiality. Data will be available only to the PI and his supervisors. Personal data will be saved on the researcher's DCU Google Drive account and in password-protected PCs in a locked drawer in the home office of the PI. All participants will be given a pseudonym and the file linking the pseudonym with participants' real name will be saved in a separate password protected folder in the researcher's DCU Google Drive account. All records and data will be disposed of appropriately after the research project is fully complete. Electronic files containing personal data will be deleted and hard copies will be shredded. It is envisaged to be complete by June 2023. However, data may be kept for a maximum of 5 years, in accordance with DCU Data Protection Policies. Data collected from this study will be included in a Doctoral thesis and may inform future publications in academic journals and presentations at conferences. The storage and maintenance of the data will be in line with best practice guidance on GDPR. For the purpose of this project, DCU is the data controller and the PI (Séamus Conboy) is the data processor. To access your personal data, or if you have further questions in relation to data protection please contact the DCU Data Protection Officer – Mr. Martin Ward (data.protection@dcu.ie Ph: 7005118 / 7008257). If at any point you feel that there has been a breach of your general data protection rights, you have the right to lodge a complaint with the Irish Data Protection Commission. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you elect to discontinue participation, any information already collected will be discarded. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence or penalty. If you wish to withdraw your consent, please contact the PI using the contact details below.

If you have any queries in relation to any aspect of this research, who can you contact?

Below are the contact details of the PI and the supervisory team in DCU.

Séamus Conboy (PI)	seamus.conboy3@mail.dcu.ie
Dr Anne Marie Kavanagh	annemarie.kavanagh@dcu.ie
Dr Jones Irwin	jones,irwin@dcu.ie

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, E-mail rec@dcu.ie

Appendix J – Code Book Phase Two

Name	Description	Files	References
Reflexive Practice	Any references made to reflecting on one's practice individually or collectively as a staff	11	27
The importance of CPD	Any references to CPD opportunities provided to/taken by participants	5	7
The influence of CPD on Practice	Any references to the impact CPD has had on participants' thinking/practice	5	7
Experience as an enabler to enacting the CNS Ethos	Any references participants make to them gaining more confidence or skills over time that enable them to enact the CNS ethos or respond to their diverse school community more effectively.	11	18
GMGY as a Key Vehicle in Enacting the CNS Ethos	Any references participants make to how GMGY supports them in enacting the CNS ethos.	13	44
Initial Teacher Education	Any references to how ITE colleges prepared participants to teach in the CNS model or in diverse school settings.	11	26
Motivation to teach in the CNS model	Any references to what attracted them to work in the CNS/a school with a multi-denominational ethos	12	15
Perceptions of the School	Any references to how the school is perceived by the general public.	5	10
The Impact of COVD-19 on Enacting the CNS Ethos	Any references made by research participants to the impact of COVID-19 on their/the school's ability to enact the CNS ethos.	7	13

Appendix K - Example of Applying the Theoretical Framework to the 'Storied' Data

The excerpt below is one paragraph from the 'storied' data on barriers to fostering parents as partners in the case-study school.

The third main barrier to parental involvement identified by participants is levels of educational attainment and the economic resources available to parents:

> The financial capital can sometimes have a massive influence on how forward someone can be, because we'd have parents from white, Irish background, but who would be low socio-economic areas They wouldn't' have the confidence to speak in an open forum (Tim, Teacher)

Similarly Jill (teacher) describes how many parents from ethnic and religious minoritised groups in the school are also "very, very wealthy, highly educated families, parents have university degrees, PhDs, amazing…Work as consultants, doctors etc." She is of the view that it is these parents "who have regular high paying jobs" that are the most actively involved in the school. Other participants share the view that the parents from minoritised backgrounds who are active members or take positions of responsibility on parental forums are highly educated. Finbar (current principal) describes how the two Parent Nominees on the BoM[1] are from minoritised religious backgrounds as they are Muslim. However, they both hold high status jobs as doctors and academics. However, Jill argues that other parents from minoritised groups "who have two and three jobs" or those that don't have the capacity to work are absent from the school's formal structures. Reflecting this argument, Michelle, who works a good deal with the PA in her role as HSCL, claims that while she believes that the PA is reflective of the school's religious and ethnic diversity "we probably have never had any member of the Travelling community or someone from lower socio-economic background" on the PA.

