

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

**DISCUSSION DOCUMENT AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE
CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION, 2005**

Irish National Teachers' Organisation
35 Parnell Square
Dublin 1

Telephone: 01 8047700

Fax: 01 872 2462

Email: info@into.ie

Web: <http://www.into.ie>

General Secretary: John Carr MA (Ed)

Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann
35 Cearnóg Pharnell
Baile Atha Cliath 1

Guthán: 01 8047700

Fax: 01 872 2462

Ríomhphost: info@into.ie

Gréasán: <http://www.into.ie>

Árd Rúnáí: John Carr MA (Ed)



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	1
Acknowledgements	3
Part One	
Discussion Document	5
INTRODUCTION	7
THE SPHE CURRICULUM	9
SUPPORT PROGRAMMES	14
SAMPLE SURVEY ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPHE CURRICULUM PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND	23
Appendix 1: INTO Questionnaire – SPHE in the Primary School	26
Appendix 1: INTO Questionnaire – SPHE in the Primary School	31
Part Two	
Proceedings of the Consultative Conference on Education, November 2005	33
AN OVERVIEW OF THE SPHE CURRICULUM Mary Mac Donald, PCSP	35
SPHE – A TEACHER’S PERSPECTIVE Joe Conway, Education Committee	41
JANUSZ KORCZAK: THE FATHER OF CHILDRENS’ RIGHTS Frank Flanagan, Mary Immaculate College	46
CITIZEN CHILD – THE EXPERIENCE OF A STUDENT COUNCIL IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL Owen McLoughlin, Principal, Scoil Mhuire, Ballyboden	55
REPORT FROM THE DISCUSSION GROUPS	59
Part Three	
Children and Obesity	63
THE REPORT OF THE NATIONAL TASKFORCE ON OBESITY 2005 – A SUMMARY	65
STRAITENED BODIES: A SNAPSHOT OF PE TEACHING AND TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS ACROSS MUNSTER	69

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND BODY MASS – ESRI REPORT	74
HEALTHY EATING INITIATIVES	75
Appendix 2: District II PE Survey	78

Foreword

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) has been an integral part of the Primary School Curriculum since 1999, although aspects of SPHE were taught in schools prior to the introduction of the revised curriculum.

One issue of major concern to society at present is child protection. SPHE provides schools with discrete curriculum time in which to teach vital safety skills. This was necessary to enable schools to deliver the myriad of stand alone programmes that found their way into schools including the *Stay Safe* programme, Relationships and Sexuality Education, *Walk Tall* programme, Anti-Bullying programme and Positive Behaviour programmes. Some schools have mainstreamed the key messages from such programmes, while others have combined aspects of the programmes, given the overlap between them. However, it is vital to ensure that all schools are offering child abuse prevention programmes to children.

There are a number of other issues that need to be addressed. Schools do not have to offer all these programmes and parents have a right to refuse their children's participation. It is time for discussions between all the education partners with a view to ensuring that every child is offered a full child protection programme that includes the vital elements of *Walk Tall*, *Stay Safe*, and RSE. There is a need for further investment in teacher education, both initial teacher education and continuous professional development in the area of child protection and child abuse reporting procedures.

The issue of childhood obesity is a major worry in terms of the health of the nation. More and more children are overweight and many clinically obese. Ailments and diseases, formally only seen in adults, such as Type II diabetes, are now affecting very young children. While schools can be part of the solution, they are not the solution. Schools can teach children about the importance of diet and exercise but what is learned in school must be put into practice in the form of a healthy lifestyle.

SPHE also makes a real and positive contribution to the building of an inclusive Ireland. Many schools now have significant numbers of newly arrived children. Our schools are the first real point of contact for international children with Ireland and its people. Schools are a unique bridge between those of us who are newly arrived and those of us who have been here a longer time. How the newly arrived learn about Ireland, its peoples and traditions and cultures will be mediated through the experience of their children in our schools. Educators and trade unionists have a responsibility to ensure that this is a positive experience that will accommodate a diversity of cultures, including Traveller culture, within our schools and lay the foundation for a

better future.

As children are increasingly regarded as citizens in their own right, facilitating their participation in decisions that affect them can be supported through SPHE. It is a positive development in relation to the holistic development of children. However, SPHE can never be seen as a curricular response to address all issues of concern to society. There is no doubt that schools have a very important role to play, but schools do not operate in isolation from the broader community. Children are very much influenced by values and practices that pertain in their home environment. Schools are part of the solution – not the solution.

Part One of this report provides an overview of the SPHE curriculum and the challenges involved in its implementation, which comprised the background paper presented to the Consultative Conference on Education in November 2005. **Part Two** includes the presentations of the conference, in addition to a report of the discussion groups. Given the significance of the growing problem of obesity, the main recommendations of the Task Force on Obesity as they pertain to primary schools, are outlined in **Part Three**, in addition to some commentary on the issue as it concerns schools.

John Carr MA (Ed)
General Secretary
October 2006

Acknowledgements

Education Committee

Máire Masterson, Cathaoirleach
Mary Cawley, Leaschathaoirleach
Patrick Dorrian
Brendan Herron
Rosena Jordan
Carmel Niland
Róisín Nic Tighearnáin
Seán Balfé
Nuala Uí Dhrisceoil
Milo Walsh
Gerard Stack
Ted Motherway
Dympna Mulkerrins
Pat Scanlon
Alice O'Connell

INTO Education Section

Claire Garvey
Ann McConnell
Dionne Halyk

Conference Presenters

Mary Mac Donald, PCSP
Joe Conway, Education Committee
Frank Flanagan, Mary Immaculate College

Discussion Group Presenters

Maureen Wilson, Healthy Eating

Ursula Smith and Susan Dixon, Walk Tall
Bernard Murnaghan, Stay Safe
Alice O'Connell, The Health Promoting School
Eimear Berry, RSE
Owen McLoughlin, The Child as a Citizen
Brian Ruane, Amnesty International
Frank O'Meara, Intercultural Education

Press

Peter Mullan, Senior Official

Publications Team

Lori Kealy, Publications Official
Niamh Corduff

Cover Design

David Cooke


Compilation and Editing

Deirbhile Nic Craith, Senior Official

Part 1

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

DISCUSSION DOCUMENT



Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

Discussion Document

INTRODUCTION

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) was first introduced to the Primary Curriculum in the Republic of Ireland in 1999. Prior to 1999, Health Education had formed part of the Physical Education curriculum. However, a more formal approach to social and personal education, incorporating relationship and sexuality education (RSE), intercultural education and child protection was new. Many programmes, developed to deal with specific issues during the 1990s, such as the *Walk Tall* programme to address substance misuse, *Stay Safe* to address child protection issues, and RSE to address sexuality and relationships education were incorporated into the SPHE curriculum. SPHE, therefore, is quite a comprehensive curriculum area, which can be seen as a positive development in relation to the social and personal development of children. On the other hand, however, SPHE has the potential to become the curricular response to addressing all society's problems. The introduction of a similar curriculum, to promote personal development and to respond to issues in society, is also being planned in Northern Ireland. The Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment in Northern Ireland (CCEA) have sought permission from the Department of Education and Science to incorporate the *Walk Tall* materials into the Personal Development curriculum rolled out in September 2006 to years one and five.

The 1990s saw growing importance being attached to the social and personal development of the child. The Government signed up to the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* in 1990 and has twice reported (1996 and 2005) to the UN on how Ireland is meeting its obligations in relation to the Convention. Under the Convention, the Government has committed itself to promoting the social and personal development of the child:

State parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

- 1 The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.
- 1 The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin.

Article 29 (Extract)

The SPHE programme in the Revised Curriculum aims to develop a framework of skills, attitudes, values and knowledge in our children that will inform their actions and decisions in:

- 1 their personal development;
- 1 their health and well-being;
- 1 the creation and maintenance of supportive relationships; and
- 1 becoming active and responsible members of society.

The school has a formative role to play in the child's social, personal and health education. It can provide the environment, the approaches and the variety of learning experiences that will help children to understand themselves, relate to others and establish and maintain healthy patterns of behaviour. It can also contribute to preparing the child for active and responsible citizenship in the widest sense and for being explicit about a just and caring society. SPHE enables the school to build on existing good practice and to work with the home and community in implementing a school-based programme that amplifies this dynamic. Since SPHE has a moral and spiritual dimension, its development is influenced significantly by the ethos and characteristic spirit of each school.

The programme that evolves in each school will reflect and support these dimensions and will thus be individualised and pertinent to each school milieu.

It is the purpose of this background paper to consider the SPHE curriculum, to provide an overview of the programmes that are available to support the implementation of the SPHE curriculum and to outline teachers' initial response to the SPHE curriculum. In addition, an overview is given of the *Report of the Task Force on Obesity*, given that some of the recommendations contained therein may impact on the work of the primary school, particularly in relation to the health dimension of SPHE. The Consultative Conference on Education provided a further opportunity to consider the contribution the SPHE curriculum can make to children's social, personal and health development.

THE SOCIAL PERSONAL HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE) CURRICULUM

SPHE aims to promote the personal development, health and well-being of the child and helps him/her to create and maintain supportive relationships so as to facilitate active and responsible citizenship in the long-term. The programme aims to develop in the child a generic set of values, attitudes and skills that will inform his/her behaviours and decisions. SPHE fosters the development of children's intra-personal development. It is child-centred, and focuses on self-worth and self confidence. Taking personal responsibility for one's own behaviour and actions is a central aim of the SPHE curriculum. Self awareness is promoted through provision of opportunities for children, within a safe environment, to name and manage their own feelings and behaviour and to cope with various kinds of change thus facilitating children to be more in control of their own lives.

SPHE also aims to develop healthy interpersonal relationships as it supports children to become competent in operating in a variety of social situations. Understanding how and why people think, act and behave in particular ways is integral to achieving this aim. This facilitates the creation and maintenance of supportive relationships. Learning with and from their peers is integral to SPHE and this can assist in developing the skills and attitudes necessary to cope with peer pressure.

SPHE seeks to inculcate an appreciation of and respect for, the diversity that exists in society and the positive contribution of various cultural, religious and social groups. It provides a context in which children learn about various ethnic groups: this fosters the development of mutual understanding and a sense of responsibility for the dignity of every human being.

CURRICULUM STRUCTURE

SPHE is structured into four levels: infant classes, first and second classes, third and fourth classes and fifth and sixth classes and is presented in three strands: Myself, Myself and others and Myself and the wider world. The strands are sub-divided into a number of strand units which are consistent throughout all the class levels reflecting the spiral nature of the curriculum content. Planning for SPHE will always be informed by the ethos of the school within the context of the school plan. It is essential that the content chosen for each class includes a balance between learning skills, fostering and exploring attitudes and developing understanding.

