

Intercultural Education in the Primary School

Including
Proceedings of the
Consultative Conference on Education,
Kilkenny, 2004.

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Foreword

The Consultative Conference on Education is organised annually by the INTO in order to provide an opportunity for members to participate in the discussion, formulation and development of INTO policy on educational issues. The INTO Education Committee plays a central role in its organisation, through the preparation of discussion documents, as presenters, facilitators and rapporteurs and as collators of the proceedings. In preparing the background paper on intercultural education, the Committee decided to draw on the knowledge and experience of teachers who had already done research in this area. A number of teachers responded to our request and forwarded copies of their research to the Education Committee, which was very useful in preparing the background paper. There is a need for wider dissemination of research carried out by teachers so that ideas and findings can be discussed, challenged, utilised and reviewed, for the benefit of teaching and learning in schools. In this context, we thank those members who shared their research findings with us to date.

This is not the first publication the INTO has prepared on the theme of intercultural education. In our publication *The Challenge of Diversity*, we described the educational support service provided to refugee children, and highlighted the difficulties that arose as a result of the service being confined to refugees. Our *Intercultural Guidelines* were also very much welcomed by schools. However, the increasing diversity of Irish society continues to create challenges for teachers and pupils in our schools. It was with a view to reflecting on these challenges that the Education Committee chose this theme for the Education Conference, and which has led to this publication. Changes in the make-up of society are reflected in the schools, and teachers need to be supported in addressing issues such as teaching English as an additional language, racism and anti-racism policies, communicating with parents of a different culture, religious difference and emerging new Irish identities. While not offering solutions to all difficulties teachers face, this publication will contribute to the debate on interculturalism in education.

This brief report contains, in Part One, the background paper on Intercultural Education which was presented to the Consultative Conference on Education in Kilkenny, November 2004. Part two includes presentations to the conference, including the keynote address given by Dr Dymphna Devine of University College Dublin (UCD) on the theme of 'Making the Difference'. I would like to thank all presenters to the conference, particularly our guest speakers, Dr Dymphna Devine of UCD, Anne Ryan, of St. Mark's School, Tallaght, Itayi Viriri of the Irish Refugee Council,

Catherine Joyce of the Irish Traveller Movement and Colm Ó Cuanacháin of Amnesty International. I would also like to thank members of the Education Committee who acted as facilitators and rapporteurs in the discussion groups. The contributions of Claire Garvey and Ann McConnell of INTO Head Office in organising the conference and of Lori Kealy and Niamh Corduff in preparing this report for publication are also acknowledged. In particular I would like to thank Deirbhile Nic Craith, Senior Official who had overall responsibility for compiling this report.

John Carr, MA (Ed)
General Secretary
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Part One

INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

DISCUSSION PAPER



Intercultural Education in Primary School – Discussion Paper

INTRODUCTION

Ireland is increasingly becoming a multicultural society, creating challenges for how Irish society copes with diversity. According to the latest population census (2002), 5.8% of the population is comprised of non-Irish nationals, and 0.8% of the population are Travellers. Children of non-Irish nationals are entitled to enrol in both primary and post-primary schools regardless of legal status. The number of non-Irish national

children attending primary schools has increased dramatically in the last ten years. It is difficult to quantify the total number of non-Irish national pupils in primary schools, as schools do not have an individual pupil record system, which is only in the process of being developed. The vast majority of Traveller children of primary school age are enrolled in primary schools. Schools, of course, play a very important role in forming positive attitudes to people of different cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds. Intercultural education may be seen as respecting cultural difference and promoting anti-racism within the educational system. However, it is only in recent times that a pro-active approach to intercultural education has emerged in Irish schools.

Traveller children have been attending primary school in greater numbers since the 1960s. The Commission on Itinerancy published a report in 1963, the main thrust of which was the assimilation of Travellers into mainstream Irish society. In educational terms it was stated that “almost all itinerants are illiterate”, (p.64) and this laid the foundation for, “special education facilities” for the “children of itinerants”, (p.61) and consequently, a segregated approach to education provision. In the 1980s teachers of Traveller education had a more enlightened approach and sought to improve standards in schools. Yet the assimilation approach continued. When the first group of Vietnamese refugees arrived in Ireland in 1979, the emphasis was also on assimila-

tion. The government was concerned with their 'fitting in' to Irish society. Refugee education, like Traveller education was perceived to be problematic. By the time the next group of programme refugees arrived in Ireland – the Bosnians in 1992 – support services began to emerge in schools. They were assisted in learning the host language, English, to survive. They did assimilate and become part of Irish society because they had no other choice.

Throughout the nineties, the numbers of non-Irish national children, including refugee children, attending Irish schools began to increase, (DES, 1999, p.9). *Guidelines on Traveller Education* were published by the Department of Education and Science and the policy of integration officially supplanted the policy of segregation. Cultural diversity was by now becoming a reality in schools. The government acknowledged this in the *White Paper on Education* (1995) and in the subsequent Education Act of 1998 and so placed multicultural education firmly on the agenda for Irish schools. The Education Act (1998) outlines the necessity for schools to respect the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society.

The Primary Curriculum (1999) recognises the diversity of the pupil population in schools in relation to religious and cultural beliefs and traditions and aims to develop a respect for difference. Specific aspects of intercultural education are found in the Social, Environmental and Scientific (SESE) curriculum and in the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Curriculum though the principles of intercultural education permeate the whole curriculum. Primary teachers endeavour to counter misconceptions and negative stereotyping of different cultures, religions or nationalities and seek to develop an appreciation of other cultures. In order to support this process, the INTO prepared *Intercultural Guidelines for Schools* which were circulated to all primary schools in the Republic of Ireland in spring 2002. Mary Immaculate College prepared two booklets entitled *Intercultural Education in the Irish Primary Classroom* and *Towards a Framework for Intercultural Education in Irish Classrooms*, based on a project organised by the College on celebrating difference, and which include practical suggestions for teachers. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) also prepared intercultural guidelines for schools, which were launched in Spring 2005.¹

Since the late nineties a number of issues are emerging for discussion in Ireland concerning multiculturalism and interculturalism. Many of these have implications for Irish primary education.

1. These guidelines were launched and circulated to all primary schools.

INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Since the recent ceasefires of the 1990s, there has been a perceptible increase in the number of ethnic minority people living and working in Northern Ireland. The relevant statutes in Northern Ireland that apply to the education of ethnic minorities are the Northern Ireland Order of 1989, Section 75 of the Good Friday Agreement (1998), the Race Relations Order (1997) and the 'Targeting Social Needs Initiative'. The Department of Education is currently examining best practice with a view to developing a strategy or policy, which will ensure a consistent approach to English as an Alternative Language (EAL). This approach, laudable as it is, is about integration of international pupils into the host culture by making it a problem of language acquisition only rather than an issue about an accommodation of the pupils' culture.

The total funding from the Department of Education to support ethnic minority pupils in the school year (2002–2003) was £460,000. This was allocated on a per pupil basis to the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) who then had to supplement this further from their own budgets. The ELBs use their specialist staff as advisory or peripatetic teachers who organised in-service courses or who visited schools to give advice. In the Western Board area, for example, there are about 200 ethnic minority pupils spread around 60 schools but only about 73 (in 45 schools) need language support as the rest are virtually fluent in English. This is reflected to varying degrees in the other board areas. It is estimated that there are about 1,000 ethnic minority pupils in all five board areas though numbers have grown steadily in the last seven years. For example, there has been a large influx of Phillipino nurses many of whom are planning on bringing their young children to join them in Belfast. Some principals in schools with a declining population have already offered to accommodate their children and have extended an invitation to the nurses to visit schools near the hospitals.

The main teacher education institutes in Northern Ireland have no modules in intercultural education in either their pre- or in-service taught courses. There is also little post-graduate research in the area of intercultural education. In general, children are withdrawn for additional support. For example, children may spend time in a 'Learning and Guidance Centre' a facility which is available to support pupils with educational and behavioural problems. However, very few schools have policies on interculturalism as few schools have experienced race or colour problems. The majority of schools also have little experience of cross-cultural problems beyond Catholic/Protestant relations and it is unlikely that the cross curricular themes of Cultural Awareness or Cultural Heritage will be of much use in dealing with the broader issues of intercultural education. To date immigrant children are expected to fit into the school and schools are not expected to do much to ensure that the home culture of these children is reflected in the work of the school.

Northern Ireland has a large Asian community comprising Chinese, Indian,

Pakistani and Sri Lankan communities. These communities are large enough to maintain their own cultural milieus and their leaders have been in Northern Ireland long enough to have put some of their children through the education system. Arising from this experience they are pro-active in contacting the schools about the promotion of their own culture. Representatives of these communities act as advisors to the ELBs but as yet there are no ethnic minority students in the Teacher Education Colleges.

THE EMERGENCE OF INTERCULTURALISM

Prior to the 1990s when migrants, be they economic migrants or refugees from calamity or war, arrived in a strange country they were expected to conform quickly to the culture and mores of the majority community, in order to 'fit in'. Initially, countries adopted an assimilationist approach to ethnic minorities, which in effect attempted to incorporate them into the dominant culture and language, as their own culture was seen to be deficient in some way. In schools, minority populations were dispersed as a large number of migrant children was considered to be detrimental to the class (Murray and O'Doherty, 2002). In general, schools did not allow any aspect of a minority culture or language to be manifested or acknowledged within the school environs (Craft, 1986). An example of a strong assimilationist approach is given in Schnapper's (1993) study of the French assimilation policy in its educational system as helping to maintain a political system which transcends all the inherent differences in the population arising from religion, culture and ethnic origin (cited in Maxwell, 2003). In France, displays of religious affiliation, such as the wearing of the Hijab by Muslim girls to school has been forbidden and was an issue much discussed in the media during the last year. However, the experience of the Italian community in Northern Ireland shows that the results of assimilationist policies are not always negative. Perhaps, because of their colour and their desire to fit in, their children were quickly assimilated, some of whom went on to become involved in Irish politics in the North. In recent years, though, there does seem to have been an attempt by the children of the earlier wave of immigrants to rediscover their culture with the formation of Italian Societies in cities like Belfast. The approach taken in Ireland initially in relation to the education of Traveller children and refugee children from the Vietnamese community could also be described as assimilation.

An integrationist approach, though not very different theoretically from an assimilationist approach, made some effort to adopt the principles of tolerance and respect for cultural difference. Many schools would acknowledge minority cultures in aspects of the curriculum such as art, drama or music, however, practice was still concerned with acquisition of the host language. The integrationist approach was

criticised as being equally as monocultural as the assimilationist approach, in that only lip-service was paid to the principles of tolerance and respect for other cultural values and beliefs (Mullard, 1982; May, 1994 and 1996; Craft, 1996). This approach caused many migrant children to fall by the wayside in terms of educational advancement (May, 1994).

In multi-cultural societies different cultural, national, ethnic and religious groups may all live in the same area but they may not necessarily come into contact with each other. In such a society difference is often viewed negatively and forms a major justification for discrimination. Minorities may be tolerated passively but not accepted or valued. This attitude is bolstered by the opinion of the host country that theirs is the superior culture and therefore foreign cultures may be ignored or marginalised. Even in cases where there are legal rights designed to stop such practice, the law may not be enforced uniformly.

According to the Council of Europe (1995) the problems of multicultural societies elicited a number of responses in the field of education;

- (i) Ensuring immigrant children could return to their country of origin and be able to fit in to their specific societal and education systems with ease.
- (ii) Incorporating children of minority cultures into the mainstream society and thereby strip them of their cultural identity completely – a policy of assimilation.
- (iii) Assisting children of minority cultural groups to fit into mainstream society whilst maintaining parts of their own cultural identity – a policy of integration.

Traditional approaches to the education of minorities have often been criticised as being divisive. A multi-cultural approach aimed to celebrate difference though it has been criticised for focusing almost exclusively on minority cultures. However, it has been claimed in the US that multicultural education was responsible for improved educational outcomes of ethnic minorities and reduced racial tension in communities (Maxwell, 2003).

The preferred approach today is intercultural education, which is about the encounter of cultures. Knowledge of different cultures is not considered sufficient. Cultural difference is respected and anti-racism is promoted. Intercultural education celebrates the positive aspects to cultural diversity as well as drawing attention to the power differences between groups and societies (INTO, 2002). Intercultural education is, therefore, an education for all children and not only for those of ethnic minorities or for schools with an ethnic minority population. Critical multiculturalism or interculturalism challenge schools to consider their structures and policies in relation to enrolment, class allocation, teaching methodologies and relationships in order to become fully inclusive. An intercultural society is perceived as a society of different cultural, religious and national groups living together where open relationships of interaction and exchange are maintained and where there is mutual recognition of

each others' values and ways of life. In an intercultural society there is a process of active tolerance and the maintenance of equitable relationships where everyone has the same importance, where there are no superiors nor inferiors.²

ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY

One's identity can be described as the essential core of who one is as an individual, involving the creation of a sense of belonging among people, emphasising certain common aspects, while differentiating one's self from others at the same time (Weeks, 1990). Weeks also argued that identity is socially constructed and negotiated through complex interactions with others, rather than forged in isolation. A person's identity, therefore, is dynamic and constantly evolving through one's life experience. Gender, sexuality, social class and ethnicity are at the core of one's identity. How people see themselves and how they are perceived by others is central to the debate on identity and ethnicity. For example, young people from the Chinese community in East Belfast spoke about living in Northern Ireland and about how they viewed themselves and their experiences. When they were asked how they saw themselves they invariably described themselves as British, Northern Irish and Protestant while at the same time describing their parents as Chinese. This was despite the fact that their parents only spoke Chinese in the house and they themselves had attended special Chinese schools after their normal school hours.³ Children do not like to be different, and many minority ethnic children, including Travellers, attempt to blend into the dominant culture and gain acceptance (Davies, 1991, Pavee Point 2002). The Chinese children in Northern Ireland, were not rejecting their parent's cultural identity so much as trying to fit in to the situation in which they found themselves.

Defining a person's ethnicity is more complex than defining one's gender as it is less tangible and subjective and rests on the identification of self in relation to others (McVeigh and Lentin, 2002). This could be described as being like the layers of skin of an onion, each laid down throughout the child's life and contributed to by its experiences. In the case of a child, its identity and ethnicity will be, in the first years of life, family centred derived from its home language, religious affiliation, the culture of the parents in terms of their cuisine, music, politics and myths. Once children start to interact with the outside world, their identities take on board the neighbourhood in which they live leading to some refinement of their views of self. This view will be affected by the family's wealth or poverty, whether the neighbourhood is a 'ghetto' or of mixed ethnicity where there is the possibility of the child confronting racism. By the time children are at school the number of actors impacting on their self identity

2. Council of Europe (1995), *All Different, All Equal educational pack*.

3. *Our Voice Heard*.

increase enormously. Other children, teachers, local culture, television, sport and of course the (con)fusion of the 'McDonalds/Coca Cola World Culture' all tend to dilute and blur cultural edges.