Séamus Conboy
Although 'white, irish' parents may share many aspects of the cultural/linguistic capital of the dominant group in Irish society, is their lack of financial capital impacting on their ability to play an active role in the school?

Séamus Conboy
Those who have high economic capital who have translated that into high educational capital (a "transubstantiation' of one form of capital into another (Baker et al., 2009, p. 145) are more active in the school.

Séamus Conboy
The organisational habitus of the school appears to value the education capital possessed by parents.

Séamus Conboy
Consistent with Moore's (2014, p. 100) assertion that those considered to have a well-formed *habitus* in the field have higher levels of cultural capital (Moore, 2014, p. 100), are those parents from minoritised groups considered to have a 'well-formed' habitus (i.e. educated, middle-class) more likely to be involved in the school's decision-making structures over those parents from the dominant ethnic/linguistic group who have lower levels of economic and educational capitals?

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[1] BoMs in Ireland are comprised of 8 members. 2 patron representatives, 2 staff nominees, 2 parent nominees and 2 community members. The parents are nominated to the BoM following an election of the schools' parent body.

Appendix L – Excerpt from a Transcribed Interview

The rationale for the inclusion of an excerpt from a transcribed interview is to give the reader a better sense of the overall context of an interview than can be provided with shorter extracts in Chapter Five.

Prior to this section, Jill described the various efforts she and the school in general make to ensure that the curriculum is reflective of the school's diverse community.

Interviewer: It sounds amazing and all that sounds amazing. Okay, challenges. Are there any aspects of diversity that you're not so confident in dealing within your classroom talking about?

Jill: Okay, I think cultural diversity, we're great on. Religious diversity, I think we're great on again... In terms of LGBTQ, absolutely awful, I would say, in the school. It's really, really hard because we've had parents… It's on the stay safe curriculum and it's on the RSE curriculum about homophobic bullying, but then parents will inevitably be coming to school and saying, "I don't want you talking about this."

We've had parents come in and say, "This boy is bullying my child, he's calling him gay." We're like, "Well gay is not an insult," so because of that we've… I don't know if we've necessarily been told, or if the fear has just been put into us not to deal with that in class, which… Statistically there's obviously so many children in every class that are dealing with this in their personal lives at home, but that's one thing. I'd say equality is not necessarily catered for. Socio-economic equalities, I don't know if they're… We're a DEIS school and our Home School Liaison is brilliant.

Jill: [crosstalk] This is her first year doing it, and she's fab, and they all see help in terms of financing and whatever else, but those children are facing challenges just to get into school every day, and I don't know within the classroom then, they're expected to do everything else that the other children are doing, even though they're facing greater battles.

Interviewer: I think DEIS school is, I mean when I, just for me, when I reflect back on my own approach to LGBT and my approach-- Even though I'm gay. I was equally as culpable of…

Jill: I know, yes.

Interviewer: This is a DEIS school. They're living in a reality that… Are we talking about their reality in school?

Jill: It's their school, but there's a massive difference between the children who are on the DEIS list, and then we have the complete opposite end of the spectrum, and a lot of children who are at the opposite end of the spectrum, who probably have no idea or no understanding of what their peers are going through. That's not discussed in class or in school.

Interviewer: Tell me, is there a big disparity… in terms of socio-economic backgrounds-

Jill: Massive, huge.

Interviewer: -tell me about that.

Jill: A lot of very, very wealthy, highly educated families, parents have university degrees, PhDs, amazing… Work as consultants, doctors, those children are very much in that bubble, and then obviously, we have the total opposite end. Families who are dealing with homelessness, unemployed or working three jobs just to support their family, and I think they're very conscious of everything that goes on around them, whereas the children who come from the wealthier families haven't a clue, I don't think of what other children are dealing with.

It's really hard because if someone's being unkind to someone else, you don't want to say, "Well, look, he's having a hard time at home," you can't say that. They're not necessarily aware of the difficulties that some of the others are facing.

Interviewer: It's a more invisible form of diversity.

Jill: It's very invisible, absolutely.

Interviewer: Tell me about your view on the-- I'm jumping all around the place here, but what makes it invisible, do you think? Is it the uniform? Is it just-- What is it?

Jill: The uniform, and I also think that children who are in more privileged positions just don't even think to look for that. Why would they? At the age they're at, they probably thinking that everyone is living in that happy little bubble as well. I just think it's a lack of awareness as opposed to badness.

Interviewer: Yes, of course.