The programme's spiral approach provides opportunities to consolidate and build on previous learning and allows for issues to be presented in an age-appropriate manner. Flexibility is also recommended so that children's emotional development and individual needs and interests are taken into account and that cognisance is taken of the child's environment. Consequently, SPHE requires children to be engaged in

activity-based learning thus facilitating them to make sense of what they learn and to take increasing ownership of and responsibility for their own learning. Active learning strategies include play, discussion and drama activities, co-operative games, multi-media programmes, carrying out surveys and interpreting data. Teachers are encouraged to provide opportunities for children to critically reflect on their own work and to explore possibilities for transferring what they have learned to situations in their own lives.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SPHE

SPHE is a life-long process. The primary curriculum provides the foundation that will inform the child's actions and decisions and provide a basis for further development.

SPHE is cross-curricular as it complements and supports themes and topics addressed in the various subjects that have a social, personal and health dimension. Recognition is also given to issues intrinsic to SPHE, hence discrete time is provided to explore and examine those in greater detail. Discrete time can be used to develop and practice particular skills, deal with sensitive issues and explore issues that are not dealt with in other curricular areas. The effective implementation of SPHE requires a combination of contexts for learning, namely, the context of a positive school climate, discrete time and integrated/cross-curricular learning.

FACTORS THAT IMPACT ON THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF SPHE

As SPHE has a moral and spiritual dimension, its development is influenced by the ethos of individual schools. The school environment provides approaches and a variety of learning experiences that help children to understand themselves, to relate to others and to establish and maintain healthy patterns of behaviour.

Ongoing influences in the child's life such as family, religious and moral beliefs, the mores of society and the media impact on schools in the formulation, development and implementation of the SPHE programme. The involvement of parents, health professionals and relevant community members in planning, reviewing and supporting schools' SPHE plans is crucial to its success. This partnership approach helps to provide children with a consistent experience in SPHE enabling them to make connections between their lives at home, in the school and in the community.

Intercultural Guidelines

The SPHE curriculum is inclusive of intercultural education. As stated in the curriculum:

diversity and difference characterise the society in which children live. However,

prejudice and discrimination are all too often features of human relationships. A respect for, and an appreciation of, human and cultural diversity can and should be promoted at every level of the primary school.

(Primary School Curriculum, 1999)

The NCCA, since the publication of the *Primary School Curriculum*, has issued guidelines to schools in order to assist teachers in implementing the intercultural dimension of the SPHE curriculum. Intercultural education, however, is not so much a taught dimension of the SPHE curriculum, as much as a way of living and being in the school community. This is borne out by the NCCA guidelines *Intercultural Education in the Primary School* (NCCA, 2005), which state that intercultural education is not an addition to the Primary School Curriculum, since the curriculum itself is an intercultural curriculum. Integrated learning is one of the principles of learning in the revised curriculum and intercultural education, in particular, should be central to all aspects of school life, reflected not only in the curriculum content, but in school policies and practices.

The Department of Education and Science has defined intercultural education as aiming to:

- 1 foster conditions conducive to pluralism in society;
- 1 raise children's awareness of their own culture and attune them to the fact that there are other ways of behaving and other value systems;
- 1 develop respect for life-styles different from their own so that children can understand and appreciate each other;
- 1 foster a commitment to equality;
- 1 enable children to make informed choices about, and take action on, issues of prejudice and discrimination;
- 1 appreciate and value similarities and differences; and
- 1 enable all children to speak for themselves and articulate their cultures and histories.

Human Rights Education

Human rights education, through the development of skills and the fostering of attitudes, complements, supports and integrates well with the SPHE curriculum. Human rights education is best described as a learning process which seeks to:

- 1 ensure that children have an understanding of their own human rights and associated responsibilities;
- 1 foster attitudes of respect and appreciation of the uniqueness of each individual; and
- 1 promote skills among children that will enable children to act in ways that defend

and promote human rights.

(Lift Off – Introducing Human Rights Education within the Primary Curriculum)

The Primary Curriculum is concerned with the development of each individual child's potential and recognises that children are members of families and communities, both local and global. Children are aware from an early age of issues such as justice and fairness, concepts that underpin human rights education. Human rights education enables children to explore issues in relation to their own development and that of society and supports children's development as individuals and citizens. The *Lift Off* Programme has been developed for primary schools, both North and South, through a collaborative project involving Amnesty International, the INTO (North and South) and the UTU (Ulster Teachers' Union), in order to support human rights education as part of the SPHE / Personal Development Curriculum.

Children as Citizens

Underpinning any research into participation in society is the issue of a particular group's status as citizens. Traditionally ignored in citizenship studies, children are now more frequently recognised as citizens with rights and responsibilities. An initial hurdle for Irish educators to overcome is how children, traditionally seen and not heard, can be 'Seen and Heard' in the matters that affect them daily. At a national level, the establishment of an Ombudsman for Children and initiatives such as the National Children's Strategy, *Dáil na nÓg* and *Comhairle na nÓg* have provided an opportunity for a limited number of children to participate directly in decision-making in matters that affect them. At school level, student councils are proposed as ideal fora to frame a redefinition of children's citizenship and more practically, to formally channel the voice of the school-going child.

Currently, student councils at second level are allowed for under the Education Act 1998. However, some primary schools have also decided to facilitate pupil participation in decision-making in the belief that such participation can be a real experience with definitive change in policy being possible to effect through negotiation and shared decision-making. The aim of a student council is that the students – representative of their peers – would join the other stakeholder groups within the structures of the school and have as real a voice as teachers, parents, management, DES and outside agencies do. In reality, the issues that impinge on the children's daily life are not the wider societal problems but more often quite solvable minutiae. The aim proposed for the children's deliberations is always 'How can we together make our school a better place?'

A wider aim of the student council is to improve the citizenship status of all pupils. Children are citizens now and not at some unforeseen time in the future and thus are

encouraged to take part-ownership of the schools they attend and cease to be just temporary guests. Student councils can contribute significantly to active learning in the area of citizenship, a core area of the SPHE programme. If forums like student councils become commonplace in Irish education, the language of children's citizenship and SPHE should evolve within these new structures.

Support Programmes

A number of programmes have been developed to support schools in implementing the SPHE curriculum. Support personnel are available to schools to support and advise teachers in relation to the implementation of the programmes. The following programmes are described briefly in the next section – the Child Abuse Prevention Programme (*Stay Safe*), the Relationship and Sexuality Education programme (RSE), the Substance Misuse Prevention Programme (*Walk Tall*) and the Health Promoting School Programme.

SUPPORT PROGRAMMES

There are a number of support programmes available to support schools in implementing the SPHE curriculum. Two such programmes *Walk Tall* and the Health Promoting School Programme are also in use in schools in Northern Ireland. These two programmes in addition to the RSE and the *Stay Safe* programmes are described briefly in this section. There are, of course, other programmes, including among others, health education programmes prepared by various health boards and road safety programmes promoted by the National Road Safety Authority. In general, many teachers find these structured programmes useful as a means of supporting the teaching of SPHE.

Child Abuse Prevention Programme (*Stay Safe*)

Stay Safe is a child abuse prevention programme which aims to empower children, through the development of their self-esteem and through developing skills to ensure their personal safety. The implementation of the programme, as part of the SPHE curriculum, is supported by the Child Abuse Prevention Programme (CAPP). The programme was first introduced in the Eastern Region Health Area (ERHA) in the school year 1991–92 and in the other health board areas in the following year. CAPP is jointly funded by the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Health and Children, and the South West Area Health Board (SWAHB). It has been incorporated as part of the SPHE curriculum since 1999.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF SUPPORT SERVICE

The CAPP programme (*Stay Safe*) is a primary school based approach to the prevention of child abuse. The aim of the programme is to reduce vulnerability to child abuse and bullying through the provision of in-service training and professional development for teachers, parent education and support and personal safety education for children at primary school level. The *Stay Safe* programme itself aims to give children the skills necessary to enable them to recognise and resist abuse and/or victimisation and teaches them that they should always tell (an adult that can help) of any situation which they find unsafe, upsetting, threatening, dangerous or abusive.

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A one day in-service professional development course was provided for all primary school teachers when the *Stay Safe* Programme was initially introduced into schools. This course outlined the content and teaching methods of the *Stay Safe* programme. It also provided background information on child abuse and bullying; responding to a disclosure of abuse; referral procedures and Departmental guidelines.

CAPP writes to all primary and special schools on an annual basis inviting applications for CAPP follow-up training. This training is provided on request and CAPP encourages schools to involve all school personnel in the training session. Follow-up training includes information on the following:

- 1 Child abuse – signs and symptoms, why children become victims, why children don't tell/ how children tell, specially vulnerable children.
- 1 The *Stay Safe* programme – the aims, objectives and main messages of the programme, teaching the programme within the context of a Social, Personal and Health Education Programme.
- 1 Procedures for Dealing with Concerns and/or Disclosures – *Children First Guidelines* and the Department of Education and Science Guidelines.
- 1 Good Practice in Child Protection – School policies viz. toileting, changing for games and one-to-one teaching.

Key issues for schools include – responsibility of all staff, confidentiality, recording, handling a disclosure, making a report to parents, the role of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP), reporting to the health board, the role of the chairperson/board of management, peer abuse and bullying, procedures for dealing with allegations against school staff.

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT TRAINING

In addition to staff training, CAPP provides information meetings for school management boards. Schools are sent a 'requirements form' at the beginning of each school year and return this to CAPP if they require any of the CAPP services or materials. With the introduction of the new guidelines in relation to child abuse and the changing emphasis that the SPHE curriculum has brought about, it is essential that members of school boards are aware of their role and responsibilities in relation to child abuse prevention. In response to the growing demand for information at board of management level on the child abuse prevention guidelines, CAPP extended this training through the provision of a series of training seminars in 2003 for members of school management boards.

PARENT EDUCATION

Parental involvement is an essential part of the *Stay Safe* programme. Parent education is provided by CAPP personnel on an on-going basis to schools that are implementing the programme. This involves providing parents with information on child abuse and bullying, outlining the content of the *Stay Safe* classroom lessons and detailing available services. A parents' information booklet, *Stay Safe – A Parent's Guide*, has been distributed to over 350,000 parents to date.

PERSONAL SAFETY EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN

The *Stay Safe* programme is a personal safety skills programme which can be used with primary school children from senior infants to sixth class. The programme seeks to enhance children's self-protective skills by participation in lessons on safe and unsafe situations, bullying, inappropriate touch, secrets and stranger danger.

The *Stay Safe* programme was revised and updated during 1997 / 98. A new *Stay Safe* pack consisting of lesson plans, user's handbook, video and audiotape, was developed in line with NCCA *Guidelines on Social, Personal and Health Education* (1998). The lesson plans were expanded to include new material on domestic violence, physical and emotional abuse. They contain additional sections on the development of children's self esteem and assertiveness and on the necessary preparatory work which teachers should complete with children prior to the introduction of personal safety education. The video models, for children, the application of personal safety skills and is targeted at children in first to fourth classes.