According to Mac Gréil (1996) many Irish people associate their identity with Irish history and the Irish language. Lentin (2002) argued that Irish people's identity is based on a history of oppression and struggle for independence, influenced by cultural nationalists and often associated with Catholicism. Such a narrow view of Irish identity, as Catholic, Gaelic playing, Irish speaking, settled and white had negative effects on those who differed from the majority – groups such as Travellers, Jews, Protestants, and Irish people of colour (McVeigh and Lentin, 2002). One aspect of racialism in Ireland, highlighted by McVeigh (1996) was the 'Black Baby Syndrome'. The charitable association of Irish Catholics in sending money to the black babies has led a lot of Irish people to associate being black with poverty. Their presence in Irish society challenges this perception in that they are real people with the same needs, problems and aspirations as Irish people.

In the past it was often postulated that people's racism may be tempered by contact with outsiders, since most prejudice was considered as being fuelled by ignorance (Allport, 1954). However, as Connolly (2000) found in his study of sectarianism in Northern Ireland, contact does not eliminate prejudice but may even reinforce it. For this reason the Integrated School Movement in Northern Ireland has not been as successful as originally envisaged. Bringing children together during the day was not considered sufficient as children returned to their families and neighbourhoods at night and were further steeped in the prejudices therein. There is a tendency to stereotype or categorise people, hence all Travellers may be stigmatised by the actions of a few and all refugees may be seen as parasites because they are all seen as beggars.

Migrant children who were given opportunities to learn their mother tongue made considerably better progress in school (Rutter, 2001). Arguments put forward for this view included that bilingual children had acquired better linguistic skills than monolingual pupils and that this gave them better tools for acquiring other languages and subjects. Furthermore, those children who retained their mother tongue also had a more positive attitude to school as well as a more positive attitude to their own culture. Children who had positive links with their community, language and culture showed less distress in school and appeared to be less psychologically vulnerable than those children with few links to their own community and culture. Work done in the UK and the USA revealed that the poor perception of the black community by whites had a large negative affect on the self esteem and group image of black children to such an extent that they expressed a preference for being white (Clark and Clark, 1939; Davey, 1983; Aboud, 1988). It appears, therefore, that opportunities for pupils to learn their mother tongue could have a beneficial impact on their self-esteem, their attitudes to school and their achievements in learning. At present, there are limited

opportunities in Ireland for non-Irish national pupils to learn their mother tongue. Perhaps this is an issue which should be further addressed when considering intercultural education issues in schools.

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has set out, in a number of Articles, the rights of young people, up to the age of 18. These rights apply universally, regardless of a country's wealth or poverty, and must be considered before any decision or action is taken which may affect a child.

- (1) **Non-Discrimination:** All the rights in the Convention apply to all children equally whatever their race, gender, religion, language, disability, opinion or family background. (Article 2).
- (2) **Best Interests:** When adults or organisations make decisions which affect children they must always think first about what would be best for the child. (Article 3).
- (3) **The Child's View:** Children too have the right to say what they think about anything which affects them. What they say must be listened to carefully. When courts or other official bodies are making decisions which affect children they must listen to what the children want and feel. (Article 12).
- (4) **Education:** Every child has the right to free education at least at primary school level. Different kinds of secondary school education should also be available for children. For those with the ability, higher education should be provided. (Article 28).

Schools should help children develop their skills and personality fully, teach them about their own and other people's rights and prepare them for adult life. (Article 31). Human rights are part and parcel of children's everyday lives. Children experience the positive aspects of human rights when their own rights are upheld. In Irish society children experience a right to education, a right to freedom of speech, to name but a few. Every teacher knows that a sense of fairness gains a very high score with children. How many times do teachers listen to the refrain "that's not fair". Children also experience the negative aspects of life, when human rights are denied. Two pertinent examples of this are name-calling and bullying, which schools endeavour to address in their codes of behaviour.

A human rights based approach to education provides the child with an opportunity to develop both personally and socially. The Revised Curriculum aims "To enable the child to develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others and so contribute to the good of society" (DES, *Primary Curriculum, Introduction*, 1999, p. 7). This cannot be achieved unless children are equipped with a certain amount of knowledge about rights education. They must also value and experience rights and respon-

sibilities in the school setting and they must practice the skills associated with a rights-based approach – for example, thinking critically and empathising. ‘Lift Off’, a programme in Human Rights education, prepared by the Cross Border Human Rights Education Initiative, in which the INTO was involved is, therefore, welcome in this context.

INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Little research has been carried out on intercultural education in Ireland or in relation to the experience of ethnic minority pupils in Irish primary schools. Devine, Kenny and McNeela (2002) prepared a report on *Ethnicity and Schooling*, which was a study of ethnic diversity in selected Irish primary and post-primary schools. It is, perhaps, one of the most comprehensive accounts of issues pertaining to ethnicity and diversity in the educational system. In addition, a number of these have been written on the topic of interculturalism in recent years, in response to the growing diversity in Irish schools. A brief overview of some of the issues addressed in this recent research is given below.

Ethnicity and Schooling

Devine, Kenny and McNeela (2002) aimed, in their study, to begin the process of documenting and analysing the reality of inter-ethnic relations in Irish schools, arising from the increasing diversity in school populations since the early 1990s. Devine et al argue that there is a need for intercultural education whether a school population is multi-ethnic or not, owing to the impact of globalisation generally. In-depth case studies were carried out in eight schools, including three primary schools. Interviews were conducted with a selected sample of both teachers and pupils in addition to the principal teacher or the vice-principal teacher. Teachers were interviewed individually and the pupils were interviewed in small groups.

Teachers’ Perspectives

The context of ethnic diversity in the schools was found to be characterised by fluctuation (in terms of enrolments, attendance and the provision of support services) and change, requiring considerable adaptation on the part of teachers and pupils from an increasingly diverse range of ethnic groups. In general, teachers commented favourably on the increasing diversity of society, but indicated concern at the rapidity of change and its impact on the educational system. In particular, teachers

commented on language needs, religious affiliation and the position of Travellers vis a vis other minority groups.

The arrival of large numbers of ethnic minority children caused administrative challenges for schools in that enrolment often occurred throughout the school-year. Many parents had no understanding of the Irish educational system and often lacked the language ability to negotiate arrangements for their children with the school. This process had an impact on teaching and learning in the school. Teachers also referred to the challenge of maintaining a Catholic religious ethos in the school given the range of diverse religious affiliations among the immigrant population.

In their relations with parents teachers found cultural differences a challenge, particularly in relation to child rearing practices and gender roles. The involvement of parents beyond initial enrolment tended to be minimal. In some cases, teachers experienced hostility towards the ethnic minority community from the majority community, an issue that school principals had to deal with. Teachers spoke positively of their ethnic minority pupils stressing that they were highly motivated and determined to achieve at school. However, according to the teachers, Traveller and Roma children showed less of a commitment to education.

Managing the language needs of the pupils created one of the greatest challenges for both the class teachers and the language support teachers. Teachers also complained about the lack of resources, in terms of staffing and suitable curriculum materials. The temporary nature of the language teaching support service was felt to preclude experienced teachers from applying for the positions resulting in a lack of expertise being built up in this area, except in schools where a permanent teacher was assigned responsibility for the area for a continuous period. Many of the language teachers themselves took a broad view of their role, incorporating integrative and pastoral functions. These findings are similar to those of the INTO survey on language support teaching carried out in 2003. It was of note that the issue of mother tongue teaching for ethnic minority pupils did not arise as a concern for the teachers. Teachers, in general, adopted a pragmatic approach to multi-culturalism incorporating ethnic minority cultures as they considered appropriate during lessons. However, there were some teachers who had developed rich programmes in intercultural practice, though the shortage of appropriate materials was identified.

Teachers were also conscious of dealing with any racial incidences they encountered among pupils, and dealt with such incidences through the school's general anti-bullying framework, by suppressing unacceptable behaviour and insisting on personal respect. Teachers did not appear to discuss racism for fear of creating negativity for ethnic minority pupils. Teachers tended to work with pupils within the frameworks they knew and understood, and focused on individual diversity rather than on concepts of social structures and group identities. Devine et al were of the view that such an approach, which ignores the specificity of racist bullying, also overlooks

pupils' need for pride in and knowledge of their own identity and bypasses the majority ethnic pupils' need to learn to respect and value difference.

Pupil Perspectives

Devine et al highlight the importance of school organisational and cultural factors in shaping the nature of children's interaction with one another. In general, pupils were positive towards the increasing diversity of Irish society. However, their views towards the Travelling community were negative. Being Irish was seen by pupils as being white, English speaking and Catholic, with a certain accent and dress code. Those not fitting this stereotype were considered as 'other' and this had implications for peer group formations. Though there was evidence of inter-ethnic friendships, particularly at primary level, language was mentioned as a barrier to more interaction.

Most children (both minority and majority ethnic) did not identify racism and or hostile attitudes to minority pupils as a problem. However, Devine et al found that the children were well aware of the language of racial abuse, which was observed in use in schools, particularly out of view and hearing of teachers. Minority pupils in general had a positive experience of school, though some expressed their difficulties in learning English. Their willingness to accept the curriculum and authority of the school may derive from their 'otherness' as they wish to do well in their educational studies. Pupils, in general, also expressed a desire to learn more about the different minority cultures represented in their schools.

Recommendations

Devine et al make a number of recommendations arising from their study, which include:

- 1 National guidelines in relation to anti-racist and intercultural policies in schools
- 1 Consultation with representatives of minority ethnic groups in the development of intercultural policies.
- 1 The examination of school ethos and how to ensure respect and support for diverse religious affiliations within a denominational system.
- 1 Principles of anti-racist and intercultural practice to be included in all pre-service teacher education courses.
- 1 Principles of anti-racist and intercultural practice to inform incareer development opportunities for practising teachers.
- 1 Comprehensive incareer development to be available for all language support teachers, with a focus on language as social practice in addition to linguistic skills.
- 1 Language support teachers to be appointed on a permanent basis and their role to be officially recognised as including integrative and pastoral functions.

- 1 The inclusion of minority ethnic teachers in the teaching profession.
- 1 Appropriate support systems to be in place to assist minority ethnic pupils on entry to the school system, and to include: induction programmes, translation facilities, flexible systems for securing funding and support, culturally appropriate assessment materials, therapeutic support, mother tongue learning opportunities, the appointment of bilingual support staff.
- 1 Core principles of anti-racism and interculturalism to underpin all curricular developments and to inform teaching across all subjects.
- 1 A reconsideration of 'Irishness' in the context of its range of diversity and racism, anti-racism and intercultural activities to be included in pupils' critical enquiry into the structures of society.
- 1 The development of a critical knowledge among pupils of displacement and the experiences of seeking asylum.
- 1 English language tuition for the parents of ethnic minority children where English is not the home language.
- 1 Active policies at school level to promote the involvement of ethnic minority parents in the school community.

INTERCULTURAL POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Maxwell (2003), in her thesis, set out to examine a number of issues pertaining to the implementation of policy in the areas of intercultural education. In examining the language needs of ethnic minority pupils, the pupil-teacher ratios for language support, models of support employed by support teachers and the involvement of other staff in supporting 'non-national' pupils were considered. Maxwell also studied teacher professional development in the context of pre-service and in-service education and the extent to which in-service training for the revised Social, Personal and Health Education Curriculum (SPHE) addresses intercultural issues. Finally, she examined intercultural policy implementation in the context of whole school policy development, involvement of parents, classroom practices, approaches to anti-racism, cultural awareness and measures necessary to translate policy into practice.

For the purposes of her study, Maxwell focussed on three types of primary school: those with fewer than three non-national pupils, those with between four and 13 non-national pupils and those with more than 14 non-national pupils. These categories were chosen because the Department of Education and Science (DES) offers different levels of support for each category. Schools with fewer than four pupils are offered no additional support. Schools with between four and thirteen pupils may apply for a grant from the DES to provide additional language support to non-English speaking

pupils. Schools with more than fourteen pupils may appoint a fulltime language support teacher for a period of two years. Maxwell's findings are based on responses to questionnaires and interviews with 38 primary school principal teachers, and are summarised below.

Language Needs

- 1 In general, there was inadequate provision of language support teachers (one school had three language support teachers for 144 non-national pupils for whom English was not the mother tongue).
- 1 Learning support teachers focussed on language support for the pupils.
- 1 Withdrawal from the class was the most used model of support.
- 1 There was little evidence that the mother tongue of non-Irish nationals is valued in the host school setting nor was there evidence of classes being provided for pupils in their mother tongue so that they could retain their cultural identity.

Teacher Professional Development

- 1 Principal teachers in all the schools expressed a belief in the need for in-service training and professional development.
- 1 Principal teachers were of the view that an opportunity had been missed to highlight an intercultural dimension at the SPHE training days.
- 1 Language training is the main area of professional development and in-service training to have been addressed by the Department of Education and Science.
- 1 Only a small number of teachers in schools with non-national pupils have completed short courses in other aspects of intercultural education.

Implementation of Policy

- 1 There is more evidence of intercultural educational policy in practice in schools with non-Irish national pupils than in those without.
- 1 Practice is more likely to be reactive rather than pro-active.
- 1 There is a variety of practices but no clear framework in many schools.
- 1 Best practice is characterised by affirming an inclusive school ethos, where policies inform practice and where there is strong leadership provided by the principal teacher, a supportive and pro-active staff, an emphasis on addressing racism and parental involvement in policy decisions.

Concluding Comment

Maxwell concludes that the Department has paid mostly “lip service” to the adoption of intercultural education principles. She argues that the Department’s main thrust had been towards the development of language teaching and learning as a move towards the full integration of non-Irish nationals rather than the promotion of interculturalism. Her findings pertaining to the Language Support Service echo those of the INTO’s survey of language support teachers, which was carried out in 2003 (INTO, 2004). Maxwell recommends that the criteria for entitlement to language support teachers be revised and that more adequate pre-service and in-service training be available to all teachers but particularly for language support teachers in ESL teaching methodologies. Maxwell also calls for a review of international best practice in language teaching for access to the curriculum, given that little attention has been paid to this area of education in Ireland to date.

AWARENESS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS INTERCULTURAL ISSUES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Lynch (2003) sought to investigate awareness and attitudes towards intercultural issues in twelve primary schools in Dublin. The principal teacher in each school was interviewed. Four of the schools were selected in order to issue questionnaires to fifth and sixth class children. In addition, Lynch interviewed four people centrally involved in intercultural education.

It is perhaps not surprising that not all the principal teachers interviewed were familiar with the *INTO Guidelines on Intercultural Education*, given how busy they are. However, in most cases, the guidelines had been given to a particular teacher to consider, though only three schools of the twelve had some form of intercultural policy in place. Pupils in schools with little awareness of intercultural education were more likely to lack the skills and knowledge necessary to deal with intercultural issues but did not in general hold more negative views. Children who had some experience of meeting ethnic minorities were more likely to hold negative views and needed support to work on their ideas, attitudes and beliefs about children from other countries. It is also of interest that schools with no ethnic minority children did not see the need to engage with intercultural education, whereas schools that did experience ethnic minority children did see the need.

Lynch recommended that a module on intercultural education should form part of all pre-service education of teachers. She also recommended in-service programmes for practising teachers that focused on the successful implementation of intercultural practices, in addition to supporting teachers in exploring their own attitudes. Lynch recommended that the INTO summer course for teachers be continuously supported

as it was the only professional development course available to teachers on intercultural education. Finally, she put forward a case for the coordination of all intercultural education initiatives under one body to ensure a coherent approach in all schools.