Jill: Everyone's wearing the same uniform, everyone goes on school tour. They don't know that they're not paying for their school tour. They don't know that they haven't paid for their schoolbooks, they just appear. I don't think it is as noticeable, because everyone's doing the same thing everyday in school.

Interviewer: Which is great, obviously--

Jill: It is, but that's why it's invisible, because everything's done on the QT, your school tours paid for

Interviewer: Yes. Actually, is there a dominant parent voice and if there is does it belong to a certain religious, cultural group or socioeconomic group? Who are the people who do you think have that strong voice in the school?

Jill: It's the parents who, first of all, have a good grasp of English, because they're the ones who can communicate their views more than anyone else. It's the parents I'd say, a lot at the time who are more educated, who've had university education, or the ones who are not working full-time or are working nice, regular jobs. It's not the ones that are working three jobs every day, and it's not the ones who've no English and physically can't come in and communicate their views

There is a massive gap there, it's very reflective like I said, the children who are on the student council. It's their children who are on the student council.

Interviewer: How about parental involvement in your own class? You're in the senior in the school, so is there much parental involvement?

Jill: Less, definitely less at the senior end. Pre COVID, I'm sure you know we had these monthly coffee mornings here.

Interviewer: Monthly? Okay.

Jill: Which were fantastic, and the senior parents would come in, and it was great. It was your one chance to get to meet them. They don't collect their kids in the senior end. Again, the ones who are more vocal and want to meet you and want to talk on the phone all the time are the ones who have the better grasp of English, and who are in a position to be able to communicate with you.

There's parents who I would go nearly the whole year without meeting. The ones who say they can't come to parent-teacher meetings because they work. They only find out each day if they work or not. A lot of them are in a very difficult position. I feel like they're automatically excluded from being on the Parent's Council or anything like that, because they're just not in the position to do it.

Interviewer: Completely, I completely understand. It's funny because what you were saying there around children from more privileged backgrounds not being aware of the circumstances for the students from… I then think back to our own identities as teachers. We can't make any grand assumptions, but a lot of teachers come from white middle class [crosstalk] Catholic,

How much of an impact do you think your identity has on your ability to respond to the diversity in this school?

Jill: I grew up in a Catholic family, so I'm very comfortable in talking about my religion, and other people's religions. I'm very comfortable around that whole discussion. It's a learning curve. Anything that's beyond what I know is totally new to me, but I'm very open to… I love listening and learning from other people. That's what I'm interested in.

Interviewer: More broadly, do you think that the fact that a lot of teachers here come from middle-class backgrounds. Do you think that affects their ability to understand and empathize with the realities of?

Jill: Yes, when I started here, and when we all started here, we had no idea how other people were living. I was so ignorant of how other people were living. I had no idea. Over the years it's something that I have become an awful lot aware of that someone's not bringing in their homework, or if someone's not attending school it is other… Just bigger things going on at home. It's taken me a long time to get used to that and to empathise.

Even still, I'm sure I've no idea of what really they're going through, but definitely over time in a school like this, I do think you'd become more aware of what challenges their facing.

Interviewer: Was there much about teaching in a multi-denominational context or diverse context as part of your teacher training?

Jill: No, so I did the 18-month course, which doesn't exist now, but it was all very, very, very condensed. There was nothing about multi-d, EAL, DEIS, nothing. Absolutely nothing. Now, I do think they have changed that since. It's now a two-year Masters. There is DICE. I think it's called intercultural-

Jill: We had no idea starting here. We really had no idea.

Interviewer: Do you think then because of that, is there a concerted effort at school level to fill that gap, or at CNS level to fill that gap?

Jill: Yes, I do think everyone's trying really hard. We are trying, and I think on paper if you're sit down and read those policy documents. That is what we're doing. In reality, I think there's still a long way to go. We've done a lot of work, but I don't think.. If equality is what we're looking for, I don't think that we have achieved it yet, but we're better than things would have been in Ireland twenty years ago. I do think there's a lot to be done.

Interviewer: Do you think that we're in a better place than…This is a diverse area. There's a Catholic school next door. Do you think that the children's experience, parents experience might be different here than in the Catholic School?

Jill: Absolutely, I don't know if you know, people in this area call us the black school? St. XXX is next door to us. They've not quite as many students but similar. Their student population is 98%, 99% white Irish.

Interviewer: Really?