The programme has recently been modified for use with children in special education. A *Stay Safe* pack has been produced and contains lesson plans for children with visual impairment, auditory impairment, physical disability, cognitive disability and emotional and behavioural problems.

There has been a marked increase in the number of schools that have availed of CAPP services – in particular staff training and training for boards of management over the last two/three years. A pre-service training module has been developed and is currently in use in some of the teacher education colleges in order to ensure that teachers coming on stream are familiar with the issues. According to the DES approximately 80% of primary schools use the *Stay Safe* programme.

Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)

Following ongoing debate since 1986 in relation to the introduction of sex education in schools, an interim RSE programme was issued to schools in 1996 (Circular 2/95). In the revised primary curriculum, RSE became part of the wider SPHE programme. RSE aims to provide opportunities for children and young people to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way. Under strand one – 'Myself' – the 'growing and changing' element of the strand includes making children aware of the physical changes that occur in puberty and giving them an understanding of human reproduction.

While there was overwhelming support for the introduction of RSE to schools from parents (93%), there was some trepidation on the part of teachers in taking on the

1. See section on Implementation of the SPHE Curriculum

role of teaching children about such personal matters. A survey conducted in 1996 showed that 73% of teachers felt uncomfortable teaching children about sexuality (Walsh, 1999). However, Walsh went on to note that good inservice training increased

confidence levels significantly. Nevertheless, RSE is one of the aspects of SPHE where schools invite an outside person to speak to pupils,¹ perhaps underlining the importance of ongoing support for the proper implementation of the programme.

The RSE Support Service is based in Drumcondra Education Centre. The service has a remit to support the implementation and teaching of the RSE element of SPHE at primary and post-primary level. In doing this, the service has worked with the Primary Curriculum Support Programme and with the SPHE Support Service (Junior Cycle) over the last number of years, but also offers the following supports to primary schools:

- 1 Advice and information on all aspects of RSE.
- 1 Teacher training workshops.
- 1 Summer courses in RSE.
- 1 Parent Information Evenings.
- 1 RSE Policy Seminars.
- 1 A mailing service for all the RSE teaching and support materials (this includes the four primary teaching books, available in English and Irish, parent information leaflets and RSE policy packs).
- 1 A lending library with resources for teaching RSE in special schools.

Substance Misuse Prevention Programme – Walk Tall

The *Walk Tall* programme is a Social, Personal and Health Education programme for the prevention of substance misuse. It is a national programme supported and funded by the Department of Education and Science (DES) as a resource to address the SPHE curriculum. In 1995, the DES initiated planning for a pilot project on Substance Misuse Prevention in primary schools. It was offered to schools in Dublin, Cork and Donegal on a pilot basis in 1996/7. During 1997/8 a further 126 schools in priority areas in Dublin, Cork and Donegal joined this development project. From 1998 onwards the programme was disseminated nationally and offered to all primary schools on an optional basis. More than 3,000 schools availed of the training and the programme materials. The programme has since been successfully piloted in Northern Ireland and will form a major part of the Personal Development curriculum to be rolled out in September 2006, commencing with years one and five.

EVALUATION OF PROGRAMME

To date there have been three independent evaluations of the *Walk Tall* programme,

all conducted by Dr Mark Morgan of St Patrick's College of Education. A formative evaluation was carried out in 1998 and concluded that the programme was in line with the most effective approaches that have been shown to work in existing evaluations of programmes from abroad. Teachers were pleased with the lesson plans throughout the programme. An evaluation in 2000 found that a substantial number of schools were implementing the programme. School based inservice and support were seen to be important factors in implementation.

An evaluation of the programme was conducted in Local Drugs Task Force Area schools in 2003. This evaluation found that teachers felt there was a greater need than ever for the programme and the programme integrated very well with SPHE and other areas of the curriculum. Teachers also found the support service very helpful especially in the area of support and training in active learning strategies.

AIMS OF PROGRAMME

The main aim of the *Walk Tall* programme is prevention of the misuse of substances. It endeavours to give children the confidence, skills and knowledge to make healthy choices. The programme also seeks to avert, or at least delay experimentation with substances and reduce the demand for legal and illegal drugs.

CONTENT OF PROGRAMME.

The main themes in the programme are Self Esteem, Feelings, Influences, Decision Making, and Drugs Awareness. These themes are developed in a structured systematic way at each class level. Care has been taken to ensure that the content is age appropriate. The theme of Drugs Awareness is dealt with at junior levels by focusing on things that go into or on our body, and safety around medicines and their uses. It is developed further at senior levels through consideration of the effects of substances, nicotine and alcohol in particular. Defining what a drug is, addiction, and legal and illegal drugs are some of the other issues dealt with under this theme. An active learning approach is used throughout the materials. The programme includes strategies to promote and develop a positive school and classroom climate and atmosphere.

RESOURCE MATERIALS/ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The *Walk Tall* programme materials are available to all schools free of charge in both Irish (Misneach) and English. A teachers' handbook *Understanding Substances and Substance Use* was developed by the *Walk Tall* programme and the South Western Area Health Board (now Health Service Executive, South Western Area). The handbook is intended as a resource to support and inform teachers in the delivery of substance use education in the context of SPHE.

TRAINING /SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS

The *Walk Tall* programme Support Service offers support to teachers to teach the programme in the context of SPHE. Training is available to teachers annually through the national network of Education Centres where summer courses are available in July and August.

DEDICATED SUPPORT IN LOCAL DRUGS TASK FORCE AREA (LDTFA) SCHOOLS IN DUBLIN, BRAY AND CORK

A dedicated support service is available to all schools in Local Drugs Task Force Areas in Dublin, Bray and Cork. School based supports are offered annually. A menu of supports is sent to all LDTFA schools in September each year. Supports include:

- 1 Methodology Workshops (Circle Time, Co-Operative Games, Role Play).
- 1 Information on the Programme, including best practice in substance use education.
- 1 Planning session on *Walk Tall*/SPHE.
- 1 Development and review of Substance Use Policies.
- 1 Drugs Information and Awareness Training for staffs.
- 1 Parent Information sessions.

Evening training courses are available to teachers in Local Drugs Task Force Area schools in the autumn and spring terms. Information sessions on the programme in the context of SPHE are available to parents.

UPCOMING SUPPORT AND TRAINING

The *Walk Tall* programme is developing the following resources for teachers:

- 1 A planning resource in collaboration with *Stay Safe* and RSE, a practical guide to the use of the three programmes supported by the DES, to implement the SPHE Curriculum.
- 1 A Circle Time video, featuring teachers and pupils in an Irish school context engaging in Circle Time.
- 1 A pilot pre-service training module on substance use education to students in teacher education colleges.

Health Promoting School Programme

Many health boards developed health education programmes for use in primary schools throughout the 1980s and 1990s – for example, *Bí Folláin* (Midwestern Health Board) and *Grow in Health* (Southern Health Board). Through their Health Promotion Offices, many health boards provide support to schools in promoting health education. The *National Health Promotion Strategy* clearly sets out the rationale for, and objectives of, health promotion in schools in Ireland. The strategy contends

that a health promoting school can be characterised as a school constantly strengthening its capacity as a healthy setting for living, learning and working.

The *Health Promoting School Programme* is designed to raise awareness of health issues in schools. The *Health Promoting School* looks at the whole school, including the physical environment, the social environment, the learning environment, the involvement of parents, the well-being of all the children and adults in the school and includes a focus on all the ways in which health can be promoted in the school setting.

The development of the *Health Promoting School* is an opportunity for genuine partnership, seeking to develop supportive relationships around health promotion between health board personnel, teachers and parents. The Health Promoting Schools Network is supported by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Health and Children and is part of a wider European network of health promoting schools. However, it is not necessary to formally participate in the *Health Promoting School Network*, as the majority of schools are health promoting schools, given their role in ensuring the well-being of pupils and in creating positive physical, social and learning environments for both pupils and teachers.

CRITERIA OF THE HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOL

The *Health Promoting School Programme* is based on criteria developed by teachers for the programme. As part of the process, schools are free to develop their own criteria thereby enhancing ownership of the programme. For example, criteria developed by the Southern Health Board, as part of the *Health Promoting Schools* initiative are as follows:

- 1 The school recognises that the emotional needs of the child must be met for the child to benefit from his/her education.
- 1 The school provides an environment conducive to learning through the recognition of the importance of supportive relationships between staff, pupils and parents and through fostering links with the home and the community.
- 1 At least one member of the staff has attended a recognised School Health Education Training Course. The Plean Scoile incorporates activity based developmental health education.
- 1 A healthy eating school policy is in operation with the agreement and support of the parents and staff to ensure all pupils are provided with healthy, nutritious school lunches.
- 1 There is regular and frequent participation by all pupils in the school in organised physical activity.
- 1 A school policy on safety is in operation. The policy includes safety within the school premises, arriving at and leaving the school premises and procedures for dealing with emergencies. Parents, pupils and staff are fully informed of the policy.

- 1 With the co-operation and support of staff and pupils, the school environment is clean and attractive.
- 1 The school has a policy in place in relation to tobacco, alcohol and substance misuse, which has the agreement and support of parents, pupils and staff.
- 1 The school encourages access to dental, medical and psychological services and appropriate community resources that promote the health needs of children.

HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

The following are some of the characteristics of the *Health Promoting School Programme* though these may vary between health board areas:

- 1 The aim of the *Health Promoting School Programme* is to enhance the health of the whole school community.
- 1 It acknowledges the school's progress to date and provides recognition for achievement.
- 1 Ownership of the *Health Promoting School Programme* is grounded in the understanding that the health related issues of most concern are those identified by the school community, (parents, pupils and teachers) and action is based on these needs.
- 1 It acts on two levels, the environmental (health promotion and influencing policy) and individual (health education, empowering the individual to take responsibility). Both levels operate simultaneously.
- 1 It has to be relevant to the setting in which people experience the health-related needs. The *Health Promoting School Programme* is based on an organisational model with the school as the setting.
- 1 It is a continual developmental process, not an event, although events can be part of the process.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOL PROGRAMME

The implementation of the *Health Promoting School Programme* is individual to each school, and can vary according to the health-related needs identified, the ethos of the school and the environment of the school. The development follows the general framework, outlined below:

- 1 The *Health Promoting School Programme* is launched in the school by means of meetings with the staff at which the major health issues for all (pupils, teachers, parents, support staff) are identified.
- 1 A curriculum audit is undertaken in the school to identify areas already covered and to highlight areas of need. An action plan is drawn up to address the health related issues identified.
- 1 Planning is carried out to consult with parents and enlist their support. At this stage, many schools will launch the *Health Promoting School Programme* with activ-

ities that involve parents.

- 1 Inservice professional development of staff is provided around identified needs.
- 1 On-going support and consultancy on the recommendation of suitable teaching programmes and resources.
- 1 A member of staff of the school is identified as co-ordinator for any health-related developments in the school.