THE CHALLENGE TO PRIMARY RELIGIOUS EDUCATION POSED BY A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Kilcrann (2003) set out to address the practical issues that are in need of debate in response to diversity in Irish primary schools. As part of his consideration of the issues, Kilcrann provides a critical evaluation of the *Alive O* programme – the religious education programme in Catholic schools – in light of best practice for a multicultural education.

The *Alive O* programme seeks to lead children to a deeper, more lived, active and personal faith. In contrast to the previous programme, the *Children of God* series, *Alive O* aims to enable the child to become fully alive to the presence of God in themselves, in others and in the Church as well as the world around them. The reference to the world around them is a change. Kilcrann argues that the *Alive O* programme can be adapted where cultural backgrounds of the pupils are different, and that the teacher can create an open and caring environment in which to present the various situations in the programme, where children can feel valued and have a sense of having their potential recognised. Through the *Alive O* programme, and through greater partnership between home and school, children can learn to promote mutual understanding, tolerance and respect for diversity and to celebrate difference. Kilcrann, therefore, concludes that primary religious education holds the key to developing an inclusive society where social diversity and cultural difference can be respected, promoted and practised.

PARENTS', CHILDREN'S AND TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

The following diaries have been compiled based on experiences and reflect the challenges faced by parents, children and teachers in relation to difference in Irish primary schools and classrooms.

DIARY OF A NON-NATIONAL PARENT (BI-LINGUAL)

I have to enrol my child in the school. How can I go up there to that grey building? I don't know any of those teachers. I do not speak the language. Is there anyone who would go with me? I saw a man with a uniform going into the school yesterday. Was he a policeman, a warder? It will be embarrassing when I do not understand what they

say. My child will have to speak for me. Will he mind? Will he know what to say? Will he have to write and fill forms? When he goes to school, how will I help him? Will he have books coming home? Will I have to pay for them? Does he have to do work at home? Will this school mind that my child has to pray at certain times of the day? Will they allow him home on his own? I don't like uniforms. Does he have to wear one? Can he get any education about his home country, his own language?

If they look for documents, birth certs, I don't have any. I don't know what age he is exactly. Will they laugh at me... I'll go this once but I am not going ever again.

DIARY OF A NON-NATIONAL CHILD (BI-LINGUAL)

I do not want to go back to school tomorrow. They stared at me. They laughed at my accent. Sean said my hair was funny. I want to have paler skin. They all have white skin. Why did the teacher keep asking me about my own country? I did not want to talk. I have so few English words. I did not like where I lived before, I came here so why should I have to talk about it. I don't have any songs from my own country! The library had nice colourful books to look at but they were no boys like me in them. They were playing games and doing things that I did not understand. All the teachers looked the same. They were all the same colour. Why did they think I was very poor? Didn't I have food for lunch and clothes! I did not like the boy in the yard who called me names, when the teacher was not looking. I liked the football. I'd like to play. Maybe tomorrow...

DIARY OF AN IRISH TRAVELLER CHILD

School was okay when they did not know I was a Traveller. I wasn't called names then by the buffers, I was one of them. Now it's different. They said I have no home. What about my trailer? They said that I don't speak properly. Why can't they learn about my language, Cant, and about my culture instead of learning about life in Australia? The boy next to me said I was smelly, he kept turning away. The yard wasn't too bad because I found my brother, sister and other Travellers to talk to. The teacher keeps sighing. I don't know if she likes me or not. She seems okay. Why do I have to go to the special room with younger children? The lady is nice but I feel too big down there. My father said education is a waste of time. He said I might not want to stay with them – that I might not fit in. He didn't want Johnny to go to the secondary, said it would make him soft. I don't want to be soft... but... I'd like to be able to read and write and go places...

DIARY OF A TEACHER WITH NON-NATIONALS AND TRAVELLERS IN CLASSROOM

How can I possibly be expected to teach a curriculum principally through the medium of the English language with five non-national children and two Traveller children in my classroom? The two children from Nigeria I'll cope with – at least they speak fairly

good English. But the little boy from Kenya has very little English and the girl from Croatia has only some few words. The principal teacher does not seem to have any background information on some of the children. We don't qualify for a language support teacher so the resource teacher is trying to cope with all the situations. The visiting teacher for Travellers is worried that the Traveller children are not in age-appropriate classes but they can't read! Anyway I suppose, as usual, I won't have them for long. They'll be off on their travels. Don't their parents realise they are depriving them of an education? I hope this buddy system the school sets up works. That incident of name calling really upset me today but how can I discuss racial issues without highlighting differences between them and 'our own' children? Will I upset them if I talk about it? We have so little space in our small classroom. It seems awful to see the children having to work in the cloakroom. They don't like going in there either. And someone always misses maths. As for religion, it's a nightmare with one Muslim child needing a place to go to pray, one Christian who is not Catholic and another child with no religion – I'm not sure what the parents expect me to do. I can't have her withdrawn. I have nowhere to put her where she will have supervision. I wish we had one teacher appointed to deal with all these problems, somebody with language skills. They might get some helpful information from parents. I feel sorry for the Traveller kids, they don't seem to be included like the non-national children. Maybe if they came to school in the same bus as the others, it might help. Some of those children are so diligent though and they have great respect for the principal and the teachers. It would be great if I had a translation service nearby of some kind... maybe to send notes to parents or even help me in understanding the children... And they could do with some after school help... maybe I should suggest it to the education centre... Ah well tomorrow is another day...

CONCLUSION

Approaches to the education of ethnic minorities are still evolving. A process of full integration has its weaknesses as the dominant cultural values and beliefs tend to be those which dominate school curricula (Coombes, 1985). Early multi-cultural education in Britain promoted the notion of a coexistence of cultures living side by side. This approach, however, does not necessarily produce social integration (DES, 2000). Schools may teach children about respecting other people's colour, ethnicity and culture but by far the greatest influence on the attitudes of children to other ethnic groups comes from their own parent's attitudes. Disparaging remarks about ethnic minorities can easily undermine all the good work done in schools.

Murray and O'Doherty (2002) challenge the view that multi-cultural or intercultural education is solely an issue for schools with a multi-ethnic population. They state

that intercultural education is an issue for all children in the dominant group as they also need to develop an awareness of themselves in relation to others from different cultural backgrounds. In Britain, it was found that celebrating difference, of itself, had little impact on institutional racism, therefore, schools began to move towards an intercultural approach which had an inherent heavy anti-racist message. Leicester (1989), in defining anti-racist education stated, that it was about eliminating ethnic bias from teaching, lesson content and learning materials. In New Zealand, May (1994) arguing for a 'critical multicultural approach' suggested that a common culture be constructed which would be more open, critical, democratic and egalitarian in recognition of the existence of cultural diversity.

The importance of taking cognisance of the rights of children regarding their ethnic cultures and their rights to learn their home language has been highlighted in this brief discussion paper. Intercultural education needs to address the worthiness of all cultures without diminishing the home culture. Anti-racism will need to be central to intercultural programmes. However, schools cannot solve the problems of society as attitudes are formed in the home and in the environment. Schools can, of course, contribute to creating, developing and fostering an inclusive ethos from the early years. Haron and Tormey (2002) argue that attitudes can be challenged and developed. There are already the makings of a fusion culture. Modern communications, both audio and visual means that there is a putative 'world culture' in music, literature and film. The ease of travel ensures that access to any part of the planet inside twenty-four hours is possible. Regarding cuisine, there must be few parts of the developed world without Indian, Chinese, Italian, French and other ethnic restaurants. The challenge will be to translate the positive dimensions of globalisation into an education system which respects and values every child regardless of ethnic origin.

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

- 1 In the enlarged Europe do we need to re-examine our concept of 'Irishness' in order to maintain a cultural identity? Alternatively, should we highlight our cultural similarities with our European counterparts in order to minimise our differences and make movement across the borders of Europe an easier task?
- 1 Should intercultural education be an issue for all schools and all teachers or just those 'directly concerned'?
- 1 Is there enough available research in this field in Ireland? What up to date statistics are available on the number of non-nationals in our schools?
- 1 Should intercultural education stand alone in the curriculum? Can it be covered adequately in a cross-curricular fashion? Should it be a unit of SPHE and/or SESE?

Is it covered adequately in teachers' inservice? Is there a danger that teachers pay lip service to its tenets while maybe not getting to grips with or allocating enough time to cover the issues concerned?

- 1 Is racism a serious problem in Ireland? Tormey and Haron (2002), report on a survey which indicates that 78% of ethnic minority respondents have been the victim of racist incidents. Many of us say we are not racist yet why do we maintain a social difference to other ethnic groups?
- 1 Is the language support system for non-nationals working in our schools? Is withdrawal or partial withdrawal a good system? Do teachers differentiate in methodologies between ESL and ESOL? When the initial two years allocated time for language support is up, how do students fare 'back in the classroom'? Does the DES need to support the maintenance of the child's own language in some way? Do parents feel left out when they too are not taught the host language?
- 1 Is there a commitment in the leadership and staff of schools to an intercultural ethos? How many schools have a written and/or working policy?
- 1 Do we need an intercultural education policy in Early Years learning? Are attitudes already formed by six years of age, from home and community?
- 1 How can the various issues facing teachers, pupils and parents be dealt with?

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Part Two

PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION

KILKENNY

20 NOVEMBER 2004.

2

Proceedings of the Consultative Conference on Education

AN OVERVIEW OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

Patrick Dorrian, Education Committee

This is the first time that the INTO Consultative Conference on Education will consider the topic of Intercultural Education. However, it's a topic that has been addressed in various other INTO forums. The INTO first published a policy document in 1998, *The Challenge of Diversity*, in response to the many issues being faced by the Support Service for Refugees, which existed at the time. More recently, we published *Intercultural Guidelines*, which were distributed to all schools in Spring 2002. In addition, the INTO has organised a total of 11 summer courses since 2001 on Intercultural Education as part of our professional development programme. However, as intercultural education is for all children, we have structured today's programme to create further awareness of the issues and to stimulate debate and discussion.

The Education Committee decided to consider the topic of Intercultural Education because of a clear need emerging in our schools, in society in general, and within the teaching profession, to address issues arising from the increasing diversity of our population. According to the 2002 census figures released in October last, Ireland's non-national population is now around 5.8% and probably rising. Due to the improvement in the Irish economy we are attracting more immigrants, many of whom come from countries where English is not the mother tongue. We also have an indigenous Traveller population – 0.8% of the population. The children of immigrants, other non-Irish nationals and Travellers are entitled to be educated in our schools. Ireland, is fast becoming a multicultural society – though we were probably

never a totally homogenous country.

The challenges for schools, for us as teachers and for our pupils and their families are increasing. We need to come to grips with the indigenous racism expressed towards those of different skin colour, religion and cultural identity. We now have no choice but to cater for diversity of ethnicity in our schools. For those who may think that we Irish are not racist, we only have to read the papers to see that there are physical and verbal attacks on foreign nationals weekly. In addition, if we are honest with ourselves, we do not always treat fellow Irish people who are not 'settled' as we should.

The education system has been seen, and still is seen as the main vehicle for delivering social change. In this case, schools are asked to teach pupils to respect and appreciate difference. As schools alone cannot change society, teachers have an important role to play in working with our pupils on intercultural issues.

In the past, when migrants were being accommodated by a host nation, there was an expectation that the eventual aim of the education process was to produce a fully assimilated citizen. It was also thought important that immigrant children could, should they wish, return to their country of origin and fit in seamlessly. Full integration, where the child was helped to fit in with the host culture whilst maintaining their own culture, was another approach.

An intercultural approach to education – where cultural difference is respected and anti-racism is promoted – is now encouraged in schools. Intercultural education may be viewed as an encounter of cultures – knowledge of different cultures is not considered sufficient. However, this approach is not without its challenges. Schools have to look at their structures, policies, teaching methodologies and relationships in order to become fully inclusive. We are challenged to rethink what our Irish identity means to us: are Paul McGrath and John Rocha any less Irish than Bob Geldof or Bertie Ahern?

A recent survey of children from the Chinese community in Belfast found that, although they came from homes where only Chinese was spoken and they have been exposed to Chinese culture at special out-of-hours schools within their own community, they identify themselves as being British and Protestant. The reason for this is the wish to be accepted by their peers in school. They strive to adapt to fit in. Those of us with relatives who have emigrated and who now have children brought up in the adopted country will no doubt recognise a similar phenomenon – that the children adopt the accent and the mores of their peers so as not to be considered outsiders.

We as a profession need to be ready to address the challenges that our schools face in catering for the needs of all our pupils, whether born in Ireland or not, so that they can become tomorrow's well adjusted citizens. We believe that Intercultural Education is relevant to all schools. In discussing this topic today, we are hoping to increase the awareness of our members of the complex issues arising from an increasingly diverse Ireland. We look forward to the contributions of our guest speakers and

to the deliberations during the discussion sessions.

MAKING THE DIFFERENCE

Dr Dympna Devine, University College Dublin

Introduction

As a former primary school teacher I am very honoured to be speaking here in front of you today about a recent research project that I was involved in. The presentation today is called *Making the Difference*, because as professionals involved in education we have a primary responsibility to make a difference to the lives of the children in our care regardless of their ethnic or cultural background. I am coming very much from a sociological perspective, and whenever you look at things from a sociological perspective it is important to ground your understanding in changes within Irish society.

I think it is fair to say that Irish society has gone through a period of immense rapid social and economic change in the past 30 years but it has been particularly felt in the last 10 years with the advent of the Celtic Tiger economy. That has brought with it both challenges and opportunities, greater affluence, greater levels of materialism, reduced levels of unemployment. But it has also brought with it concern about the values and the direction of Irish society socially and culturally. Part of that change is crystallised in the patterns of emigration and immigration we have now in Irish society. We have moved from being a society with a very large degree of emigration to a country of immigration, and while our immigration patterns are still below what would be prevalent within our European neighbours, they none-the-less represent a significant change within society. Our demographic profile is changing. It's important to mention that most of those immigrants who are coming into Ireland are returned emigrants – the children of emigrants who were born in the UK or the US for example – or they are economic migrants who have been brought into this country legally in order to boost our growing economy. Certainly many of these immigrants are asylum seekers but they are the minority.

The public attitude towards this changing social and economic context has been one that ranges from welcoming the diversity in our society to mass hysteria about the notion of being flooded by other cultures and by other people taking our jobs. The latter has been fuelled very much by media discourse in the area and was crystallised in the recent referendum which altered the citizenship status of children who are born to parents who do not have citizenship of this country. We also have some research

that indicates the prevalence of racist attitudes among the Irish public. We have the Amnesty International Report of 2001 which documented the very extensive experiences of racism by minority ethnic groups and we have the earlier research by Mícheál McGréil in 1996 which indicated that there was high level of prejudice amongst the Irish public towards certain minority ethnic groups including Travellers. Parallel with this broader change, we have a change in attitude towards children and children's rights in this country. That has derived from the signing of the *EU Convention on the Rights of the Child* in 1989 and crystallised in the publication of the *National Children's Strategy 2000*, which seeks to address issues to do with the rights of children and tries to have a holistic perspective on improving the economic and social welfare of children in Irish society. I will return to this towards the end of the presentation.