Jill: Even though these two schools are next door to each other. This is such a diverse area, but we've one very white school and one very non-white school. They don't reflect the diversity of the area at all, because they've all just gone to one school or the other.

Interviewer: Have you any hunch about what that's about?

Jill: I presume a lot of the local Irish families, automatically, want to go to St XXX. I'd imagine because this is such an EAL School. Maybe parents have preconceptions about academic achievement. If they go to the white Catholic school, are they going to get better results? Is no one going to speak English in their child's class? People I'd say just aren't aware of… It's all the same stuff going on inside really in some ways probably better. I'd love to think that if I have kids I'd rather send them to a school like this than to St. XX next door.

Interviewer: Who are the white Irish kids… It's a brave decision, really, for that minority group because they are very much a minority in this school.

Jill: Completely a minority.

Interviewer: What do you think that those parents have in common? Are they brave, are they…?

Jill: For a lot of the white Irish, they're not Catholic. They're not any religion, so they don't want to go to that school. For some of them, in fact for a lot of, it's we've a halting site beside the school. They're a minority in a different way. They're white Irish, but we would have quite a few children from the traveling community. We very few white Irish Catholic children, because they're all next door.

Appendix M – Excerpt from NCCA Review of the Original GMGY Programme

Between 2008 and 2011, two meetings were held with parents of children attending XX CNS and XX CNS. The meetings were aimed at providing an opportunity for parents to view a selection of lessons, ask questions and discuss the programme. Parent respondents reported that initially, they were happy with the selection of GMGY lessons shown to them.

> *The lessons we used to see in the meetings, was a very nice story about how to be inclusive, how the giraffe would be friends with the crocodile and all these kind of nice stories. So we liked it so much and we had positive feelings about it and those who taught the belief-specific programme were known to us, they're from our community. (Parent 6)*

However, some concerns arose for parents of a ▮▮▮▮ background in XX CNS upon viewing all of the lessons that had been developed. The parents reported that incorrect information had been used in some of the content pertaining to ▮▮▮ and this had resulted in the misrepresentation of their religion. Christian references were reported by the parents to have been used in a large proportion of GMGY lessons. The parents felt that it was unsuitable for one person to be tasked with writing a religious education programme for all religions. They recommended that a person belonging to each religion should oversee all material before it is taught in the schools to ensure the accuracy of information. The programme content was not openly available to parents which resulted in what 26 parents reported to be a lack of transparency. The approach to group prayer in GMGY was deemed unsuitable for ▮▮▮ children by the ▮▮▮ parents in XX CNS and the approach to religious education was referred to as ambiguous.

Although the issues were predominantly raised by parents of a ▮▮▮ background, they felt their concerns had implications for children from other beliefs. One-third of parents withdrew from the GMGY programme in XX CNS in 2012. Parents felt their concerns had not been sufficiently addressed. In order for them to re-engage with the programme, the following requirements were outlined by the parents in XX CNS:

▪ The programme should focus on the general moral values and avoid referring to any religious themes or characters and should not include group prayers.

▪ Parents should have full access to the programme.

▪ Any future reviews or amendments to the programme should be approved by the ▮ before implementation.

▮▮▮ belief-specific classes should be provided by the ▮ and reviewed by the project officer with responsibility for the development of the GMGY programme.

The lack of a curricular framework was cited by one parent as a barrier to overcoming many of the requirements outlined above.

> *We thought that programmes taught in this school should be designed through an authority like the Department of Education or NCCA, a proper curriculum department. We discussed all these issues and we could see a clear problem. The programme had no clear guidelines, no clear blueprint. (Parent 6)*

A school manager offered an explanation for the absence of such a framework.

> *Some teachers were saying I don't know what the overall picture is, I can't get it. We were saying that initially too. But the author was so busy trying to respond to the pressure of producing the next lesson that really it was all subsequent. It's interesting that it took until 2013 for the author to develop their philosophy on it. (School Manager)*

The situation which arose in XX CNS was reported to be a very difficult one. Respondents felt that these difficulties were often exacerbated by a lack of religious and cultural understanding and experience. This often meant that school management and patron representatives found themselves in unfamiliar territory, navigating new situations, new intercultural relationships and not foreseeing possible issues that would arise in relation to GMGY.

> *I think everybody found themselves, I don't mean this in a bad way at all, but everybody found themselves in a situation where we were out of our depth, we didn't know what to do or how to cope. (Principal 1)*