A number of positive outcomes for children have been reported by schools involved in the *Health Promoting School Programme*. These include the following:

- 1 Children's awareness of health-related issues were definitely enhanced.
- 1 There was a noticeable improvement in eating habits, litter awareness, attention to hygiene and environmental awareness.
- 1 There was very positive reaction from parents of infants in particular.
- 1 Standards of health awareness and knowledge of health and safety issues among staff were raised.
- 1 The public profile of schools was raised arising from public events (awards, campaigns and promotions).
- 1 Schools had access to a huge bank of resources from health boards and State agencies.
- 1 Schools became part of a network in order to avail of support and to share and exchange ideas.

Even though the experience of schools participating in the programme was positive, with both pupils and staff benefiting in terms of knowledge and skills, teachers have identified a number of issues of concern. These include the following:

- 1 Considerable time commitment involved in co-ordinating and planning.
- 1 No substitute cover provided for training/seminar days.
- 1 Most co-ordinators for the programme are either HCSL teachers, special needs resource/learning support teachers or special needs assistants. Not many classroom teachers are represented among the co-ordinators.
- 1 Most participating schools are from disadvantaged areas.
- 1 It is difficult to keep children motivated as they get older.
- 1 Parents need to be more involved for maximum benefit – perhaps more involvement by parents' councils required.

Generally, teachers in participating schools were very positive about the programme and its effects on pupils, staff and (to a lesser extent) parents. Schools participating in the programme found that the SPHE curriculum was addressed quite adequately through the programme. Support from Health Board Education Officers is an additional resource upon which schools may draw. However, there is a need to

address the issue of time management and support mechanism for co-ordinators.

SAMPLE SURVEY ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPHE CURRICULUM

During the school year 2002–2003 , the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) provided all primary teachers with two days inservice in relation to the SPHE Curriculum. A specific planning day for SPHE was not provided and schools were expected to incorporate planning for SPHE in to their other planning activities in the school. Implementation commenced in the school year 2003–2004 . Given that SPHE has the potential to create an additional workload for teachers because of the nature of its broad and all encompassing content, the Education Committee decided to carry out a brief study into teachers’ initial response to the SPHE curriculum. In

	%	Resources Preferred
1	38%	Variety of Resources
2	26%	Class Text and Workbook
3	26%	Single Teacher Manual
4	7%	Class Text

order to
gain an

overview of teachers’ views regarding the implementation of the SPHE programme, the Education Committee requested the assistance of members of the CEC in Districts III, IV, XIV and XVI, in distributing questionnaires at the AGMs of local branches of the INTO in January 2005 . These questionnaires were completed at the meetings and returned to the local member of the Education Committee who returned them to Head Office for final analysis.

Profile of Respondents

Of the 316 replies, the majority were from teachers in co-educational schools (71 . 84%). Special schools were also represented. The majority of respondents were female (81%), which is reflective of the teaching population. The majority were also class teachers – the rest being made up of principal teachers, resource or learning support teachers and Home School Community Liaison teachers. A small number of teachers did not indicate their teaching status.

The majority of respondents (67 . 4%) had more than 16 years teaching experience; 53 teachers had six to 15 years (16 . 77%) experience and 45 teachers (14 . 24%) had less than five years experience. Five teachers did not indicate the length

of their experience.

Professional Development

The majority of respondents had attended professional development training in SPHE, but interestingly, 20 respondents didn't know whether they had attended training or not. The majority (70%) thought that the training equipped them "adequately" to "well" while only 37 respondents (12%) indicated that they were unhappy with the professional development provided. Though no in-school planning day had been scheduled as part of Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP), half of the respondents indicated that they had a collaborative school planning day, while just over a third (36%) indicated that they had not.

Importance of SPHE

Encouragingly, the vast majority of respondents (96%) see SPHE as being very important or somewhat important. The majority spend up to half an hour (52%) a week, or up to one hour (25%) a week on SPHE. A small majority (53%) feel they have been successful in incorporating active learning strategies in their teaching of SPHE, while a significant minority (33%) said that they were not successful and 15% were unsure.

Availability of Resources

Almost two thirds (64%) were satisfied with the resources available to them for SPHE. Respondents were asked to rank the support resource material they would prefer. Their responses are outlined in the table below:

TABLE 1: TEACHER PREFERENCE RE RESOURCES

Almost two fifths (38%) of respondents indicated their preference for a variety of resource materials to be available to support the teaching of SPHE. In a separate question 63% stated that there should be a textbook for SPHE and 20% stated that there should not.

Cross-Curricular Approach

The majority of respondents (69%) were of the opinion that they succeeded in incorporating an 'across the curriculum' approach to SPHE. When asked in which

curricular areas they incorporated SPHE, Religious Education was the most likely subject, followed by SESE, English and PE. Only 64 respondents (20%) indicated that they did not integrate SPHE with other areas. About half the respondents indicated that outside personnel were brought in to support aspects of the SPHE curriculum. Such personnel included, nurses, gardaí, dental hygienists, Accord, and personnel in relation to RSE.

Barriers to the Implementation of SPHE

The greatest obstacle to teaching SPHE was time, followed in order by, lack of resources, overcrowded curriculum, multi-grade classes, class size, lack of parental support, lack of training, broadness of subject, children not being serious, lack of focus among teachers, suitable content and lack of knowledge. Only 30 teachers (9%) stated that they had no difficulties.

Concluding Comment

In conclusion, there is in general, a favourable response to the teaching of SPHE, with the majority integrating it across the curriculum. However, a major obstacle appears to be time and while teachers use a variety of resources, there would be a welcome for a single resource book which would cover all the strands. Given the number of support programmes available, which are accompanied by suitable resources, it is interesting that almost two thirds of teachers would find a specific textbook for SPHE useful. Teachers are spending between 30 to 60 minutes on a weekly basis teaching SPHE and it is quite usual to invite outside people to deliver aspects of the curriculum including RSE. The extent to which external personnel are invited in to schools, particularly for RSE, would warrant further research. In general, teachers were satisfied with the SPHE curriculum.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

A review of the Northern Ireland Curriculum was instigated at the end of the 1990s to ensure its suitability for pupils of the 21st century. It was also, especially in Key Stage 4, (pupils aged 14 to 16) to concentrate on skills education rather than on content, with a view to increasing the future employability of pupils. To this end, it was proposed that the narrow boundaries of subject areas would, instead, become curricular areas which would cover a number of interlinking subject areas (*Recommendations to the Minister for Education, January 2003*).

The curriculum for Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) is being developed in this context. Although it was of itself a hybrid subject, which saw the amalgamation of minor subject areas, it was recommended that it would be merged with Citizenship, Physical Education and Cultural Awareness across the four key stage areas, covering nursery, primary and post primary education. Together, these subjects would form part of the new curricular area of Personal Development along with religious education, sex and relationships education, careers education, work related learning and drugs, alcohol and tobacco education.

Underlying Philosophy of PSHE

The underlying philosophy of the Personal Development curriculum which emerged was to develop in the pupils a high degree of mutual respect and support of one another; to help pupils think about issues and then to arrive at informed opinions; to be aware of, and to care for, others and the environment. The pupils were also to be encouraged to develop the ability to discuss their feelings and to appreciate the feelings of others, with a view to combating high suicide rates in parts of Northern Ireland. The need for such a new curriculum is a recognition that not all children come to nursery or primary school with the same basic range of relationships with others, self-esteem or confidence. The curriculum also concentrates on external relationships and there is a strong emphasis on encouraging cultural tolerance, respect and open mindedness.

This curriculum was designed to be 'spiral' in nature. All the topic areas would be covered a number of times by the pupils but with each visit to an area, the degree of complexity of the lessons would be increased so that knowledge and experience are built upon over the four key stages in the passage between primary and post-primary schooling.

Major Themes

The curriculum was designed to follow the major themes of Personal Relationships, Health and Safety, Social Awareness, Personal Management and Preparation for Work. The last area was seen by government as highly important for key stage four so that school leavers would have a better chance of securing employment. This was also reflected in the concentration on skills education.

The approach to work in this area is focussed on the development of attitudes and values. To this end the planners emphasise how important it is that the children have the opportunity to develop these naturally as a consequence of their investigations and guided critical reflection on issues. Therefore, learning should be based on active pupil investigation, from which they can suggest solutions to problems discovered and make decisions based on what they have learned.

A second strand of Personal Development focuses on aspects of the local community. Children should have the chance to investigate local community issues and in so doing exchange ideas with others. Pupils should not only work within their own schools but should be able to meet outside agencies and form collaborative work groups with other schools.

It is hoped that these learning experiences will better equip pupils to be able to make transfers or leaps of progress such as:

- 1 from learning about themselves to becoming more aware of others;
- 1 from having a positive self image to developing strategies to improve learning;
- 1 from learning about options for a healthy, safe lifestyle to respecting their own body; and
- 1 from becoming aware of relationships to an appreciation and understanding of other cultures.

The Programme for Personal Development in the primary sector is set out in two strands:

- 1 personal understanding and health; and
- 1 mutual understanding in the local and global community.

Key Stage Four Arrangements

In Key Stage Four there is a statutory requirement for pupils to take courses in Learning for Life and Work. These courses are modular and pupils can achieve a GCSE qualification by taking four modules over two years. The modules cover the three major themes, PSHE, Local and Global Citizenship and Employability. The GCSE in Learning for Life and Work, produced by the Council for Curriculum, Evaluation and Assessment (CCEA) and validated by the Qualifications and Assessment Council, addresses the requirements for covering the three major themes above.

Additional areas of the Personal Development curriculum are still in the early stages and the pilot studies reports are not yet available.

Health Promoting Schools (HPS) Initiative

Alongside the PHSE curriculum initiative, pilot schemes in health promotion were also set up across the five Education and Library Boards (ELB). This topic originally started out as a ‘cross curricular theme’ in 1989 but over time it has grown in importance in the belief that the future health and well being of people can be influenced by the lessons they learn in school about lifestyle and health.

The Health Promotion Agency (HPA) in partnership with the five ELBs, have set up a team of five co-ordinators in the boards and one in the HPA. The first phase of the pilot study began in the school year 1995 /6 with six primary and two special schools. The HPS programme has now been extended to include post-primary and nursery schools. Being a part of the HPS programme should help schools provide an environment where the physical, mental wellbeing and safety of staff and pupils are supported in partnership with family, community and external agencies. (Health Promoting Schools).

The work of health promoting schools features in three key areas:

- 1 ethos and environment of the school;
- 1 quality of teaching and learning in health related areas of the curriculum; and
- 1 links with family, community and the other agencies concerned with health.

Health Promoting Schools are also supported by the Department of Health and Social Services, Public Safety and the Department of Education. This support is part of a partnership which also includes the Health Promotion Agency (NI), Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and CCEA. Schools opting to join this programme are offered help in developing the health and safety sections of their school development plan and they are offered help with staff training and development in good practice in the area of health and safety. The programme also:

- 1 benefits the health of all in school;
- 1 helps to meet the objectives of the PSHE curriculum;
- 1 enables schools to further develop home and community links for health;
- 1 provides guidance, support and staff development in the design, implementation and incorporation of the Health Promoting School concept into school development plans; and
- 1 provides extensive external evaluation of a school’s activities in relation to Health and Safety.