Developments in Education

I would like to narrow the focus now to our own specific area – education. The last ten years has been a period of rapid educational change. We had the Education Convention in 1994, the Green and White Papers in Education culminating in the Education Act 1998. As primary school teachers you have been involved in the implementation of the Revised Primary Curriculum (1999) and that has brought with it a lot of challenges to you as working teachers in the classroom. Underpinning a lot of this change has been a greater emphasis on whole school evaluation and school development planning. I mention these issues because all of these changes, coupled with the social and economical changes within the broader society have resulted in an intensification of the teaching role and a sense by teachers of role overload. Teaching is becoming a much more complex activity than it was ten, fifteen, twenty years ago when perhaps we entered the profession first.

So what has all of this got to do with ethnicity in schooling? Well, on top of all this change, we have a change in the pupil profile. The pupils that are coming into our classroom are increasingly an ethnically diverse group and we also have the integration of children with special needs which creates its own level of challenge and opportunity. So the teachers and pupils are embedded in this changing social landscape and it is in that broader context that I want to frame some of the discussion on ethnicity and schooling.

I work predominantly with the professional development of teachers. In trying to devise a programme that looked at issues around interculturalism in education five years ago, I realised that there was very little research on this area that was actually coming from within Ireland. There was plenty of research coming from the US, for example, or the UK and I was concerned that my work with teachers would be informed by research that had been conducted on the ground in the schools here in

Ireland. So myself, with Dr Máirín Kenny and Eileen McNeela, conducted a study into how teachers and pupils on the ground were coping and dealing with this changing context within Irish primary and second level schools. We selected eight schools in total, three primary and five second level. The minority ethnic enrolment in each of these schools varied from four percent to 24% of total school enrolments. We interviewed 52 teachers and we had group interviews with 311 students. We also attended group meetings of language support networks. So this was a very intensive, qualitative study that was about trying to give voice to the experiences of pupils and teachers within the school system.

For the purposes of this presentation I have tried to narrow the major findings and hope that in some way they will stimulate your discussion groups afterwards. I have identified the following issues for teachers:

- 1 the practical day to day challenges that emerged in trying to deal with the greater diversity in the classrooms;
- 1 issues to do with the challenges to school ethos and sense of identity and community within the school;
- 1 issues that cut across relationships with parents and the relationship with students;
- 1 issues about how you teach and learn within a classroom and within a school that has a greater proportion of ethnic minority students within it.

PRACTICAL CHALLENGES

Looking at the practical daily challenges, the sort of issues that emerged related to admissions policy. Many of the schools involved had undergone rapid change. They had gone from being relatively homogenous schools ethnically to suddenly having perhaps five, ten, fifteen percent of their student enrolment from a cultural and ethnic background different to the norm of the school. This was often talked about in terms of an explosion for the school itself. There were issues to do with the placement of children when children arrived in the school – what was the appropriate classroom for them to be placed in? What was the children's ability, what was their readiness for learning? Children often had different prior school experiences – their age would recommend that perhaps they should go into fourth class but perhaps their ability level/learning readiness was only equivalent to a first class child. So there were complex issues about which the schools had to make decisions.

There were issues to do with equipping the children for school. As with all children, children of migrant workers came from different socio-economic backgrounds. Some of them were the children of professional workers, working in hospitals and some of them were asylum seekers, so they had different demands and different needs in terms of equipping them appropriately for school. In addition to that was the provision of adequate support, which could revolve around issues to do with language, psycholog-

ical assessment, trauma, particularly if they were refugee children coming from politically torn societies. There were also issues to do with attendance of children. This emerged primarily because the children of migrant workers can often be a very transient population as they try to settle in different parts of the country. So often the attendance of children was quite erratic and that would have applied to Traveller children and to Roma children in particular.

A more fundamental issue perhaps was the temporary status of the language support teachers. This made it very difficult for schools to plan properly for their migrant populations and it has often meant untrained teachers in these positions. In my experience the schools, where an established teacher within the school was appointed to that role, were in a much better position to work effectively with the new children coming into the school.

SCHOOL ETHOS

The next challenge was to the school ethos. In Ireland, we have a denominational State funded system which creates its own challenges. The majority of schools are Catholic schools, and one of the essences of the Catholic faith is that this ethos will be reflected throughout the integrated curriculum. Some of these challenges to the school ethos can link into issues of identity and issues of community that I think are reflected in the following comments that I have taken from the study.

“Before they came we had a very clear community, we had an unspoken and unarticulated understanding about where they were coming from, their culture and background but you couldn’t assume the same about these people.” (which were the migrant people within the school).

“Can we have a Catholic multi-denominational multi-cultural school?”

I think the phrasing of that question is very much an Irish solution to an Irish problem and I will come back to that later.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

Once the children were in the school, teachers said that it was quite difficult to sustain contact with the parents. They attributed this to a number of factors, the primary one being the language barrier. Where the children came from a country where English was not one of the main languages, the child often became the vehicle for communication between the parent and the teacher – a situation which was not satisfactory for the teacher. There was also the issue of some parents being suspicious of State institutions and being wary of any contact the school wanted to have with them. This sense of distrust, or ignorance or lack of awareness of what the school was actually about was fuelled by, for example, a lack of information booklets that could be

provided to parents that would lay out clearly the structure of the school system in the person's own language. There were also cultural issues that arose for the teachers and the parents. Cultures that had a very strong patriarchal tradition proved challenging; for example, when parents wished that their daughter in a co-ed school would not be allowed to sit beside a boy, or where only the father would come to talk to the teacher but would want to speak to a male teacher rather than a female teacher. I think we have to remember that it was not too long ago that we lived in a similar society ourselves!

There were also issues to do with child rearing practices. Sometimes pressure was put on children to do very well in school, therefore teachers were reluctant to communicate with the parents for fear of increasing pressure on the child. There were issues in relation to corporal punishment. However, I wouldn't want to give the impression that corporal punishment is only something that is administered within minority ethnic groupings because we also have it within the majority settled population. But how these issues of language and culture intersected was to create the notion among teachers of minority ethnic parents as a breed apart, strange, unknown and outside the teacher's typical frame of reference. Similar issues were raised with respect to Traveller parents – the relationship for teachers who had come into contact with Traveller parents was one that was often characterised by fragility and uncertainty. It is also important to focus on the majority parents. In this respect principals in the schools often felt that they were acting as negotiators in the relationships within the wider community between the majority and the minority parents.

Some of this is probably best illustrated through the comments of the teachers themselves. A language support teacher in Oakleaf primary school said:

“You see it is all so new to us, I will bring you out at two o'clock and you will see it is like the United Nations out there, it is so new for our other parents as well so there is this suspicion, well not suspicion, but ignorance really.”

So she was speaking not only of herself as a teacher and other teachers in the school but also of the majority of parents in the community.

“I have had a few parents complaining about my favouring the foreigners to put it politely, it sounds petty but if you could hear an incensed mother saying that the place had gone to the dogs since they came, chewing you out in front of the other children and parents.”

TEACHER PUPIL RELATIONS

In terms of the relations with students, in general teachers tended to be very positive about the new type of student that was coming into their classroom. They were defined as being a teacher's dream and research internationally on migrant children

does indicate that they tend to be very ambitious – they want to work hard and make the most of the opportunities afforded to them within their host countries. However distinctions were drawn and teachers tended to speak much more negatively about Traveller children and Roma children. Irish Travellers to many of the teachers were as foreign to them as many of the immigrant children and they spoke of them in deficit terms. What was evident from the teachers’ talk when you went into their views and experiences, was the struggle within the teachers themselves over the dichotomy between ‘them and us’ in times of stress. When the teachers were experiencing the intensification of their role that I talked about earlier, they were inclined to separate their focus on ‘them’ the foreigners, and ‘us’ – ‘our children’ – the children that we should really be spending our time on. That was something that they felt guilty about but it was something that they struggled over. Again the comments reveal the sort of points that I am talking about:

“They are extremely well behaved, courteous, polite and dedicated. They are eager to get on and make something of their future.”

Teachers, particularly in disadvantaged schools where there was a high prevalence of minority ethnic students, spoke about the way the school had changed – that they were dealing now with children who really wanted to learn and who added something very positive to the climate within the school.

“Without a doubt they do bring their own difficulties, setting them up and looking after them, I know we should do it but it takes a bit of time away from our own.”

So who is defined as ‘us’ and who is defined as ‘other’?

“In general Travellers are at the bottom the class, they are bright kids but they wouldn’t have the stories at home, the language, the same drive, whatever.”

That is a very interesting comment because it is coming from a deficit perspective and defining these children, in spite of being bright, as not actually achieving well in school. I see a contradiction within that.

In terms of issues to do with teaching and diversity, there was a tendency for the teachers to prioritise language over cultural issues. There were a number of reasons for this, primary among them was the view that this was the best way to serve the interests of these children. If equipped with the English language it was felt that they would cope with the curriculum and integrate successfully with their peers and the wider community. However, there were reservations, particularly from the language support teachers, about the English programme they were given to teach to these students. They felt it was inadequate for primary school children. Underpinning a lot of the teachers’ views was the desire for these minority ethnic children to be absorbed into the majority culture of the school, a concern that children would not be made to

feel distinctive or different in any way and a discomfort over knowing how to deal with this cultural and ethnic difference. It is far easier to focus on issues to do with language and the assimilation of the children into the norm rather than to focus on issues to do with cultural and ethnic diversity. Part of that came from the teachers' sense that they hadn't the resources, the knowledge or the expertise to deal with the changing profile of the pupils within their classrooms. They were working very much within a policy vacuum and they wanted to know more. What the teachers implemented was what Connolly has referred to as a form of pragmatic multiculturalism. In other words, in an effort to be child-centred, for example, where a situation arose in a discussion in geography then the teacher would include a minority ethnic child and encourage them to talk about their experiences in their home country, or if there was a religious celebration they would try and talk about that. But it was very much on an individual or ad-hoc basis.

“Everything is so new, all these cultures being introduced to me, I need more information and more understanding.”

“Language support is a band aid to satisfy a need, it doesn't address the problems.”

RACISM AND ANTI-RACISM

Another area in terms of teaching and diversity is racism and anti-racism. When the issue was raised with primary school teachers they were inclined to say:

“Primary school children really don't know anything about racism and I really don't think we should be talking about this sort of thing with them.”

There was a paternalistic attitude towards children. They could see the children playing in the yard and it didn't seem to be an issue. What I would say underpinning that attitude is a discomfort or silence around issues to do with cultural and ethnic diversity – a discomfort among teachers about acting politically correct and not knowing how to handle situations of racism when they arose. There was a tendency, where teachers had come across racism in the primary school, to individualise it, to attribute it to a behaviour deficit within the child who had engaged, for example, in racist name-calling and talk about it in the context of anti-bullying within the school rather than to frame it in terms of racism and anti racism.

There were, however, group distinctions and the teachers were aware that Traveller children experienced some hostility from their settled counterparts and that Roma children could also experience some hostility. Again the comments of the teachers exemplify a lot of this:

“The seeds are there. I have heard a few comments from children in 2nd or 3rd

calling names. Rather than make a big issue out of it we let it go. You have to decide if this is once off or going to continue, so you don't even want it to be once off. I don't like any bitchiness in my class or hatred towards other people as I can see what affects the child. There is a lot of difference in my class but I see past that, I see all the similarities."

There is a tendency to focus on the sameness among the children rather than to emphasise the diversity.

"Foreign national children play with the Irish outside of school more so than the Travellers, they would find out about a birthday party before the Travellers were invited. You still get that thing where the others don't want to sit beside a Traveller child. And there is a positive anti-racist policy but there wouldn't be a positive integration policy. Well what could you do? They integrate in the class but when they have their breaks..."

That whole area of children's social world outside the classroom is a pet subject of mine because I think it is an area that teachers deliberately do not focus on. What they focus on is what takes place in the classroom – that is their primary professional focus. But there is a lot that goes on in the school yard that they may not be aware of.

I think it is very useful, not only from a children's rights perspective, but also to act as a counter balance to the perspective and views of teachers, to focus on what the children said within the research. Children generally had a mixed response to an increase in diversity in their classrooms. When they spoke about it positively, and many of them did, they spoke about the opportunity of making new friends. They also spoke about how useful it was to have children from other cultures when you are doing a geography or a history project. However, the children's understanding of ethnic diversity was very much embedded in their concepts of difference and normality. For the children, to be normal was to belong to the Catholic white settled population, and to be outside that frame of reference meant that you were different or other. How this influenced the children's interaction can be understood through a more deeper analysis of child culture and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in children's social world. The children's perceptions of inclusion, exclusion, sameness and difference influenced how they interacted with children who were ethnically different than themselves. It is also important to focus on children's perceptions of racism and in their discussions of racism they tended to attribute racism only to issues around skin colour – that racism was the verbal abuse of a child who had a black skin colour in particular. We had very interesting discussions about the children's perception of skin colour and the status attributes given to children of different skin colour. In that sense Travellers are different because Travellers were not perceived to be subject to racial abuse because they were not a different colour, and if Travellers were subjected to hostile treatment this was because they were deficit in some way rather than being ethnically different.

The following comments are from children speaking about Muslim children in their school:

“Muslims are different, they go on fast that means they are not allowed to eat. The Muslims they do fast that’s all that’s wrong with them.”

“Girls in my class don’t know I’m a Traveller, I’m ashamed I don’t want to tell them.”

I think that is a very powerful and heart-wrenching statement from a Traveller child. That interview was conducted in a group interview with a number of Traveller children and it was a very interesting discussion between those Traveller children who tended to isolate this particular child because she seemed to be ashamed of her Traveller identity. But it is a very powerful statement about the invisibility of Travellers within our society when we have a young primary school Traveller child who feels that she has to deny her identity as a Traveller in order to be socially accepted among her peers. In terms of child culture and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, being the same and having some status issue is very important to children in their social world. One comment from a minority ethnic boy was:

“Please people who are listening to this, pick up some sport or you get slagged, you have to be good at sport.”

And another child said:

“I wouldn’t like to be a Muslim in any school.”

“Why?”

“I just don’t want to get picked on by anybody. I wouldn’t like to be a Protestant either.”

What that indicates is the discourses that children are buying into. There are discourses of ethnicity that refer to the Muslim population but also tying very much into discourses around Englishness and Protestantism that is linked to our own cultural history.

Name calling was very prevalent among the children – something that the teachers were not aware of at all. In every single interview that we had with primary school children, they were able to call the names that children were called in the school yard.

“Are there names that people are called that hurt the most?”

“Yes, they call us the black people, chocolate boys.”

“Is that sixth class boys?”

“Yes, and fifth class and second class too.”

In terms of the children's understanding of racism, what is a racist?

"You're white and there is coloured people and you don't like any colouredly people or you're black and you don't like any white people. Michael Jackson is a racist because he changed his colour, he got all the surgery done because he doesn't like black people."

I think the important point to be raised here is the children's level of awareness, the fact that they do talk about these issues within a context where teachers themselves are uncomfortable about talking to the children about this. In the absence of constructive discussion about this, children are forming their impressions based on what they get from the media and obviously discussions that they would have in the wider community. There is a complexity in the response of the children and I have taken some comments here about a Nigerian girl, Eva, who was doing very well in school.

