Ways of knowing, ways of being in and through faith in contemporary London

Within sociocultural approaches to language, identity and learning, there is now an emergent body of work that has called attention to the role of faith for sustaining a sense of belonging to a community of shared values and beliefs for many children and their families both long-established and recently arrived to a new country. This line of research has viewed faith as a cultural practice embedded in specific local and global contexts that affords children with membership through active participation and apprenticeship (e.g. Heath 1983; Gregory and Williams 2000; Gregory et al. 2004; Lytra et al 2016).

My presentation draws on a three-year collaborative team ethnography whose aim was to examine how sixteen children aged between four and twelve from Bangladeshi Muslim, Ghanaian Pentecostal, Polish Catholic and Tamil Hindu/Saiva communities become literate through faith activities in London. In this presentation, I focus on children's multimodal text making and the conversations around these texts. I present and discuss examples from the children's scrapbooks, their personal note books where they recorded their own thoughts, narratives, feelings about their faith as well as entered their photographs and artwork associated with their faith and which they created at home during their free time. After the completion of the scrapbooks, the children went through the scrapbooks with the researchers to explain how they understood and interpreted the texts they had created. These conversations were video-recorded. Theoretically, I draw upon the concepts of syncretism and syncretic literacies (Duranti et al 1995; Gregory et al 2013a, Gregory et al 2013b) that has foregrounded the fluidity and fusing of languages, skills, interaction patterns and artefacts in children's learning and identity negotiations as I seek to respond to the following question: how do children draw upon and syncretise complex sets of multilingual, multiscryptal and other semiotic resources associated with faith (e.g. images, symbols, narratives) to invoke a commonly shared past, often rooted in the country of origin and tied up with their migration trajectories and diasporic identities? Through the examination of children's faith-inspired scrapbooks and conversations around them we can explore how becoming a faith community member entails that children become knowledgeable about their historical, cultural and political past and learn to make sense of their personal and collective experiences by revisiting them through the past and projecting them in the future.