CONCLUSION

The introduction of the SPHE curriculum to primary schools has afforded teachers discrete time and a structure within which to address the social, personal and health education of their pupils. The Primary Curriculum states that SPHE:

Fosters the personal development, health and well-being of the child, and helps him/her to create and maintain supportive relationships and to become an active and responsible citizen in society.

(Primary School Curriculum 1999)

The focus on self-esteem, decision-making skills, conflict resolution, communication and self-awareness are central to the promotion of personal and social skills, which in turn have a major impact on the culture of the learning environment in the school. Approaches to behaviour and discipline are also rooted in the philosophy of positive relationships and respect for others.

There is no doubt that there is a great similarity between the fundamental approaches advocated and the content areas to be covered in the various support programmes, which were originally designed to deal with specific issues such as the prevention of child abuse or substance misuse. Teachers find that such programmes support many aspects of the SPHE programme. Health education programmes developed by Health Boards over the years have also contributed to the social, personal and health education of pupils. All programmes emphasise the central role of parents in implementing the programmes and the SPHE curriculum in general. It is, of course, not necessary to use any such programme, but they are considered useful resources. Where schools do use a particular programme, teachers find that with supplementary lessons in aspects not covered by a specific programme the SPHE curriculum can be adequately addressed. However, some teachers find that the use of a particular programme requires more time than the recommended allocated time of 30 minutes per week for SPHE. This can lead to a fear of curriculum overload, given the enormous scope of the content recommended in the SPHE curriculum.

Nevertheless, it is heartening that teachers recognise the central importance of social and personal development of children and the schools' role in ensuring their well-being through the SPHE curriculum. Values and attitudes are developed substantially in a child's formative years and are influenced significantly by the home and to a lesser extent by the school environment. Changes in Irish society in the past thirty to forty years have been substantial. Teachers' and parents' own social and personal development would have taken place in a different context to that of children today. SPHE is the one area of curriculum, where co-operation between teachers and parents is crucial to pupil learning.

School policies and practices play a key role in ensuring the full implementation of the SPHE curriculum. A school's code of behaviour, opportunities for pupils to participate in decisions that affect them and relations between teachers, pupils and parents, are fundamental in providing learning opportunities for children around issues such as rights and responsibilities, citizenship and interpersonal relations. How successful schools are in providing such learning opportunities remains to be seen, as the process of implementing the Primary School Curriculum continues. It is hoped that the views of delegates at the Consultative Conference on Education will contribute to the discussion on the place of social, personal and health education of pupils in primary schools.

Appendix I

SOCIAL PERSONAL HEALTH EDUCATION IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

INTO Questionnaire: AGM 2005

1. **School type:** Co-ed p Boys Only p Girls Only p Special p
 Junior p Senior p Other p
2. **Are you :** Male p Female p
3. **What is your teaching position in your school?** _____
4. **No. of years teaching:** 0-5 p 6-10 p 11-15 p 16-25 p 26+ p
5. **Did you undergo inservice training in SPHE during the school year 2002 / 2003?** Yes p No p
6. **If so, how well did this day equip you to teach the new SPHE programme?**
Well p Adequately p Not at all p
7. **No 'In-School' planning day was given over to SPHE.**
In spite of this, did your school manage to have collaborative planning in the subject? Yes p No p
8. **How would you rate the importance of SPHE in the curriculum?**
Very important p Somewhat important p Not important p
9. **How much time each week do you devote to SPHE?** _____

10. **Do you feel that you have successfully incorporated Active Learning Strategies in your teaching of SPHE?** Yes p No p
11. **How would you rate the resources available for SPHE?**
 Very satisfactory p Satisfactory p Not satisfactory p
12. **Which of the following would you prefer? Rank in order of preference:**
 A variety of resources p A single teachers' manual p
 A class text p A class text and workbook p
13. **Do you think there should be a textbook for SPHE?** Yes p No p
14. **Do you feel you succeed in incorporating an "across the curriculum" approach to teaching SPHE?** Yes p No p
15. **With what other curricular areas do you integrate SPHE?**

16. **Do you bring in any outside contributors to help support any aspect of the SPHE programme (eg, RSE)?** Yes p No p
 If Yes, please clarify _____
17. **Can you list what are, for you, the biggest obstacles to your teaching of SPHE?**

Part 2

Proceedings of the Consultative Conference on Education, November 2005

THE SPHE CURRICULUM

Mary Mac Donald, PCSP
Joe Conway, Education Committee

THE FATHER OF CHILDRENS' RIGHTS

Frank Flanagan, Mary Immaculate College

CITIZEN CHILD – THE EXPERIENCE OF A STUDENT COUNCIL IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL

Owen McLoughlin, Principal, Scoil Mhuire, Ballyboden

2

Proceedings of the Consultative Conference on Education, November 2005

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SPHE CURRICULUM

Mary McDonald, Primary Curriculum Support Programme

Introduction

I am very pleased to be here this morning to talk about the SPHE curriculum and some of the positives and challenges surrounding its implementation. There are a number of both that we can identify but, given the time constraints, I can only address a few. However, I will suggest a few ideas in terms of options and ways of dealing with issues that arise under Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE).

Context of SPHE

We will look first at the context of SPHE and our obligations under the Education Act 1998 and its role in education today. Remember that the Education Act is really the primary context of SPHE. Looking at the definition of SPHE, when it is planned and consistent throughout the school it gives children an opportunity to develop a framework of values, attitudes, understanding and skills. It is not just about information and skills development, but it is about a balance of those, along with values and understanding, that will in turn inform their decisions and actions, both now and in the future. SPHE, more than any other subject on the curriculum, provides particular opportunities for the child in the areas of personal development, health and well-being, and in turn helps him or her to create and maintain supportive relationships.

For a child to achieve that and to become an active and responsible citizen in society, is in itself a tremendous feat. Given the concern in recent years about Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), it is vital for us to allow a child to develop a sense of cooperation with others through co-operative learning in school, having the confidence, competence and language skills to ask a question and express a feeling. We give them opportunities to develop these skills in SPHE.

Implementation Issues

When I was asked to give this brief overview, I looked at the background paper that was circulated to all delegates and read that 96% of teachers, in a survey carried out by the INTO in January 2005, saw SPHE as an important subject on the curriculum. That is very significant support on the ground. Nonetheless, we have to acknowledge that for some teachers, this is a new subject and, therefore, there may be some perceived difficulties in relation to implementation. I will consider the elements of time, curriculum overload and resources, issues that came up in the survey.

Very often, as teachers, we find it difficult to implement or progress initiatives or programmes without adequate parental support. Parent-teacher meetings can provide an opportunity to inform parents, to consult with them and to engage in discussions and look at programmes that will best suit the needs of their child and children in the class and which reflect the ethos and values of the wider community. SPHE affords us an opportunity to engage with parents.

SPHE is a very broad curriculum which gives us an opportunity to give children skills for life. We must not, however, see it as a cure all for society's ills, but as an opportunity to give children skills for life, skills that will equip the child to go out with confidence in the world and deal with the areas, issues, concerns and situations that are thrown up in real life.

Contexts for SPHE

We will look at the INTO survey and the issues that came up in it, the first one being time. We must remember that the 30 minutes discrete time, one of the contexts for SPHE, is just for information giving – dedicated SPHE time where we may wish to deal with, for example, nutrition or dental hygiene or a project on SPHE.

Another of the three contexts for SPHE is the positive school climate and atmosphere. How much does the child learn from seeing how we, as teachers, relate to each other? Do we relate to each other easily and well, do we greet each other on the corridor, do we talk to each other in the playground, is communication evident in the hallways? As soon as we go into a school we can see in the playground whether there is a proactive anti-litter promotion. When we go into the corridors we can see if the

children's work is on display. Children pick up so much in these messages. In the classroom, is democracy underpinning the class rules? Have children had an input into them? In terms of time, there are so many other ways of incorporating and addressing SPHE other than the 30 minutes discrete time. For example, the integrated approach, the third context for SPHE, could mean that, while we are doing something like visual Arts, we can also design packaging for food so that children have an opportunity to integrate SPHE and the visual arts. If we are doing geography, then maybe we can also look at the source of food or look at food that is produced in the local area and how it is transported to the supermarkets and how, in turn, it comes into our homes and so on.

Another opportunity to look at food and nutrition is in terms of science. What effect does salt have – putting out a saucer of water the night before and looking the next morning, on a frosty morning like this, what is the effect salt has on it? Looking at language, developing the language of expression, the language of empathy, developing skills through the content and so on. With regard to drama, dealing with issues like bullying allows children to role play situations. How often have we, as adults, thought about a situation, when maybe we have gone away from an argument or a discussion, and said “if only I had thought of that or dealt with it a certain way”. We can all identify with that.

This is the integrated approach, addressing elements of SPHE through integration with another subject area, as well as in a discrete way. This approach means we deal with a topic once, regardless of subject heading and is very effective in relation to time.

Active learning is the principal learning and teaching methodology recommended for SPHE ie, the child being active in his or her own learning. It doesn't have to mean being physically active. Very often classroom situations do not allow for that, but using talk and discussion as a methodology and allowing children the opportunity in the classroom to develop talk and discussion and maybe problem solving skills. For example, when the estimates came out, whether we were out at a social gathering in a hotel as we are this weekend, or whether we were in the staff room, we want to talk and discuss. We will discuss the Budget ad nauseam, but do we give children enough opportunity to talk in the classroom, given that they are so willing? Talk and discussion can be used in a positive and focused way to address some aspect of the subject that we want to consider. Does problem solving transfer from the maths curriculum to real life situations where children have developed the skills that they need to manage a project, manage their time, self regulation, learn how to source information, how to collate it or to analyse it and generally develop higher order thinking skills? Also, giving children the authentic experience, in other words starting with people and places with whom they are most familiar, as opposed to the exotic far away places that many of us in our day learned about and from, before we knew very much about our own area. We need to give them the opportunity to develop the skills to appreciate visual art, the piece of

art on the wall, allowing them to develop their skills of appreciation or the aesthetic dimension likewise with music. Children get opportunities in SPHE for co-operative learning – helping them work together. Many of us, as adults, have never learned to work co-operatively as a team. Also, an appreciation of democracy, learning to go with the consensus, learning to go with the majority decision is invaluable. There are so many skills available to a child through being actively engaged in his or her own learning.