"I heard you saying there that Eva was a racist, what do you mean by that?"

"She doesn't like white people. She does get along with white people but sometimes she doesn't like to be their friend. She thinks she's all smart and all and great because she is from a different country, she knows her Irish the most, she thinks she is all popular."

"It is not fair at all to say that she is a racist because she is not, she does like white people, she doesn't get on with some of them, that doesn't mean that she is a racist."

There are a number of intersecting issues in that particular conversation. The first is that the context of that quote was that Eva didn't lend one of the children her rubber and because there was that disagreement between them, issues of racism were drawn into the children's perception of what was happening. Eva didn't lend her rubber "because she is a racist because I'm a white child". But when you go further into it, there are issues to do with the fact that Eva has stepped out of the mark a little bit. Eva thinks she is all smart and great because she's from a different country and she also knows her Irish which is not something somebody not from Ireland should do – Irish children should know their Irish better. In fact, that was one of the comments that was made by some of the teachers, that these minority ethnic children also tended to surpass the settled white Catholic children in schools in the learning of Irish because they were very familiar with learning a number of different languages.

There are a number of intersecting discourses there feeding into the children's perceptions of racism and attributions of racist terminology to what the children are saying. Also from that comment there is a positive note which is that one of the children was sticking up for Eva. Travellers are different.

“People in this school are racists, most people, I just stick up for them. My nephew is black so how could I be racist if there is a black person in my family.”

“What about Travellers? Are there any here?”

“Yes, and I slag Andy who is a Traveller child.”

“Why do you slag him?” “Because he is a little knacker.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means you’re scum/scumbag.”

Now this is the same child who said how could he be racist because there is a black child in his family. So the thinking is that it is fine to racially abuse Travellers, it is not racism at all, it is actually because of a deficiency within Traveller cultural itself. That is an issue that needs to be tackled head on.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I would say, in terms of both the teachers’ and the children’s perspectives, we have contradictory perceptions in the talk of both groups. On one hand, there is a welcoming of diversity within Irish society but on the other hand there is sense that it is threatening, it is unknown and we don’t really know how to deal with it. Prominent in the teachers’ talk was a discourse of need and normality, a focus on the needs of these children trying to make them as normal as possible while making them the same. Therefore, the reference to ethnicity and interculturalism is not grounded in the context of rights. I refer you back to the start of the presentation where I talked about Ireland being a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the National Children Strategy. We need to move away from a focus on needs to embracing the notion of rights of both minority and majority ethnic children. It is also very important that when we are talking about issues to do with ethnicity and interculturalism, it is not simply something that applies to minority ethnic children. Just as gender studies is not simply something that applies to women only. Ethnicity and interculturalism apply to all schools regardless of whether they have a minority ethnic pupil population or not. I leave you with some questions, one of which was phrased by a primary school principal.

“Can we have Catholic multi-denominational, multi-cultural schools?”

“How can we cope with increasing cultural and ethnic diversity in a school context where particular denominations are feeding through all aspects of the primary school curriculum?”

“How can schools welcome and respond creatively to all levels of diversity among their students?”

“How can schools best address the climate in which racism develops?”

This presentation began with making the difference. My final commentary is if we want to make a difference to what happens in our schools we need to consider the whole issue of ethnicity and interculturalism on a number of different levels. The first level is national policy. At the time that we did this research, teachers were working very much within a policy vacuum where the response of the State was reactive rather than proactive. That is beginning to change and we have the development of a national action plan on racism and interculturalism in education. In relation to curricular policy, the NCCA is presently developing intercultural guidelines for schools. We also need to focus on issues of leadership and professional development within schools particularly in relation to issues to do with ethnicity and interculturalism. There are also implications for ourselves as teachers in the classrooms in terms of the policy that we have of integration and inclusion and respect for diversity in our practice.

PANEL DISCUSSION

The final session of the day was a plenary session at which delegates were given an opportunity to ask questions of the panel comprising:

Dr Dympna Devine, UCD.

Anne Ryan, Principal teacher, Tallaght.

Itayi Viriri, Irish Refugee Council.

Catherine Joyce Collins, Irish Traveller Movement.

Colm Ó Cuanacháin, Amnesty International.

Emma Dineen, District XII Education Committee.

Máire Masterson, Cathaoirleach Education Committee.

The following includes an edited transcript of some of the main questions and responses. Prior to the session beginning, each of the panellists gave a brief overview of their background.

Ann Ryan, St Mark's Junior NS, Tallaght

A Principal's Perspective / Story

I am speaking in my capacity as Principal Teacher of a Junior school with 500 pupils – 155 of whom do not speak English as their mother tongue. About 22 countries are represented. So for the next few minutes I am going to tell you how we have managed the challenge, give you a taste of the frustrations and point out how it could be so much better with just a little more commitment from the powers that be!

Our strengths are common to all primary schools – staff who are highly skilled in developing language in all our pupils and a revised curriculum with its emphasis on oral language and multiple intelligence. The SET (Special Education Teacher – new system of allocating special education support to schools) view of resourcing children with special needs has allowed us move and think outside the box thus meeting the needs of the child rather than categorising the child's needs according to the teacher's job title. Core to our efforts is an ethos that is welcoming and cherishing of everyone coming to our school, thus reducing feelings of nervousness and isolation which are the dual demons of ethnic minorities. Nothing extraordinary there!

BACKGROUND

In 1998, when I took over as Principal of St Mark's JNS there were 18 international pupils with no additional staffing. Today we have three extra temporary teachers who are endeavouring to meet the needs of more than 150 pupils from our new commu-

nities. I should emphasise nothing came as a right. It only came after a fight! Nothing new there!

With a total lack of guidelines we drew up our own policy on intercultural education – it is organic. The INTO did issue helpful guidelines which we incorporated. I concur with the notion that all schools should have a policy. Integrate Ireland do great work and have made a valuable contribution to ESL⁴ teachers. While almost one third of our total student population do not speak English as their mother tongue many have actually been born in Ireland but have existed in isolated cultural cocoons. This year we have 32 pupils in each of our four junior infant classes: ten of whom do not have English in any meaningful way. This creates a bit of a challenge for the teacher! But it must be a terrifying shock for the child.

RATIO

I would like to mention the word Ratio here. It is fully acknowledged by the DES that our Traveller children belong to an ethnic minority. That ratio is roughly 1:14. No such ratio is applied to the children from our new communities. Indeed if the ratio were the same, instead of three over-worked teachers, I would have an extra ten teachers on my staff!

OUR MODEL

ESL Teacher 1 is our language teacher. She deals solely with junior infants, and her room is based on a play therapy model with strong emphasis on toys which will elicit language. Sand and water provide a therapeutic tool for the disturbed/traumatised child. Many children initially have a silent period while they come to terms with settling into school and becoming secure. ESL Teacher 2 scaffolds international and Irish children from senior infants and first class. ESL Teacher 3 scaffolds first and second class children. The emphasis is on oral language development and literacy.

THINGS WE HAVE FOUND HELPED

First impressions are crucial so every effort is made to make all newcomers welcome. With this in mind we use translated booklets from Dublin Corporation, gestures, smiles, sign language and even pigeon French if appropriate. Interpreters are still not a realistic option – but we use other parents with the minority language if possible. We offer second hand uniforms to all our pupils.

All our teachers try to meet the needs of the new child arriving mid term who may need intense one-to-one or total language immersion. Children are placed in age appropriate classes when they are enrolled – give or take one year. We have found that withdrawal of children from class in small groups, though a flawed model, offers the best way forward. It allows for small groups to receive intense intervention. Where possible children with a good facility in language are taken out to model language in

the small group. However, some of these children's parents do not support this, feeling that their child may be missing out. We are very aware that many of our parents, while extremely well educated and qualified in their mother tongue, may not be able to read English, so we try to stock dual language books.

OTHER INITIATIVES

The Vincent de Paul have been heroic in actually walking the walk, as well as talking the talk of integrating new communities. They subsidise our swimming and basketball programmes. The Vincent de Paul helped us reduce the isolation of some parents by funding adult English classes, run by some of our teachers. These classes became social outlets particularly for some of our mothers from the more fundamental religions. Mother and toddler mornings, and a family language class were also organised. Our annual Arts Week provides a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the diversity of our new communities, while at the same time making us more strongly aware of our own identity. So Ceilís and African story tellers might be running in tandem. The School Completion Programme has offered us the added bonus of a Breakfast Club and After School Club where children are helped with homework.

NARROW VIEW

The DES takes an extraordinarily narrow view. They believe that our international children require help in only one area – language. The DES believes two years language intervention will make all children sufficiently fluent to cope with life in a strange culture. Teacher observation, Micra T and NRIT test results are evidence that this is not so. Our international children and their parents need far more than language support – their needs are emotional, social and educational to say nothing of cultural and financial.

Year after year principals, like myself, are forced to fill out census forms indicating the level of English and length of intervention for each child. If a child has had more than two years help (this might only be 30 minutes a day, three to four days per week) they are deemed undeserving of further intervention. The appointments are only temporary. Boards of management receive no extra capitation for children from new communities who are, for the greater-part in our school, totally dependent on social welfare. This puts a huge financial strain on us.

OTHER CHALLENGES

We grapple with the very real emotional, cultural and social needs of children from our new communities. Keeping up the overall educational standards is a constant battle when so much time goes into just simply explaining language. We are so stretched meeting oral language and other needs that we cannot adequately bridge the maths gap for our less able pupils. In short, maths standards are suffering.

The religious challenge, we are more aware of standing tall and defining ourselves as a Catholic school whilst at the same time espousing tolerance. That tolerance can be sometimes tested – for example, some of the fundamental religions find shaking hands with a woman unthinkable. While this has only happened a few times, it is still a shock when it does occur.

Minding our language is an ongoing challenge. Racial prejudice is skin deep when under pressure, and we have to be vigilant and aware. We actively promote a language of caring.

The cultural shock is enormous. Our various new communities have much in common – loss of country/past/family. In short many are suffering bereavement. They all hope for a better future for their children. If you have ever travelled in a country where you could not read or speak the language you will have some small idea of how hard and exhausting it must be for our new communities.

Parental discipline has presented an ongoing concern for us. Some of the families from our new communities have a 50s style view of discipline. Misbehaviour in school reported to parents by the teacher can result in an out-of-proportion response by the parents. Negotiating this can be difficult.

THE POSITIVES

We live history/geography and SPHE in a vital organic way. We have multi-lingual parents and pupils – many have up to four languages, now including Gaeilge. We have new cultures, costumes, hair styles and foods. Our school is no longer a two dimensional black and white place, it's a multi-layered glorious technicolour place where we are all learning about each other and how much we have in common. We have learned so much about ourselves, we have also discovered that no matter where you come from the primary need in all of us is to be loved and to belong. We have felt privileged to be a part of such a new and exciting adventure.

CONCLUSION

In our school we seek to create an oasis of welcome and security thus reducing those two demons of fear and isolation. We try to give our new communities a surefooted start. We tweak, redraw and reshape our model on a regular basis – so that the model that has emerged is one that bends to fit the child. To end on a philosophical note, I think it is fair to say that we are trying to move forward together in our new school community embedding as we go those values we believe will make for a more tolerant Ireland for us all.

Itayi Viriri – Irish Refugee Council Policy Officer

I would like to start by commenting on something I realised when going through the documents for this conference; that Ireland is already moving at a very encouraging and commendable pace in terms of welcoming other communities.

Simply looking at some of the terminology used, for example, I notice that we are now talking about intercultural aspects of education instead of multi-cultural. If we look at examples from the United Kingdom – England has had people from other communities and ethnic minorities since the 60s or even from the end of the second world war – some of their multicultural endeavours did not work out, hence you see problems in places like Burnley.

It is very encouraging to see that, in Ireland, you have already moved towards interculturalism. This, to me means that on one hand you are accepting and recognising that people do come from various and very diverse backgrounds, and on the other hand there is encouragement of interaction instead of people keeping to themselves in their various enclaves. So that for me is a very encouraging aspect of where we are heading.

The Irish Refugee Council is one of the main bodies dealing with refugee issues. We have the sometimes unenviable task of trying to change certain perceptions which are not conducive to the welfare of asylum seekers and refugees. I am sure some of you are aware of some of the challenges asylum seekers face and you have all, at some stage, heard the various urban myths and gross exaggerations about their entitlements and their legality. This, of course is not unique to Ireland, but across the EU and the rest of the developed world where you have people coming from the developing world to seek refuge be it for political or other reasons.

Because of these challenges, our main focus is to provide correct information and training for interested parties, in this case, primary school teachers, who want to know more about asylum seekers and refugees. Issues we look at include:

- 1 The asylum process and the relevant legislation?
- 1 What are the effects of the asylum process on the asylum seekers and the surrounding community?
- 1 Fact vs fiction – Debunking the myths?
- 1 What are the policy measures that currently prevail and why are they in place?

Because there is so much incorrect information out there, urban legends emerge and are perpetuated. For example, you hear one story in Kilkenny about an asylum seeker throwing away a buggy “because she can easily get another” and you then hear the exact same story also happening in Donegal. Because of the number of misconceptions and myths that are perpetuated through public discourse, we produced a video and an accompanying workbook for teachers, as part of the Civics, Social and Personal Education (CSPE) programme in secondary schools. The resource pack was

produced with the full support and assistance of the CSPE support team.

We are currently in the process of sending out the education packs to all secondary schools and other interested institutions and organisations. We would be delighted to provide the resource pack to primary schools if it is required. The pack consists of a straight-forward depiction of the asylum process, outlining what asylum seekers go through and the relevant legislation. The accompanying booklet gives the various techniques that I am sure you all are familiar with, for imparting the knowledge in a very clear and concise way. Once schools have the video and resource pack, we often get requests to come in and give a presentation, going through the video explaining certain issues and then listening to the views of the pupils. We have received very encouraging reviews from the schools where we have carried out these exercises. We, of course would welcome working closely with the INTO in distributing this resource or collaborating on issues of mutual concern. We do recognise that a significant number of asylum seeker and refugee children are now in some of your classrooms and, therefore, we would like you to know we are there to assist, should you need our expertise.

I recently held a training session in Galway for a fantastic group of primary school teachers, discussing asylum issues and what experiences and challenges they faced having refugee/asylum seekers children in their classes. Even though I was conducting the training I found it very useful interacting with this group. They were very forthcoming and there were a lot of things that they wanted to know more about the asylum process and what it meant for their pupils and their families. The Irish Refugee Council would be very interested in carrying out this kind of training more often. We do this type of information/training sessions with various other bodies – we have done it with employers' bodies, city and county councillors and certain parliamentary committees in the Oireachtas. However, we are an NGO⁵ and we come when we are invited. If we are not asked obviously, we are not going to force ourselves on people!

We get various reports on what is happening around the country in terms of how children are being welcomed in the classrooms. We produced and presented a series for RTE TV this year called Mono, and one of the programmes looked at the work that is happening in a school in Ballinasloe. This school actually won an award for their intercultural activities and I think the school was a very good example of what can be achieved in the classroom – perhaps some of the teachers from that school are here today and I'm sure would be happy to share their experiences with you, their colleagues.

In summing up, it is very encouraging to see what is happening across Irish classrooms. There is such fantastic integration happening at this level and it is all thanks to the work that you and your schools are doing. But of course, more needs to be done and the Irish Refugee Council would like to be of assistance. We are there if you need us, so let's explore how we can work together.