Resources

In the INTO survey, resources were seen to be something of a challenge in SPHE. Teachers sometimes look for particular textbooks to address the various dimensions, aspects and content objectives of SPHE. Really, when we look at it, SPHE, it is the most richly resourced subject on the curriculum as there are a number of mainstream resources that every school is furnished with for SPHE. Indeed, no single textbook would deal with the situations, concerns, content objectives or other areas pertaining to a particular school. Nonetheless, textbooks are an important resource that this curriculum allows us to use in a much more flexible way, in that we can dip in and out of them and take from them what we want in a structured but flexible way. We are enabled to plan for the different needs and concerns, which may have particular resonance for our own school or environment. There is no one textbook or resource that will completely fulfil all the content objectives for any school. We may get a certain textbook and work right through it but if we are to fulfil curriculum requirements in relation to SPHE, we will need to look at a variety of resources and pick from them. The PCSP website (www.pcsp.ie) provides information to support planning for schools in SPHE. There are two very comprehensive resource lists, one which addresses planning under class levels in terms of resources and indeed links the content objectives to the resources suggested different class levels, and a second resource list based on the strand units, regardless of class level. So there is a lot of help out there in terms of resources.

RSE

There are different dimensions of SPHE that may prove a challenge for us in the classroom, for example, RSE, but RSE is only one aspect of SPHE. In turn, sensitive issues are only an aspect of, or part of, RSE. Looking at the extent of the sensitive content: children are going to learn the names of their sexual body parts along with their other body parts; they are going to learn about new life in animal life and in human life; they are going to learn about the changes that will take place in puberty and they will learn that a baby grows for nine months in its mother's womb and then is born. They are

going to learn how sexual intercourse takes place in the context of a loving, committed relationship. There are very few children, if any, that would leave primary school without having been exposed to that level of content on any soap programme. There used to be the watershed of nine o'clock but nowadays that seems to be gone. So when we, on the other hand, are delivering what we call the sensitive issues of RSE, we are delivering within the value system that reflects the ethos of the school and indeed that of the wider community. That is very important to say and that would be reflected in school policy. Again, this is an opportunity to engage parents.

In relation to RSE, we have to acknowledge that in today's world children need relationships and sexuality education in a values context, with clear, correct and factual information reflecting the ethos of the school in its context. SPHE provides that curriculum context. In terms of the class teacher teaching RSE in the classroom, we need to reflect on our relationship with the children, seeing that we as class teachers, are the best people to address SPHE in the classroom. We have an established relationship with the children, we know what stage they are at, we know what we need to be sensitive to at any given time, and we know the maturity level of the class. As the class teacher, we will be the ones that are there subsequently for the questions that are thrown up. RSE, as laid out in the SPHE curriculum, must be delivered within the primary cycle. If we leave the sensitive areas of the RSE programme until the end of fifth and sixth classes, we will be condensing it into a couple of hours, effectively. In a worse case scenario, we will be condensing an eight year paced, phased programme of RSE into two hours and I suppose we can all see that that is certainly less than desirable. We wouldn't do it with fractions so why would we do it with something as important as sexuality education?

Child Protection

In terms of child protection we have to look at the three pronged approach ie, prevention, procedures and best practice. In terms of the DES *Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures* we know that they were issued to all schools about three years ago and all schools were invited to attend seminars on the DES guidelines in relation to procedure and protocols. However, the designated liaison person in some schools has not yet been identified. This is one issue we need to look at. That person needs to be identified in the school and given responsibility in relation to this area. As teachers and professionals, we have elected to work with and be responsible for children and this is part of our responsibility. We are on the front line in terms of contact with children. We are the ones in primary school that have them all day for five days a week and we may be the person with whom the child has the only relationship or certainly the most important relationship outside of the home. So, in that respect, we have some responsibility, and as professionals we need to take that on in terms of

child welfare and child well-being. The Ferns Report will just act as a catalyst for this, as we have all been horrified and shocked at what went on there. That sort of behaviour depends on a conspiracy of silence and collusion and we as primary teachers cannot be part of that. In schools we need to have a statement rather than a policy, as a policy infers that we have some choice in terms of what we elect to do or not to do. In our statement we simply need to say that we follow the guidelines as issued by the Department and maybe name the DLP and outline how toileting procedures and changing for PE and so on will be dealt with.

Stay Safe is an Irish resource designed to give children the skills, information and a sense of security and self worth – I am worth something. That phrase has been made flippant by the advertisement, but the notion that as a child I am worth it, I am worth looking after, I am worth growing up with a good sense of self worth is very important. The *Stay Safe* programme was designed for an Irish culture and context and should give children many of the skills that are needed for their own self worth and indeed protection. Nonetheless, we must acknowledge teachers' apprehension regarding the sensitive nature of personal safety, and sometimes we may feel uncomfortable with some of the things that are thrown up. But getting back to our professional responsibility, in this regard we are also apprehensive about disclosures being made and I must say that this happens very rarely, but when it does, we have the procedures in terms of how we deal with it. It cannot be overstated how important it is to follow the correct procedures when we have a disclosure, an allegation or a suspicion in the context of child protection, because we can totally negate the evidence of what the child is saying or how it can be progressed if we don't follow procedures correctly.

Another area that comes up under SPHE is Substance Use – we look at substance use as opposed to substance abuse as there are substances that we need to use if we are diabetic for example. So we look at the whole positive and negative use of substances in the classroom and learn to differentiate which is which. This links in with the idea of nutrition because obesity is just an enormous problem, if you'll pardon the pun. This train is not coming down the track, but is already in the station. So we have to look again in school at what is good nutrition and how we foster good habits. We also have to look at how we engage with parents because obviously in school our role is limited in relation to nutrition.

Conclusion

So to conclude, SPHE gives us particular opportunities for the personal development, health and well-being of the child. It can develop self-awareness and self-regulation, motivation, good communication skills and leadership and democracy, for example, if they are working on a project. SPHE can give them insights into themselves and consequently help them make good decisions in terms of life choices. It gives them

interpersonal skills in terms of their being able to relate to others effectively and with confidence. Such skills are widely acknowledged as making a critical difference in the workplace. These are the skills that are being looked for because, and research will back this up, they make a critical difference in negotiating this knowledge society that we hear about more and more. It is highly significant that 96% of teachers acknowledge this in the INTO survey.

SPHE builds this foundation of skills, values, attitudes and understanding and information that is relevant to these issues and areas and consequently fosters in the child a sense of self worth and self efficacy and equips the child to deal with new and demanding situations. We have aspirations for that child in our classroom in this regard. As adults we would feel ourselves well equipped were we to have, what I have just described, in terms of dealing with life.

SPHE – A TEACHER’S PERSPECTIVE

Joe Conway, Education Committee

A goodly number in this hall today will have, somewhere along the line, done Latin. Strange you might say that a speaker initiates a talk on SPHE by referring to that long moribund tongue.

Let me jog your memories with a charming piece of nostalgia from Julius Caesar’s own account of his wars in France – his *De Bello Gallico*. Herein, he informed us that – Gallia omnis divisa est in tres partes – that all of Gaul was divided into three distinct parts.

This morning, this Julius Caesar is about to section off teachers – for the purposes of the SPHE curriculum – into three, not all that clearly defined cohorts, namely:

- a) Teachers who enthusiastically implement SPHE.
- b) The ‘In Fairness’ Brigade ie, those who will say “In fairness, it might have a lot going for it, but as yet I’m unconvinced”.
- c) Those who think it a great load of ‘old hogwash’.

Some would argue that this segmentation could be done with reference to all subjects – there would probably be hugely varying levels of enthusiasm or ‘díogras’ right across the spectrum of the revised curriculum.

But in the matter of SPHE specifically, this is the first difficulty, I believe, that it runs into as a subject. Now, I want to prefix my next observations with a detail from the

Education Committee's research on the subject, namely, that a significant majority are committed to the implementation of SPHE in their schools.

However, I feel that there is an element of perceived electibility about the subject. In other words, you can run with it, or run away from it, depending on your disposition or mindset, and I believe that there is an historical explanation for much of this.

As a growing plethora of programmes began to make their headlong rush into classrooms in the 80s and 90s viz. *Stay Safe* and RSE, for example, a significant number of schools effectively had no truck with these initiatives. Moreover, for those who did (as well as for those who didn't) there was a widespread practice in schools of importing speakers/experts to deal with the 'Sensitive Areas', as the euphemism went. I suppose, in retrospect, it was our contribution to the national phenomenon of the time – An Irish Solution to an Irish Problem... that you ducked the challenge altogether, or you ducked it by proxy.

The upshot of this manifested itself in 1999, when the Revised Curriculum arrived in our classrooms. There was a legacy of perceived choice or electivity attaching to this new subject which only began to dispel with the SPHE Inservice 'Roll-Out' in 2001. Teachers were apprised of the reality of Social, Personal and Health Education, that this was for real, an entity in all its complexities that had to be grappled with and delivered.

Just an interesting aside here about our own Education Committee Survey. 316 teachers were surveyed. Of them, 70% were happy with their SPHE inservice training. When questioned if they had received SPHE training, 20 teachers replied that they could not say whether they had or whether they hadn't! But a whopping great majority (96%) believed that SPHE was very important or somewhat important.

There was, of course, another difficulty with the introduction of the subject, and I will highlight this by referencing the SPHE Curriculum document itself.

Social, Personal and Health education provides particular opportunities to foster the personal development, health and well being of the child and to help him/her to create and maintain supportive relationships and become an active and responsible citizen in society.

It would be hard to enunciate a more weighty aspiration for a curricular device.

Now, if you want to promote an area of the curriculum, then logically you will give it every positive support. Yet, in its introduction to schools, SPHE had the inglorious distinction of being the only subject not accorded a specific school-based inservice day. Whatever fudge was utilised to rationalise this decision, it gave the wrong signal. It amounted to an inversion of status for the subject ie, this is a very important subject, so important that we will herewith disadvantage it more than any other subject in the

curriculum.

School based inservice is where the nitty-gritty planning and pre-implementation takes place, where reflection gives bespoke plans, which in turn begets full subject implementation. Seminar-based inservice alone can be likened in a way to Brighton Pier – good as far as it goes... but a poor way of getting to France!

And what of that implementation, in place now for two years? What has our research indicated? The indicators are reasonably positive, with a picture of a teaching force cognisant of the importance of SPHE, and of them devoting up to one hour per week to the subject. This, in itself, is encouraging but only a bare majority feel they have been successful in incorporating active learning strategies in their teaching. More worrying still is the fact that two out of every three teachers want a text/workbook for the subject.

I firmly believe that this is evidence – not of a failure by teachers to understand the thrust and nuances of the SPHE curriculum – but of the constant battle teachers are fighting, trying to square a circle that has a day of finite hours and a curriculum whose demands seem to grow exponentially. Are teachers saying, “We’d love to deliver this, but we can’t as things stand, we need the help of a device that is inherently frowned on by the curriculum itself.” Is this tantamount to teachers saying that the SPHE curriculum is, as it is promulgated at present, undeliverable? And, for that matter, how many of us have stopped to reflect since 1999 and asked, “is this Revised Curriculum, with its complexity, depth and range, with its adjuncts and addenda, with its policies and plans, with its assessment and aggregations, is it just – within the confines of human endeavour and a finite day for children’s attention and motivation – simply deliverable?”