Catherine Joyce Collins – Irish Traveller Movement (ITM)

The Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) was established in 1990 as a limited company and is a representative organisation for Travellers and Traveller organisations in Ireland, North and South, and in the UK. All Traveller organisations throughout the country are members of ITM. We work at two levels, one at policy development and formulation and the second with our members in terms of ensuring that they are up to speed with policy developments and also that they are involved in the process of implementing national policy at local level. The main areas of work that we are involved in are accommodation, equality, legal, health and education issues.

There are approximately 30,000 Travellers living in Ireland – 26,000 is the official number as your report suggests. However, the census doesn't acknowledge Travellers who are nomadic. It also doesn't acknowledge Travellers who live in local authority standard houses as Travellers and there is an issue of Travellers not identifying themselves even in the ethnic identifier question in the census. For these reasons, we would argue that the true number of Travellers in Ireland is closer to 30,000. A quarter of the population of all Travellers live in the greater Dublin area and the rest are dispersed throughout the country.

Before I go on to discuss the key issues and the policies around Traveller education, I want you to bear in mind that €42 million was spent last year on Traveller education. Travellers have asked in our consultation sessions, "if you take into account the number of Travellers that are in this country, would we not be able to provide private education for Travellers the whole way through their learning cycle out of that money?" The question that we find ourselves trying to answer is what is the best use of that money and that resource in terms of the outcomes for Travellers – not for the schools, not for the Department, not for settled people, but for Travellers. For Travellers who are going through the education system, what is the best use of that resource?

The following is an approximate breakdown of what that money is currently used for:

- 1 €1 million for pre-schools for Travellers.
- 1 Resource teachers for Travellers (approximately 519 mostly fulltime posts) cost about €18.4million.
- 1 €4.9million for teaching hours at second level.
- 1 €1.46million for capitation grants for primary schools.
- 1 €1,845million for Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers.
- 1 €245 million for junior training centres and €12 million for senior training centres for Travellers.

So there is a lot of money and a lot of resources going into Traveller education, but Travellers are asking "where are the outcomes in terms of our children?" In addition,

“why are our children not progressing through the whole school cycle?”

POLICY

In terms of policy at a national level for Travellers there are a number of key reports that I want to cite. In 1985 the *Task Force Report on Travellers* looked at all areas concerned with Travellers and made key recommendations in relation to the government’s response to Travellers issues with a time scale of five to ten years to implement the recommendations. One third of the Task Force Report focussed on Travellers in education – preschool, primary school or adult education and the majority of those recommendations have still not been implemented. One significant issue arising from the Task Force Report was that the Visiting Teacher Service was increased and we have seen an increase in Travellers accessing primary school education.

The other most significant policy for us was the 1995 *White Paper in Education*, which looked at cultural difference and how to cater for difference within the school learning environment and the teaching environment. Another was the development of the Traveller Joint Working Group on Traveller education as a mechanism for Traveller organisations to put Traveller education and learning issues on the agenda of the Department of Education and Science and the government. The most significant work that we have been involved with at policy level is the development of the Education Strategy. The following are a number of key areas being focussed on in the Education Strategy for Travellers:

- 1 One of the key priorities is a programme for inclusion of Travellers at all levels in mainstream education and training provision.
- 1 The acknowledgement of interculturalism and anti-racism is key for us. We have been lobbying for years to have interculturalism and anti-racism included as part of training, the curriculum and the thinking within pre-schools, primary schools and adult learning.
- 1 The examination of existing provision and where the resources are actually going is key to the strategy. Looking to the future in terms of the best use of those resources.

PRESCHOOLS

In relation to pre-schools, one of the priorities or maybe challenges is that they should be brought into line with the Early Start programmes. Travellers’ pre-schools only receive funding for a teacher from the Department and sometimes not all the funding, but maybe 70 – 90%. They don’t have classroom assistants as standard, they don’t have premises in some cases and a lot of the time is spent on trying to fundraise for resources to keep schools running. The Department of Education and Science carried out a review of Traveller preschools recently though many of its recommendations have yet to be put in place.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS

While the number of Traveller children has increased in primary schools, there is still a problem with attainment and achievement and progression onto second level education. In addition, there is the issue of Traveller children in primary school who are almost invisible. Traveller culture or identity is not acknowledged or raised and if it is, it is raised in a negative way – for example, when somebody calls a Traveller names in the yard or there is an incident between Traveller and settled children in the yard or where Travellers are portrayed negatively in books. So the way in which children are being taught in schools is something that has to be looked at.

SECOND LEVEL

There is the issue of progression on to second level education from primary. If children don't achieve in primary schools then it makes the progression on to second level and achievement in second level very difficult, if not impossible. One of the serious concerns is that if you have 100 Travellers entering into the first year of second level education, you would very often find that out of that 100, probably ten might complete the first part of the cycle and do the Junior Certificate. Very few will progress on to the sixth year. As a result of this poor retention level, very few Travellers make it through the whole school system and progress on to third level education. There is a serious concern around access to education in the first place, then attainment and progression through the second level cycle, the lack of resources and support, and the issues of discrimination and isolation.

THIRD LEVEL

If you haven't got it right at primary school and secondary school then progression on to third level education for Travellers is virtually impossible. Last year's statistics showed that there were just 16 travellers in third level education, some of whom had gone through Access programmes or who had gone back as mature students. The ITM has serious concerns in relation to the number of Travellers who, because of their learning experiences or circumstances, are incapable of going on to third level and completing the school system cycle.

CONCLUSION

There is a range of other issues around adult learning, which I will not deal with here. There is a whole alternative education and adult learning section that I would see as 'the sticking plaster' for the mainstream flaws and the pitfalls that Travellers are falling into. Currently, Travellers find themselves going into segregated services in training centres – either junior training centres or senior training centres. Alternatively, they go into Traveller projects, to adult literacy programmes or personal development courses where they can learn basic literacy skills. This is a whole area that I think needs to be

looked at, particularly in light of accreditation and progression on to mainstream and further adult education and training.

I would like to say specifically that there is an area where we see that Traveller organisations have a role to play within the school system and that is as educational providers. If you don't have Travellers coming through the school system, when are there going to be Traveller teachers or Traveller tutors in the training centres, pre-schools, primary and secondary schools? This is a huge concern not only in terms of what kind of education we receive but also in the way that Travellers are taught. We need support workers in all schools to ensure that Travellers are being taught in an appropriate cultural way.

The last point that I will leave you with is that I think teachers are in the unfortunate position of having to deliver, in my opinion, a flawed system to Travellers. The Education Strategy is not going to solve all the problems in terms of Traveller education, but I think it is a big step in terms of looking at Traveller education from two perspectives. One is inclusion into the mainstream and the second is value of outcomes for Travellers. If we get that right, I think we will see progress made by both Traveller children and Travellers throughout the whole education system.

Colm Ó Cuanacháin, Amnesty International,

Human rights education: the process towards understanding and action that underpins interculturalism in the school system.

Human rights education offers the essential framework for learning about, in and through interculturalism. Intercultural education seeks to challenge the injustices and inequalities that exist in our world. It looks to transform the way people see the realities around them, by encouraging them to examine, question and change their environment. This approach is rooted in the idea that education is about knowledge, attitudes and skills; that education is experiential; that education is participative; that education is transformational.

Human rights serve to define the enabling environment where just such an approach to education can thrive. They are not just the ends but the means by which global justice and non-discrimination can be realised; they serve to nurture a values system that can be applied critically, continuously and effectively.

Human rights provide the mandate, the methods and the model for an educational process that fosters understanding and action on intercultural issues.

THE MANDATE – HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

Human rights education is enshrined in international law. We all have human rights as defined in inter-governmental declarations and treaties, and included therein is the

enabling right to know our rights. There is a corresponding obligation on governments to fulfil this right by providing education about and for human rights. This fact cannot be overstated – there is an international legal responsibility on the State to ensure people know their rights. Yet, how many educators are aware of this? The gap between the commitment to human rights education by states on the one hand, and the low level of activity to address this on the other is enormous.

Indeed every major international human rights treaty binds states to educate citizens about its content. When agreeing these legal instruments politicians chose to include education for a very good reason, because rights mean nothing unless people know about them, justice means nothing unless it is understood.

The *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, for example, is the most widely endorsed international legal instrument, with all but one country (the USA) having ratified it. The Convention provides both the rationale and the framework for human rights education. For children to have respect for rights, their own and those of others, they must first know and understand them. There must be opportunities provided for children to learn about human rights. In this way the enormous potential of human rights can be realised.

Osler and Starkey (1996) reflect on the commitment governments have made in Article 29 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, to directing education “towards the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and for the principles enshrined in the *Charter of the United Nations*”:

This undertaking by governments implies that teachers should know what is meant by “human rights and fundamental freedoms” and indeed, that they are familiar with the content of the *Charter of the United Nations*. Our experience is that few teachers would claim to be confident in the first area and that to find someone with even a passing knowledge of the UN Charter is very rare indeed (Osler and Starkey, 1996 : 119).

Despite this, and somewhat incredibly, there is little or no formal pre-service education for primary school teachers in the area of human rights education.

In fulfilment of this obligation states will tend in the first instance to rely on the formal education system, where they have a significant degree of control and influence. But it would be a mistake for governments to assume that they can rely only on the formal system, for adults, and children who are not in the school system have equal right to know their rights.

It is essential that teachers and others know that this international mandate for human rights education exists. It is important that they use the legal framework to underpin the advocacy initiatives for their projects on interculturalism and global issues. In pressing for education on interculturalism issues in a local school, or seeking support for youth theatre projects on the life of Travellers, it is with the compelling weight of international law behind us that we should demand a response.

THE METHODS – HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION AS METHODOLOGY

Human rights are not just ends, or solely a set of aspirations. Human rights are values to be lived by, and means to be lived through. To realise social, economic, cultural, civil, political and environmental rights, it is necessary that we all live these rights. Human rights underpin a process of teaching and learning in, for and about human rights (Heater, 1984). It is not enough to teach children about rights, but we must educate using human rights, and for human rights.

The concepts or principles that inform human rights include justice, equality, freedom, dignity, universality, indivisibility and interdependence. It is these same concepts that inform intercultural education, global education, citizenship studies, development education, education for mutual understanding, and indeed all experiential learning processes. So it is that human rights have enormous potential for education. Indeed Lynch (1992) goes so far as to assert that human rights inform the aims of education.

This synergy between education and human rights is determined primarily through methodologies, and not just content. Human rights approaches, based on openness, equality, transparency and fairness inform participative methodologies, through which learners experience an environment that is informed by human rights; where learning is participative; where listening, sharing and understanding are part of the process of attitudinal change that is intrinsic to education.

The approach inherent to human rights education, and arguably the only approach to learning that will not impede human rights, is a participatory process that embraces how learners 'think, feel and do' which is pivotal in developing mutual understanding and reciprocity (Starkey, 1987).

Learning for rights means working towards achieving them rather than offering the subject as an area of knowledge. It is, essentially, an approach to education encompassing the curriculum, the classroom organisation and teaching methodology as well as the school's ethos and organisation (Klein, 2001: 11).

In seeking to advance intercultural education through formal and informal education environments it is critical that we think not only of the content, but the process. It is the methodology and delivery that can impart the strongest message about how people should interact, and how people can act. It is in the area of methodology rather than content that teachers often enjoy greater curriculum autonomy. Educators and facilitators are given a broad degree of flexibility and control over the delivery of lessons or workshops. There are rarely gatekeepers or head-teachers who will veto participative methodologies, so it is incumbent on human rights friendly teachers to take the opportunities they get to inject democracy and sharing into their teaching approach.

THE MODEL – HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION AS THE BLUEPRINT

The environment, the atmosphere, the structure, the curriculum content, the

methodology, the decision-making processes, and virtually every dimension to the educational experience dictates the degree to which it will successfully advance human rights education. In this scenario the most appropriate method to progress human rights education is where the formal school system and the non-formal educational approach are interwoven.

Schools clearly have an important role to play in the process of disseminating the principles and provisions of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. As Osler and Starkey (1998: 313) argue, “they can do this not only by educating children about their rights as part of the formal school curriculum, but also by establishing themselves as model human rights communities”. The experiences from schools that have adopted this approach and introduced whole-school human rights education processes show that participative approaches lead to improvements in conduct, performance, relationships and other variables across school life (Cunningham, 1991). The children’s value systems, and their understanding and approach to global issues was developed.

Proponents of human rights education argue that children are more confident, happier, and have a stronger sense of self-esteem, when educated in a participative and democratic environment.

The whole ethos of the school or institution should empower pupils and students to stand up for fairness and what is morally right for self and for others, as well as taking responsibility for their actions (Singh, 1994: 98).

In a study at primary school level in the Republic of Ireland where a whole-school human rights approach was adopted, the children felt that they knew more about others and understood better the problems faced by other people, arising from the changes in their educational environment. Comments from the children included a view that the programme helped them to think about the world in a way that they had not in the past (Ó Cuanacháin, 2004).

Democracy is imperative to human rights, and creates the enabling environment within which human rights can thrive. Democracy cannot be learned in theory, but must be lived and experienced by the children, through the whole-school dynamic. Democracy, like human rights, is not just about knowledge and information. It is about attitudes and values, and has to be experienced to be understood. It cannot be learned in a hierarchical and autocratic teaching environment, but rather it will thrive in a democratic environment, the same learning environment that is conducive to nurturing understandings of intercultural issues.

In practice this means a policy approach at leadership level in the school to create an enabling environment informed by human rights, and where social and global issues both inform the dialogue, and are confronted as part of the process. These ideas draw on the concepts outlined by Thorne (1995):

- 1 A 'telling school': Children must be encouraged to tell, if they experience problems, if they have been bullied, or if they witness bullying.
- 1 A 'listening school': Children must know that we care, that we will listen, and respond (Thorne, 1995: 177).

The need for an education system informed by, and framed in human rights is a matter for the state, the Department of Education and Science, and school management. There is clear evidence of the educational effectiveness of whole-school human rights approaches, and as we have seen above there is an international legal requirement on governments to enable such systems. This goes right to the heart of issues such as power, culture and schooling, and it is these same issues that shape young citizens, and their attitudes to global injustice, interculturalism and inequality.

CONCLUSIONS

Educators with a mission to use their energy to encourage others to seek fairness in the classroom, in the community and in the world should see the human rights framework as a source of legitimacy and affirmation. They should use it as the legal justification and endorsement of their approach. Secondly, teachers and trainers seeking to promote equality and justice in society will understand that human rights are not just about what must be achieved, but how to achieve it. Finally, education can bring about lasting change through participative and dialogical engagement with people at the level of values, attitudes and understandings, but this requires a systemic and institutional overhaul of the system, informed by human rights.

DISCUSSION

Questions posed by delegates are in bold.

Máire Masterson, Cathaoirleach, Education Committee

There are two observations that I would like the panel to comment on.

1) I believe that with increased prosperity in Ireland, everything is now valued according to its contribution to the economy. The racism that is prevalent is based on the perception that migrants and Travellers are an economic drag on this country – nothing to do with their background or culture. The use of Shannon airport by US troops is another example of the economic imperative triumphing over moral and ethical arguments.