Like the little street waif who hollered, as the bumptious but clearly naked king drove past, “...but he has nothing on!” we teachers should not shrink from giving our considered professional opinion and shout out the unpalatable truth, if we feel that somebody needs to call halt.

Let me revisit once again the aims of the SPHE curriculum – which sets as its desired targets the building of skills, attitudes, values and knowledge among our pupils, leading them to be valued and caring citizens. Lofty ideals indeed, and well worth striving for, I’m sure we would all agree.

But, for all that, we should not lose our sense of proportion either with the remit of the subject. Many of these values and attitudes will be well grafted on to our pupils by the very first day they arrive in our schools. Their nascent skills and knowledge are likely to flourish or founder, depending on the quality of training, nurture, love and support that they have got in the four years prior to arrival in our classrooms.

Whether we like to admit it or not, I think it is indisputable that no curriculum can

2. See Part 3 of this report

come into existence without a political basis – I’m using ‘political’ here with a lower-case ‘p’ – and SPHE is no exception. An aspiration to build valued and caring citizens is manifestly a political piece of desiderata – nothing wrong with that in a democratic society, but therein lurks a danger.

Countenance, if you will, Vincent Browne’s programme late in the evening or *Talk to Joe* – which mercifully most of you are forced to miss because of its schedule – or indeed almost any current affairs/ commentary outlet of any organ. How many times do you hear the experts, the saineolaithe voicing their considered solution to this ill in society, or that failure in the system, with the rejoinder that “...well, the schools have a huge role to play in this...”

Well, I’m bound to say that when it comes to problems in the midst of our young people – isolation, depression, drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, aggression, to mention only a few – schools have a serious role to play, but schools are not the answer. And teachers should lay down political markers that we are not some kind of legion of sociological Harry Potters – who can magic away the problems of disaffection and distress that are abroad in this land of ours, when ironically we never had it so good! Before I leave you, I want to advert to the question of overweight and obese children.

At the beginning of this year, the Education Committee did an interesting piece of research in the counties of Waterford, Tipperary and Clare – all the details are in your Conference Pack under a sub-title *Straitened Bodies*.² Over 230 teachers responded to the questions – these teachers having a combined pupil cohort of 5108 children in their classes. It showed roughly one in ten overweight and one in forty obese. Now, these are teachers’ perceptions and are not scientific – nevertheless, they tie in very tightly with the HBSC (Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children) survey, conducted in twenty-nine countries worldwide in 2001 / 2.

While acknowledging the existence of this problem, we should be prominent in caution. Most of you will remember the Armageddon-type scenarios painted by journalists over the years – there was herpes, followed by HIV, Aids, the Ebola Virus, BSE, obesity... and now we have graduated on to bird flu, and just in time for Christmas, too! Journalistic careers have been built on promoting scares – we teachers know there is a problem but we know also that it is not of the gargantuan proportions sometimes peddled in the media.

And what of that problem, what other snippets did the survey yield up? Well, in addition to being a challenge for SPHE, it is clearly too a challenge for the inextricably linked subject of PE. In the face of that difficulty with overweight children, it will come as no great surprise to you that six in ten teachers had no adequate indoor facilities in which to do PE. And a mere 8.4% of teachers ie, less than one in ten felt that children were getting enough exercise at home. Put those two items together with the figure of 66.8%, that being the statistic indicating what percentage of teachers would like to spend more time at PE, and you have a very compelling argument for

massive investment in indoor facilities for all schools. You all know that you cannot wish away weight, it cannot be dissembled in pious rhetoric, it needs activity – and in an Atlantic climate such as ours, that means indoor areas for PE, Dance, and so on.

I would like to give you two actual responses from this survey: both come in reply to the question “**What single factor militates most against your teaching of PE?**” Of course, when you ask teachers for a single factor, they shoot up their hands and give you at least three – as you will see here:

REPLY ONE:

1. No gym.
2. Very little equipment.
3. Outdoor concrete area outside other rooms, and field usually wet.

NEXT REPLY

Lack of indoor facilities and hard play area. Also, school located on main Cork/Dublin road where 12,000 to 15,000 cars and lorries pass weekly, and thus it is impossible to speak or be listened to with the noise of it all.

It all reminds me somewhat of what Dr Johnson said of the dog begging... “The interesting thing, Boswell, is not that he does it badly, but that he should do it at all.”

So, there, that’s my perception of where we are at – at the sharp end of SPHE implementation and the awesome challenge of moulding and building a healthy, well and balanced future generation to, (I was going to say pay our pensions, but no) to take our society on to a level of inclusivity and wellbeing, in the face of growing material prosperity and individualism. But we, as teachers, should, I feel, accept our roles as agents of progress and change, without succumbing to fox-like blandishments about the extraordinary talents of the Irish primary school teacher. Whenever I hear this, I make a mental adjustment to equate “the talented Irish teacher” with double-speak for “You must muddle on with what you’ve got, wasn’t it good enough for those who went before you, and – God knows – didn’t it beget the Celtic Tiger!”

In the last analysis, we can, as teachers, do much, but we must not accept the role of a sort of Schutzstaffel of rectitude, which could be pernicious and demoralising. As well as implementing SPHE in our schools, we should take care to have it in our own professional lives – where we can interact socially and safely, where our personal development accrues and where we can preserve our most valuable asset – our own health.

3. Key, Ellen, *The Century of The Child*, available on-line at www.socsci.kun.nl/ped/whp/histeduc/ellenkey/

4. *Readers of Laurence Kohlberg’s The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice (Essays on Moral Development, Volume 1)*, Harper Collins, 1981 will already be familiar with the broad outlines of Korczak’s biography and educational ideas. The most complete biography is Betty Jeans Lifton’s, *The King of Children: the Life and Death of Janusz Korczak*, New York: St Martin’s Griffin, 1988. The full text of Lifton’s biography is available on-line at www.korczak.com/biography/kap-0.htm

Wait a minute... it's called SPHE, and sure isn't that what it's all about today.

JANUSZ KORCZAK: FATHER OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Frank Flanagan, Mary Immaculate College

Introduction: The Century of the Child

In 1899, the radical Swedish social reformer Ellen Key predicted that the 20th century would be the century of the child.³ She could not, of course, have anticipated the

catastrophes, of both natural and human origin, which would delay the fulfilment of this prophecy: economic collapse, war, genocide, famine, epidemics, etc. Nonetheless from the beginning, the 20th century showed great promise of meeting Key's optimistic vision.

By 1924, the Assembly of the League of Nations had adopted a Declaration of the Rights of the Child. This Declaration was revised and expanded in 1948 and endorsed by the UN in 1959.

At the same time new educational initiatives attempted to promote more enlightened approaches to the care and development of children. The movement towards child-centred education, particularly under the influence of Dewey and other post-Rousseauist visionaries, and innovative radical institutions such as Homer Lane's *Little Commonwealth* and AS Neill's *Summerhill* in England, Patrick Pearse's *Scoil Éanna*, and Fr EJ Flanagan's *Boys Town* in the US, tried to include children in the administration of their own schools and institutions.

One of the most influential of these centres of children's self-government, if not the best known, was Janusz Korczak's home for Jewish orphans which flourished in the Polish city of Warsaw between 1912 and 1942.

Korczak's influence has taken on global significance: in 1979 the Polish Government, to celebrate the Year of the Child (the centenary of Korczak's birth) proposed that the United Nations institute a Convention of Children's Rights.

Who was this man that the Polish Government of the time chose to honour in such a way?⁴

5. Quoted, Arnon J, 'Who was Janusz Korczak?', *Interchange*, 14, 1, Ontario, Institute for Studies in Education, 1983, 33

6. Quote *Ibid.*, 33

Origins

Korczak was born Henryk Goldszmit in 1879 into a well-to-do assimilated Jewish family in Warsaw. He chose a career in medicine, and specialised in paediatrics. He established a literary reputation with two books based on his experiences with the slum children of Warsaw: *Street Children* (1901) and *Salon Children* (1904). He established a related literary career as Janusz Korczak – a pseudonym he adopted for a literary competition. In a society where one’s surname declared one’s religious affiliation, Goldszmit was unmistakably a Jew, an outsider. A Polish name like Korczak, linked to a classical Polish past, allowed him to become an insider, a Pole.

As a paediatrician and an educator Korczak dedicated his life to childhood and to the vindication of the rights of the child. In his *Ghetto Diaries*, he describes how he resolved to remain single and childless and to devote himself to the service of childhood: “Out of a mad soul,” he wrote, “was forged a sane deed: a vow to uphold the child and defend his rights.”

The world’s oldest proletariat is the child. This, the oldest underdog in the world, is suffering at the hands of those who call themselves grownups... We must make a start with the oldest underdog in the world – the child. Justice will come from the child.

In 1912 Korczak was appointed Director of a new Jewish orphanage in Warsaw, the Children’s Home. He devoted himself to this task wholeheartedly, effectively abandoning both a successful paediatric practice and a growing literary reputation. The orphanage, in effect, became the laboratory where he could develop his educational system based on objective (empirical) observations of children and childhood. The Children’s Home was to be Korczak’s home, and the orphans his children, for the next 30 years.

The Children’s Home

By 1925, the Jewish population of Warsaw exceeded 320,000. Like everywhere else Warsaw suffered from the economic collapse, depression and slumps in trade and employment and the consequent political instability of the late 1920s. In addition, Warsaw suffered the resulting anti-Semitism.

The Children’s Home (Dom Sierot at 92 Krochmalna Street) catered for approximately 100 boys and 100 girls. Children were admitted at seven and stayed for the duration of their primary schooling which ended at 14. They attended the local state-funded schools for Jewish children where lessons were in Polish and the curriculum (except for religion) was the same as in other Polish schools. But their out-of-school life was largely confined to the free but protective ethos of the Children’s Home.

7. Neill AS, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1985, 59

8. *Ibid.*, 60

Many of the children of the Children's Home were not technically orphans but victims of poverty, social deprivation, overcrowding, and abandonment; they were the children of prostitutes, criminals, and broken homes. Aware of the almost inevitable causality between social and economic deprivation and delinquency Korczak set about the task of re-socialising them in a structured, child-centred ethos. Aided by his life-long colleague Stefania Wilczynska, Madame Stefa, Korczak provided a supportive, harmonious community, which promoted developmental self-discipline and self-restraint. He inculcated a deep reverence for freedom of opinion and democratic institutions and procedures by involving the children at every level of the operation and governance of the orphanage.

There was a constitution, a parliamentary assembly, a trial court and a newspaper all of which enabled children and adults alike to deal with differences on a basis of institutionalised equality, without domination or repression. The constitution and judicial system reflected Korczak's belief in the educative power of institutions. They provided firm social contracts between the weak and the strong, between the child and the adult. The purpose of the court, for example, was educational and (re)formative. Korczak considered it a real source of emancipation for the children; it also provided practical opportunities to develop respect for law and individual rights. "Every child has the right to serious consideration and a just handling of his grievances. In the past such things have always depended on the disposition and the good will of the teacher. The child had no right to protest. It is time to put an end to such tyranny."⁵

The principal purpose of the Children's Home court was more than punitive. It was primarily intended to reinforce the order which structured relations between the strong and the weak.