2) As teachers we need to look in our own back yards as to what constrains our practice and our efforts to be inclusive as primary school teachers – for example, next year I am faced with an enrolment policy which will exclude non-Catholic children from my school even though they are within walking distance of the school.

Itayi Viriri, Irish Refugee Council

Having been educated by the Christian Brothers in Zimbabwe for six years, the picture that was painted of Ireland by some of the Christian Brothers was very different to the reality that I experienced when I came here. I think once you concentrate on economic gain you tend to lose elsewhere. I suppose it is difficult to have both, but I am sure you get that everywhere.

Colm Ó Cuanacháin, Amnesty International

It is the case that our government is driving an economy and economic policy is the overarching parameter setting to their work as they see it and that is leaving an enormous amount of issues behind. All of the main social indicators in this country are going in the wrong direction. Suicide is increasing, homelessness is increasing, drug addiction is increasing, alcohol addiction is increasing, the prison population is increasing. Who is asking the questions about why that is happening? Who is asking the questions about where the human rights framework is in all of that? I think it is really important that those issues are being raised and raised very forcefully. Linked to that is the issue of religion and education and schooling. I think we do in Ireland have an education system, which is in reality wholly private at primary level. It's owned, governed and run to a large extent by private bodies, which are the churches. That is almost unique in Europe and it does raise enormous questions for teachers trying to

preside over an intercultural, equal and just teaching environment. I think these are huge questions for Ireland as a whole and they go right to the heart of power and schooling and power in the classroom. I think we have to have that debate because some of the policies such as those you have highlighted are serving to undermine human rights.

Dr Dympna Devine, UCD

While I agree with you that our society has emphasised far too greatly the material aspect of our economic growth, I don't actually agree with you that racism is based on economic issues alone. I think there are many layers to racism and that there are huge issues related to the recognition and respect of cultural difference regardless of the economic status of people. I think the pattern of immigration in countries is that the economically marginalised communities within society are also the communities where you will tend to have an increasing number of immigrants. That creates tensions within those communities and that is something that certainly arose in the research that we did. But I think it would be a mistake to say that racism only has its root in economic differences because I don't actually think that is the case. Reiterating what Colm has said about the religious status of education, I think that is a huge issue for society. When I was talking to a number of delegates during the break, we were talking about the rapidity of change in Irish society. We have gone through a level of change in the past ten to fifteen years that other countries have taken fifty, sixty, seventy years to go through. We have a system that is structured for a different type of society. I think this is a huge issue for schools, for primary schools particularly. We have the Education Act which has enshrined the status of the different patrons within the school system but it is not a system that is dealing with the lived realities of our society and the changes that have taken place there.

It's not a question that I have to ask but to supplement what this gentleman at the back has said. I am teaching in an area where already the template of the school's admission policy discriminates in favour of either Catholic or Protestant children whatever – it is already leading the exclusion of children from primary schools in the area.

Anne Ryan, Principal Teacher

It is time that we as a teachers' union have a debate about religion and when we teach it. Why not put religion at the end of the day so that those who do not want to avail of religious education may go home without having to be brought back afterwards. Just to go back to what this gentleman said, I think that if we are led by a negative attitude, we are buried. We have to speak up for those who are silent. Because those who are new in this country are silent. The Kurdish family that I referred to – not one of them,

not their children, not their parents, none of them spoke through the whole interview with the interpreter. Therefore, I would say it behoves us as teachers to educate for tolerance because the hallmark of the truly educated person is that they are tolerant and understanding of others.

We as teachers need to accept and respect all individual differences in our classrooms. I have to take into account ethnic, non-nationals, special needs, high ability, low ability, one parent families, two parent families, special needs etc. and if that is the key to this discussion, should we not be getting more assistance, support, resources, for all nationalities regardless of any difference a child should have?

Can we have genuine intercultural primary education without confronting the major structural issue in primary education in Ireland? I think the panel has kind of answered that question already but I would like to share with you our experience. Every year in September we are contacted by families all over the country who are facing the dilemma of whether they are going to ask for their child to be absented from religious instruction in schools. They are very often indigenous Irish families but they are also increasingly families who are returned emigrants or part of the immigrant community that is developing. The particular pressure that this puts families under is that for the vast majority of parents in this situation they decide not to make it an issue because as parents they're primarily concerned about the socialisation of their children in schools. As a result of this there is a hidden insidious impression of their rights to their identity taking place. We have mentioned here about the tremendous work that teachers all over the system are doing to try and ameliorate this situation. I acknowledge the tremendous work that is being done by teachers in denominational schools all over the country trying to address this problem. But, sooner or later, we as a society have to face this, that we cannot seriously go forward with a primary system unique in the developed world in which 99% of primary schools are privately owned religious institutions who, by law, must uphold one particular religious ethos. I would really like to hear the INTO's view on that major structural issue.

I just want to talk about what that gentleman has been saying. The existing situation in primary schools worries me. We have children who are not Catholics and they are in our classrooms while religion is being taught. We are in fact indoctrinating them and it isn't right. But the problem is an economic one as far as I can make out. Because there is nobody to supervise the children, you would need extra personnel in the school to supervise the children who are not Catholic and are in our classrooms while religion is being taught.

I think you said there that tolerance was the hallmark of an educated person and my concern about racism is about the distribution of asylum seekers in an area where you have high unemployment. The asylum seekers have to wait a year, perhaps two years, without work. In our situation the asylum seekers who are unemployed are in an area which is already full of people who are unemployed and I think that will lead to racial tension. I think the policy of the housing of asylum seekers while they are waiting for work should be looked at by whoever is responsible for it. While I favour that people should not be isolated from their own I do think that putting a large group of asylum seekers in the midst of a high unemployment area is very bad practice.

Catherine Joyce Collins, Irish Traveller Movement

Government policy in relation to the housing of asylum seekers and refugees is similar to that for Travellers. All Traveller sites, dwellings, halting sites or group housing schemes are built in socially or economically disadvantaged areas. What we have to do is teach people and children who are in schools to respect difference and to respect different cultures and different ethnic backgrounds. I think there is a need for curriculum change and thinking change and also a need for a change in the attitude of teachers. In addition, there is a need for teacher training, for manuals and modules for teachers who are actually delivering the services. I don't buy into the argument that it is one of economics, I think that the resources are there. If you look at the money that is going into Traveller education why do we not see the benefits of that in relation to Travellers? What I want is my children to be taught the curriculum that's in their school, to respect the differences of other people who are in that school as well as being proud of the fact that they are Travellers. The people who are involved in the delivery of the service have a responsibility to ensure that it is delivered in a way that it is intercultural, that it respects other people's culture and that it is funded and resourced. But I don't think it is a purely a matter of resources or funding.

Colm Ó Cuanacháin, Amnesty International

I think the area of institutional racism is very important, and here we are dealing with a very complex concept that we have to face up to. If, as individuals we are part of the State system, we are part of an institution and as teachers you are part of an institution of State and you are part of an institution of Church. We know that institutions can take on racist policies and can take on a racist approach almost unwittingly and unknowingly to the individuals within that institution. We become socialised and normalised in the series of policies, behaviours and practices that we are no longer able to question. It is at that point that the system is at its weakest in terms of being able to embrace change and dynamism in terms of people. I think that is the point that

we are at in Ireland in relation to a large number of our institutions – including our education system but also the health system, the system within Enterprise, Trade and Employment for dealing with immigrant workers for example. There are a number of institutions in Ireland that have to question their policies and practices and roll out change for the individuals in their systems. And that is, as you said, going to require resources and support. There is need for the Department of Education and Science to create a dedicated well-resourced unit that's exploring these issues and trying to drive change through the system. There is a need for the Colleges of Education to be much more responsible, much more dynamic in terms of pre-service and in-service training. There is a need for the NCCA to be much more involved and driving this. Secondly, on the issue of economics and the cost to the denominational school system in terms of minding children who need to be taken out of class for religious education – sure that is an important issue but it is to minimise and understate the enormity of the problem around our denominational educational system. The management is Church led, the decision making is Church led, the appointments of staff are Church led. The training colleges up until recently were Church led, all future employees were coming through that system. I'm trying to say that it is an institutional issue. It's not just about resourcing that half an hour when kids are doing Roman Catholic education. The final point is in response to asylum seekers in areas of low economic wealth. I think that is a real issue, but let's not forget that the vast majority or at least the large majority of ethnic minorities in Ireland are not asylum seekers – they are either workers who are here at the invitation of the State on work permits with their families, refugees or black or ethnic minority Irish. We have to be careful that we keep our understanding of the statistics in relation to asylum seekers in check always.

Itayi Viriri, Irish Refugee Council

Approximately 10% of non-Irish, non-EU, non-American nationals in Ireland are asylum seekers – a very small number of people from the developing world. The issue of dispersal provision centres where asylum seekers are housed has been a contentious one since they were introduced in 1999. Unfortunately, when this dispersal programme was initiated not much thought was put into where these centres were set up. So you have a situation like Mosney where you have 750 asylum seekers in County Meath without many amenities nearby. The issue of understanding the policy implications in the asylum process is very important especially for children from asylum seeking families. For example, understanding that the asylum process can take anything up to seven years from the time of arrival here to the point that they either get refugee status or are deported. Also understanding that the parents are not allowed to work as long as they are in the asylum process, as these issues obviously have an impact on the family life. You would find in some cases that children are not attending

school because parents feel that they have other important issues even though the education of their children is very important. But they feel that there are more important issues that they have to deal with. So understanding the policy implications I think are very important for yourselves in how you deal with the children from these backgrounds. We have been working with St Patrick's College in Dublin to see if there is a way of including primary school teachers who have got their qualifications in developing countries. From Zimbabwe alone there are about 25 to 30 primary qualified teachers in Ireland. I think it would be interesting to have some of these people as your colleagues.

Dr Dympna Devine, UCD

One of the words that hasn't been mentioned so far in our discussion is the issue of power and power in society and who has power. I would say that given the present structures and type of systems that we have, the question that has to be asked is – whose interest is served by keeping the system as it is at the moment? Who has the power to decide where asylum seekers will be housed? In whose interest do the present policies that we have operate? I think that is where the contribution of Colm in relation to human rights is so important. Human rights are not something that are given out of charity. A distinction must be made between interacting with people because you feel it is a nice thing to do, in other words a paternalistic frame of reference, or because people have a right to respect and recognition. I think we need to broaden the focus to issues of power and inequality within society which applies as much to economically marginalised people in this country as to ethnic minorities.

What is your opinion of the criteria that the Department are now using in terms of defining needs in literacy and mathematical terms only and that the cultural and ethnic differences are not being addressed as being equally important. If you are going to talk about inclusion in terms of the Travelling community do you see the need for the class sizes to be reduced considerably? In relation to the social world outside the classroom, I would suggest that the reason teachers are not aware again is because of all the extra pressures that are being put on the classroom teacher at the moment in terms of what they are expected to deliver.

Catherine Joyce Collins, Irish Traveller Movement

In relation to cultural identity and cultural programmes in schools, teachers who are teaching Travellers are not Travellers. What we have been trying to do is to get the Department to use the resources that are put into Traveller education as a whole school resource. Resources should be provided on the basis of need and not on the basis of identity. So if you have children who are falling behind, they should be taken

out either before or after school and given remedial help, and not taken out during classes. Travellers are taken out of class by resource teachers while other subjects are being taught in schools. Sometimes the parents don't know anything about it. Sometimes the parents do know but don't know that the children are missing out on something else. Regardless of what it is that they are missing out on, it has a lot of negative implications for Traveller children. I think it is the same with any ethnic minority group. They need to go to school to learn the curriculum that's being taught in school. It might well be the basic Maths, History, English and Irish but there is a challenge between the academic advancement and achievement of children in school and having their identity and rights acknowledged within that school system. While I was involved in trying to promote teacher training in Maynooth, one of the teachers who had come through the primary school system was talking about a system in England where they had books and materials that taught the basic curriculum from an intercultural perspective. The books didn't have all white children and didn't have families of two parents and two children. They had books that reflected different aspects of culture. In Ireland we have books that portray predominately white, settled, middle class, Catholic children – they don't reflect ethnic minorities or the working class. The pictures in the curriculum books don't generally reflect the lives of people who live in flats and apartments.

Dr Dympna Devine, UCD

I think the issue raised there and the reaction from within the room is very interesting. It is actually getting to the core of a lot of issues to do with intercultural education. I am going to address specifically the question that was asked about children's social world. I taught in a primary school for nine years and my focus as a primary teacher was on the learning of the children within the classroom and the programme that I was expected to teach. What I concentrated on since moving into third level and having the opportunity to do research in schools was on actually listening to what children have to say. It has struck me that when you talk to children about what is important in school the first thing that they will always talk about are their friends. They frame so much of their experience of school in the context of their relationships with other children. I made the comment about the school yard and teachers not being aware of what goes on, because that's when teachers are typically on their break, it's their switch off time and it's also the children switch off time. What I would call for is a recognition on the part of teachers of the importance of the way in which children learn in social context. One of the problems with a child-centred curriculum is that we are inclined to focus on the child as an individual and the child's individual needs. What I am calling for is more focus on the child as social being who brings with them issues relating to their gender, their ethnic identity, their sexuality, their economic status, all the issues that feed into the way in which a child learns in school. It is not that

it is something that teachers don't have time for, I think it is something that should be incorporated into pedagogy, into the way in which teachers teach. I was trying to signal it as a very important area that teachers are not aware of – not trying to blame teachers because I wasn't aware of it myself. It can add a dimension to learning within the classroom. I have absolute concerns about the narrowing of the primary school curriculum and that ties into the comment that was made earlier about the economic thrust of our society because a focus on skills is all about economic development. However, I would argue that if we have a revised primary curriculum which embraces a lot of broader curricular areas and we then introduce a form of assessment that is all about emphasising basic skills, we are doing away with the strengths that the curriculum has to offer.

Emma Dineen, District XII Education Committee

As a practising teacher I worked with Pat and the rest of the Education Committee on this remit today. I understand the point in relation to the perception of books, but I would say that it is changing and perhaps people outside of the education arena may not be quite aware of that yet. I think that it will take time for everybody to become aware of just how much change there is in resources and materials in our classrooms today. The second thing that came across a lot in the discussion groups was the importance of the social aspect of school. The word community came up a lot in our discussion group and a community based approach is needed. But the question I would ask is how the school can be the instigator of that community based approach but at the same time be only one element? We can't do it all. The third thing I would focus on is the ways that children learn. A lot of teachers are more concerned with the broadening of the curriculum than the narrowing of it. We are at the stage where we are wondering can we actually deliver everything we are expected to deliver in the different methodologies in which we are supposed to be able to deliver the curriculum. The way that things are assessed is vital. We would be in 100% agreement with Dympna on that issue. For example, we can't have a brilliant SPHE programme which not only puts emphasis on skills but emphasises values, rights for children, responsibilities of our children in our classroom and explains in a very simple way to them what Colm and everybody is speaking of here today. Children not only have rights but they have to show responsibility as well and that's where it begins. It begins in our classroom and I would like to bring this discussion back to the classroom. I think that we do not and should not be assessing items in the very small narrow focus which Dympna is talking about. The last thing that I would like to say today is, I think we need that community based approach to have a political element as well. It should be part of the Department of Social Welfare as much as the Department of Education and the Department of Health. There should be liaison personnel who could help us in the community to make the connections that need to be made between the school and the community

and to improve the situation involving intercultural education in our community.

Catherine Joyce Collins, Irish Traveller Movement

I realise that there is change in the materials and books in schools. However, what I am saying is that there needs to be Department and government change in terms of the curriculum that is being developed in schools. I think that teacher training needs to happen to coincide with this change. I will give you an example. There are Traveller children going through schools at this very present moment, and even where there are books in schools that have aspects of Traveller culture and where there are modules and practical exams for children to be doing in schools, Traveller children don't want to be identified as Travellers. They don't want to be singled out. The way in which they are being taught is creating more problems for them in the school yard than it is anywhere else. There is a need for a change in the way that the curriculum is actually taught. There is something seriously wrong if there are Traveller children going through the whole school system having to deny the fact that they are Travellers. I am arguing that there needs to be curriculum change, there needs to be a change in attitude, needs to be a change in the way the curriculum is taught, and there needs to be inservice training for teachers.

Anne Ryan, Principal Teacher

On the point about children being withdrawn from class, I think there has been an absolute sea change in our schools. I know that I can only speak from the experience of my own school, but there is not a Traveller in my school who wouldn't hold his or her head up tall and say I'm a Traveller and talk to their class about it. I think that comes from the fact that interculturalism in our school is part of the ethos, it is part of how we are, it is tied up with respect for one another. It is not necessarily taught, as much as caught. It has to permeate everything. I would say that the Special Education Team's (SET) view of teaching and resourcing special needs is a godsend to us. I know that there is not one Traveller or one international child who goes out for resourcing that they do not need. They go for language support or for help with literacy, unfortunately we can't stretch to Maths. So there is no question of a child being out when there is something that they need going on in the class but teachers are not elastic and we are stretched to breaking point.

The Cathaoirleach then thanked all members of the panel and the contributors who posed questions for the panel speakers.

REPORT FROM THE DISCUSSION GROUPS

Delegates to the conference were allocated to Discussion Groups and presented with questions for discussion. The groups were facilitated by members of the Education Committee and members of the Committee also wrote reports of the discussion. These reports have been collated below. The questions posed are in bold type, and are followed by the collated responses.

Question 1:

What does it mean to be Irish in the Ireland of today? Within the Irish population today, there is a great deal of diversity in terms of ways of living, beliefs and values. We have borrowed and so have other ethnic groupings. Yet, do we maintain and uphold one definition of Irishness only in the Irish primary classroom of 2004? Do culture and tradition define us or who we are? Is it necessary to define what it means to be Irish before we can understand the ethnicity of others?

The discussion groups found it difficult to define what it meant to be Irish in the Ireland of today. However, some degree of consensus on 'Irishness' did emerge although it did tend towards the Hollywood stereotype. The strong image of Irishness was, it was claimed by some delegates, a product of our colonial past when there were attempts by a succession of invaders to eradicate the native language and culture and supplant it with their own. In many ways the current complexion of Irish culture is something of a hybrid because of this. Most agreed that music and sport, particularly the GAA were central to Irishness. What did emerge from the discussions was that identity was not a simple construct but rather more like a 'Russian Doll' – my street, my town, my county, my country, and my continent. Each doll could be identified with in sporting competitions, eg, the All-Ireland Final, Internationals and the Ryder Cup, when we can all be fervent Europeans.

Religious affiliation in Ireland is still a major factor in defining 'Irishness', but in recent times, people have become more secular. Schools in Ireland still promote and reinforce Catholicism (in Catholic schools) along with Irish language, song and dance but there is no longer a monopolising of children's cultural education by schools. The all pervasiveness of the mass media in modern society has meant that national identity has been infiltrated and, to a certain degree, diluted by the 'Consumer Culture' that we import via world music, world food and world cinema. This led some delegates to propose that although people from different eras may claim an Irish identity they may be at odds to identify it in each other except through some constants such as music and sport.

Finally on this question, some people expressed the view that as Ireland had prospered the most important aspect of life had become the economic imperative and that this had resulted in Irish people becoming less generous and welcoming towards others who were less well off. This economic imperative has become the driving force behind education; what was once supposed to be the great civiliser has been reduced to learning skills to sell ourselves. As we become wealthier we resent the intrusion of poor migrants (perhaps too cogent a reminder of where we came from) as a drain on our economy and steps have been taken to exclude people from claiming Irish citizenship. Some delegates opined that this was the end of the “Ireland of a thousand welcomes”.

Question 2:

What impact, if any, does the inclusion of children from a variety of ethnic backgrounds have on the mediation of the primary curriculum and its assessment?

One group responded that there “had been no change” in the mediation as such in so far as within schools the aim was still to assimilate, to make them ‘Irish’. The same group felt, irrespective of country of origin of these children, that the bad press given to “floods of immigrants” caused consternation to the parents of children at the receptor schools. It was felt that this was due to the fact that these schools were located in areas already short of resources, and stretching their already meagre resources to accommodate migrants could cause the schools to “sink” further.

Although parents in these schools were worried about the effects of the inclusion of non-national children in their schools, it was suggested that the attitude towards these children was still better than that shown towards children of the Travelling Community. The image of the Travellers was still thought to be that of “free loader” whilst that of the immigrants was seen to be more positive in that they are seen as necessary to support the national economy – doing the low paid and menial jobs. Perhaps the basis for this image is the transient nature of the travelling existence. It was mentioned by a delegate that schools that have large numbers of Traveller children cannot depend on the length of time they will stay within a community and so this adversely affects planning. While large numbers of non-national pupils may well be equally as transient, the difference appears to be in parental attitude to the values of education. The perception is that education is not as valued in the Travelling Community as it is among the immigrant communities and this is reflected in the general attitude towards school work.

Question 3:

If a school had a new intake of five immigrant children (of mixed ethnic background eg, Asian, African, East European), and all of the children and their parents had limited English, how would your school make them: (a) Feel welcome both to the school and the community and (b) make them efficient learners?

It was felt that essential to the success or otherwise of this exercise was the provision within the school of a Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Teacher to act as a link between the school and the parents. Also it was suggested that the school could have a website that displayed the school policies in a variety of languages. Further, schools should have their information signs displayed in various languages. In all cases, when the school knew about the arrival of a pupil from a different cultural background, then the class into which the child would go should be prepared in advance. This could entail some information about the country of origin and some cultural knowledge; pupils from the class could be designated as “guides” or mentors to ease their transition into the school life.

A number of contributors commented that some immigrant parents did abuse the education system by registering their children with a number of different schools and by treating the schools as an out of hours child minding service. This apart, there were a number of positive suggestions as to how progress could be made. Firstly, a united approach from the local community and the schools was essential. A cultural centre could be established in the local area in which information leaflets (multilingual) would be displayed to assist parents. In tandem with this the local school(s) could hold multi-cultural events, perhaps at significant times, eg Dwali, to show inclusivity and to educate our own children. Evening classes could be held for parents to help with their English/Irish so they can assist with their children's homework. The school could also facilitate the use of their building by other professionals to help deal with post-traumatic stress or other trauma caused by war or displacement.

PTAs (Parent/Teacher Associations) were seen as a great resource in supporting parents newly arrived in an area. It was suggested that they could be instrumental in providing newsletters and networks that might include making contact with relevant embassies who may be able to provide translation services where necessary. Religious education was highlighted as being problematic. Some felt that separate provision for the teaching of minority religions, should be made so that schools, that are mostly Catholic, could not be accused of proselytisation should migrant non-Catholics attend religious education classes.

To make non-English speaking pupils more efficient in their studies posed some practical problems, particularly in terms of resourcing an HSCL teacher. It was also suggested that schools should join schemes such as the Comenius Project to forge links with other schools both at home and in Europe.

However, whatever schools may try to do it would still be necessary for resources to be made available by Government so that permanent language teachers could be employed. Further, it was suggested that greater flexibility was needed so that language instruction, beyond the current allocation of two years can be provided, should the need arise. There was a feeling that perhaps the government did not believe that immigration from non-English speaking countries, was anything other than a temporary phenomenon.

Question 4:

“A person’s identity is bound up with their ethnicity, language, religion, place of birth, home cultural mores and the environment in which they live. Therefore, it is incumbent on schools to accommodate the cultures of ethnic minorities within the milieu and curricula provided so that the pupils are able to feel included and so develop to their full potential”. How can we ensure that pupils’ ethnic backgrounds are respected, remembered and re-stated?

One delegate thought that in teaching children from this background, the priority was that of enabling them to communicate efficiently through English. Another reported that, in her school in Donegal, children living there for five years had forgotten their mother tongue and she was worried that as a result they would, subsequently, lose their cultural identity. Yet another delegate suggested the problem would seem, “how do we accommodate the cultural identity of some and not at the same time ‘damage’ the cultural identity of the host children?” This provided a spirited discussion about whether a culture could be still alive if it did not adopt from other cultures and, indeed, if in adopting whether it was improved or damaged.

As religious observance is such a large part of most cultural identities, it was recommended that schools be more proactive in encouraging and accommodating observance by perhaps forging links with other clergy and having, for example, the Koran in the school. However, the view was also expressed the parents of Catholic pupils had the rights not to have their children so exposed. It was opined that “political correctness” was skewing education, and that not all aspects of every culture was acceptable.

Whilst the debates and discussions were, for the most part, positive in their approach one observer expressed the opinion that as teachers there was only so much they could do in a school day. Teachers can, as educators, expose the children to a range of cultural diversity, and can accommodate to the best of their ability but at the end of the (school) day the support of parents and the rest of society is needed to reinforce the message being transmitted by teachers. Other ‘educators’, such as parents, newspapers and television have more influence on children collectively than teachers do and also need to transmit the same message.

Question 5:

Are rights universal in name only? Do we perceive rights education as an issue only for the underprivileged in society? How can we, as a society, protect rights for each other? In the classroom how can we build capacity in terms of rights education?

The direction of the discussion was on the vehicle for Human Rights Education. SPHE was suggested as that vehicle but some countered that rights education taught in isolation did not encourage children to see the broader picture, to do this Rights had to be taught in tandem with Responsibilities that are obligatory in society. A practical lesson was suggested in which children would help draw up school rules and in so doing develop an understanding of the need for rules in society.

Delegates also made political points such as: Rights education was not the preserve of the underprivileged; children's rights should not preclude the equally valid rights of adults; state rhetoric did not match the degree of funding/support offered either to rights groups or to the teaching of rights in schools.

Concern was expressed by some delegates with regard to the State's insistence that all pupils learn Gaeilge, including those from a minority ethnic background and the question was asked whether this was an infringement of their rights. One delegate criticised the tendency in society to indulge behaviour from minorities that would not otherwise be tolerated. It was felt this was due to the hosts not wishing to be labelled racist if they challenged this bad behaviour.

Question 6:

What particular issues pertaining to the Language Support Teacher Service need to be addressed to improve this service?

The delegates addressing this question criticised the idea of awarding a language support teacher for two years when some children may need substantially more or less time than others. Schools also had to be very wary about the numbers needing support, as there was a minimum number (14) below which support was withdrawn from the school. It was felt this may encourage the practice of one or two children who may not require support being kept on the list so that the service could be retained.

Margaret Maxwell's work in the area of maintaining the child's mother tongue was discussed favourably by the group and this was considered essential for maintaining the child's link with his/her culture and extended family group. Whilst on this point, the group as a whole expressed deep disappointment with the fact that some schools could not participate in the Integrate Ireland in-service day as substitute cover was not

given to allow the teacher with responsibility in this area to attend the course. Delegates felt that mixed signals were being given out – the government want to be seen as good hosts but doesn't want to pay for the costs involved.

Question 7:

“.....mix but don't dissolve...” In terms of children from other nationalities in our schools, should we allow those who wish to ‘dissolve’ to do so in peace? Is this assimilation by choice?

Delegates expressed the feeling that the discussion on interculturalism was wrong in that it presumed that this was something that was done to people. It was felt that instead of allowing the participants in the education process to develop an ownership of their education, there was a feeling that interculturalism was being prescribed to correct a perceived fault. There was even an assumption that every participant in the process wanted the same outcome, ie, to maintain “otherness” and be able to go home. Some delegates felt that many ethnic minority children just wanted to be like the rest of the children, they just wanted to fit in.

Anecdotal evidence was quoted of the ‘loyalist’, Chinese, first generation, Northern Irish children in Belfast and how they had adapted to their situation. The discussion also considered Irish settled children and how they too want to be the “same” – following the same music, eating the same fast food, wearing the same designer gear and watching the same cartoons as children in most other countries. Being the same means not being noticed for special treatment such as bullying.

What was apparent in this short discussion was that this area of education is still evolving. It was argued that there is a need to maintain the education of immigrant children on two levels; enabling them to be a fully functional citizen of the host country while allowing them to be able to do the same should they wish to return home. Some of the delegates thought that this was yet another piece of political correctness gone mad. The education budgets of most countries are stretched as it is and burdening them even more means thin resources being squeezed ever tighter.

Question 8:

Should the key principles of anti-racism underpin the entire primary curriculum as opposed to being ‘treated’ in a half-hour SPHE class, a few times a term? Do children recognise racism in general terms eg, do they see derogatory comments as racism? How can we help the children we teach to examine critically unequal power structures in society and so raise awareness of how racism can begin?

It was declared that racism was a problem that needed to be tackled head-on. Anti-racism taught in class was considered insufficient but it was felt that modelling good behaviour in the 'hidden curriculum' as well is where children acquire reinforcement for what is taught in class. One delegate reported how their school had held an inter-cultural day where differences were celebrated. The teacher reported that this had been a very successful day and they felt this was the "best" way of dealing with cultural differences.

Two negative points were raised during the discussions:

- 1) Some people felt unqualified to deal with multi-cultural issues.
- 2) The topic caused some people discomfort but this discomfort was not elaborated upon.

The importance of out-of-school factors in the teaching of civics was highlighted. Schools, it was argued, may teach how to be a good citizen but if this is not reinforced at home and in the community then the ideal can be lost. A Northern delegate pointed out that despite over 20 years of integrated schooling in Northern Ireland it had had a minimal impact on the problem of sectarianism largely because after school most of the pupils retreated back into segregated housing estates and had to deal with the sectarianism therein.

Another delegate mentioned the role of the media as an opinion former within the community. Desire to sell newspapers or attract viewers often meant headlines like "swamped with refugees" were used and throw-away lines from an adult in the house after hearing this kind of emotive language, can often stay with a child far longer than even the best prepared lesson. The language used in the home 'leaches' into the playground along with the attitude that goes with it. Evidence to support this conjecture was presented by a delegate who described what had happened to their school after it had adopted a 'welcoming school' policy. The Irish parents transferred their children to other schools. This had resulted in rooms left vacant in some schools while new schools were demanded elsewhere.

Concerns were also voiced that anti-racism was just another add-on to education. Over the years governments had asked schools to deliver to pupils the moral imperatives that were once the duty of parents and the churches to inculcate. Teachers recognise the partnership basis of education but the feeling grows that all the 'hidden curriculum' work is being loaded from the other partners on to the schools without the necessary support needed at home and in society in general.

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