*When someone does something bad, it is best to forgive him and to wait for him to mend his ways. But the court must at the same time protect the quiet ones and see to it that they are not bothered by the bullies: the court must protect the honest ones and hard workers and make sure that they are not taken advantage of by those who don't care or are lazy; the court must maintain order, because disorder harms good, honest, peaceful people the most. The court is not justice itself, but must always search for the truth.*⁶

-
9. Korczak, J, *How to Love a Child*, in *Selected Works of Janusz Korczak*, Translated by Jerzy Bachrach, Washington: Published for the National Science Foundation by the Scientific Publication Foreign Co-operation Center, Warsaw, 1979, 129
 10. Korczak, J., *When I Am Little Again; The Child's Right to Respect*, translation and introduction, E.P. Kulawiec, Maryland: University Press of America, 1992, 176
 11. See Erikson, Erik H., *Childhood and Society*, Vintage Books, 1995, 232-234; *Identity and the Life Cycle*, New York, Norton and Co., 1994, 87-93
 12. See Margulies, Peter, 'The Lawyer as Caregiver: Child Client's Competence in Context', *Fordham Law Review*, 64, 1996 (A report on the Conference on Ethical Issues in the Legal Representation of Children, 1995), 1473-1504

Self-Government

How can children be included in the political reality of the state or community? Can we extend to children the kinds of freedoms which adults enjoy in liberal democracies? Korczak agreed with his contemporary AS Neill that children should be involved in the control of their own affairs. According to Neill:

...a self-governing school carries its civics out into life... the school that has no self government should not be called a progressive school. It is a compromise school. You cannot have freedom unless children feel completely free to govern their own social life. When there is a boss, there is no real freedom.⁷

One of the weaknesses of any system of self-government, however, and one which Neill freely admitted, was that it depended heavily on the presence of a cadre of older pupils who take it seriously. Although the younger children participated in the system at Summerhill they were incapable of running it on their own. "Frankly," Neill wrote:

...younger children are only mildly interested in government. Left to themselves I question whether younger children would ever form a government. Their values are not our values, and their manners are not our manners.⁸

Korczak himself had first-hand experience of this developmental difference. Under his editorship, from 1926 to 1939, a weekend supplement to a popular Polish newspaper was entirely written and produced by children. Gradually, the enterprise came to be dominated by the older children, the adolescents, who had clearer personal and political goals and greater powers of articulation. Korczak realised that age and experience make a difference; children are not equal in their capacity to articulate or direct their own affairs.

The question is, then, to what extent can children participate effectively in self-government? And the answer is clear: such an initiative can only be undertaken as a developmental programme. Through participation in a real system younger children learn; and in their turn they became the older students who can be committed to the ideal of self-government.

But even the issue of granting a constitution is problematic: adult control over children's lives can only be ended voluntarily by adults, not by children themselves. The children of the Children's Home did not demand their own constitution: it was bestowed on them by Korczak. When it was evident (to him) that it did not work as he wished he withdrew it and revised it. Its purpose was educative in the first place: children were to learn to be democratic by having (constrained but appropriate) opportunities to behave democratically in the first place: children can only learn to be

13. Arnon, *op. cit.*, 34

14. Korczak, J., *King Matt the First*, trans. Richard Lourie, Vintage Books, 2005

democratic by being given structured opportunities to engage in democratic activities.

Children's Rights

Korczak passionately advocated the idea that children have rights which must be acknowledged and vindicated. He called for a "Magna Charta" of children's rights which would include children's right to their present, to an integrated self-identity, to self-expression, and to participation in all decisions affecting them.

Perhaps the child's primary and irrefutable right is the right to voice his thoughts, to play an active part in our deliberations and verdicts concerning him. When we have gained his respect and trust, when he confides in us of his own free will and tells us what he has the right to do, then there will be fewer misunderstandings and mistakes.⁹

Korczak was critical of the 1924 *Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child* on the grounds that it did not go far enough. "The Geneva law-makers," Korczak wrote, "confused duties with rights; the tone of the declaration is one of persuasion not insistence: (it is) an appeal to goodwill, a plea for kindness" rather than a declaration of rights.¹⁰

But a child's right to become him/herself in the context of a constructivist view cannot be separated from the enculturation which the child must necessarily receive in order to be a functioning adult at all. What is decisive is not the child's right to be him or herself *ab initio* but the adult influence which will delimit (if not determine) what the child can become.¹¹

In addition, the child does not have the right to do anything which is contrary to some adult's understanding of what s/he is to become. The child can (subject to the developmental limitations of expression) tell us what s/he feels and thinks, and we may take such communications into account in our decisions regarding the individual concerned. Although the child's voice should be heard the decision regarding the weight of importance to be assigned to the child's expressed view will be decided by adults, whether parents, parent surrogates, or judges, not by the children themselves. Thirdly, notwithstanding the priority given to the child's "best interests" in the 1989 *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, there is no universally agreed definition of a child's "best interests" which would direct the interpretation of the child's view.¹² Children's rights are always subject to interpretation and implementation by adults. The need for 'goodwill and kindness' is inescapable.

15. Quoted Aron, *op. cit.*, 34

16. Quoted, Lifton, Ch. 30

17. Newerly, I., "Preface" to Korczak, J., *The Ghetto Diaries*, 74, 75

The Redemptive Power of the Child

In his practice in the Home Korczak promoted an austere optimism. He kept the children protected from the outside world in the belief that by allowing them to develop morally and socially in a self-contained, self-governing environment he could create the basis of a new moral social order. His priorities were reflected in the speech he made annually to those leaving the orphanage. “As you leave here we’re giving you only one thing to take with you – the dream of a better life, a life that doesn’t exist anywhere in the world today, but that someday will: a life of justice and truth... But this is no little thing. Truth and justice are things which everyone must learn to embody in himself as best he can. No one can do it for him. It’s up to each one of you”.¹³

King Matt the First,¹⁴ a novel for children, has proved to be Korczak’s most enduring work. It was the first book in Polish literature with a child hero who spoke and thought as a child. In Poland it holds the same status as *Jimín* in Ireland, *Tom Sawyer* in the US, or *Peter Pan* in England: it is as much a national symbol as a novel.

When little Prince Matt is orphaned and succeeds to the crown he sets himself the task of righting all his country’s wrongs. He fails because he is a child and lacks the understanding, experience, and political guile necessary to fulfil his ambitions. Although the book reflects Korczak’s own idealism and optimism ultimately, for the adult reader at least, *King Matt* is a deeply pessimistic book: good intentions and child-like idealism are not sufficient to bring about social improvement and justice. We cannot depend on children to reform the world for us. Korczak’s abiding hope that “justice will come from the child” is in stark contrast to the pessimism in *King Matt*.

Dealing with Greater Force

Although most of his co-workers never questioned Korczak’s methods many of them realised that he was not preparing his orphans to face the real world of inequality and injustice. Yet they allowed themselves to be convinced that his ideal of an oasis of order and justice would produce people who could, and would, fight evil with virtue. Subsequent events would suggest that they were tragically mistaken.

Harsh reality called for characteristics absent from Korczak’s scheme. Graduates of the orphanage had been taught to be unaggressive, non-competitive, co-operative, trusting, and reasonable. By the 1930s economic recession brought an atmosphere of growing anti-Semitism. Many of the graduates of the Home became embittered because Korczak’s system had not prepared them for life in a society where, as Jews, they were regarded as second-class citizens, much less for later life in the Ghetto. They felt that they should have been trained to fight back; their lives were difficult because they believed in justice; and justice was useless in a world ruled by brute force. One survivor commented: “Korczak made my life difficult, because he educated me – successfully – to believe in justice, whereas we live in a world where brute force

prevails".¹⁵

The children could not be protected entirely from the political and ideological conflicts that raged outside the orphanage in the Warsaw of the 1930s. Many of the graduates of the Home joined the Communist party as a protection against the growing anti-Semitism. They shared Communist literature with the older children in the Home. Communist sympathisers, unemployed and bitter, who returned to visit incited the volunteer helpers and the older children to be more critical of Korczak, whom they considered politically naive.

This aspect of Korczak's philosophy presents another problem for the educator: to what extent should we protect children from the realities of life and inculcate an idealism contrary to the acknowledged realities of life. The world is not fair: while we may pay lip-service to the principles of justice and equity, charity and humility, experience teaches our children that self-interest is often the predominant value and force the most effective method.

The Ghetto

In September 1939, Germany occupied Poland and in November 1940 the Warsaw Ghetto was established and the Children's Home was moved. Overcrowding and the attendant malnutrition and disease in the Ghetto caused the deaths of thousands even before the deportations to the Nazi death camps began in late 1941.

The Warsaw Ghetto was, at every point and in every particular, a negation of what Korczak had attempted to achieve in the Children's Home: the rule of law, reason, compassion, co-operation, and equality. As one survivor put it:

*You can't shove half a million people on top of each other into a small walled-off area without adequate food, housing, or heat and expect them to lead normal lives. In the beginning you might have felt normal, but after a while you were no longer sane. The ghetto was a mad world, and we behaved madly.*¹⁶

As conditions within the Ghetto deteriorated support for the orphanage diminished drastically. Korczak was frequently urged to send the children back to whatever relatives they might have and to save himself. But he insisted that the children were safer with him. In the blistering summer of 1942, in a state of extreme stress and tension, he managed to procure sufficient money, food, fuel, medicines, to keep the Home going. There was never enough but he succeeded in keeping the Home intact, keeping the children clothed and fed after a fashion and, above all, protecting them from the barbarous reality of the Ghetto.

And his policy of insulating his children from the outside world had an unexpected, if grim, benefit. Igor Newerly, a non-Jewish friend and long-time colleague, recalled the order and routine of the orphanage even in the final days.

It is difficult to describe the psychological shock experienced by any normal decent man in this sinister concentration of people living under sentence of death, the sense of personal humiliation and shame at being a so-called Aryan. Only in the Children's Home was it possible to recover, to regain self-control. There it was like an oasis... Peace, order, good management prevailed in the house as if the children had lived there a long time. Korczak's child community – the court of peers, the self-government, the orphanage newspaper, the fixed schedule of daily routines and occupations such as monitoring duties, school hours – all were maintained. The children studied, cleaned and tidied the house, worked in the linen room, the kitchen. Only the oldest boys went to work on building sites within the ghetto or at the Eastern Railway Station, unloading coal or laying rails. This gave them the chance to barter this or that, and bring back some food.¹⁷

The End

As the end approached Korczak became more and more resigned, keenly conscious of his crippling responsibility and of the dark rumours regarding the fate of those who had been taken for “resettlement”. The final pages of the *Ghetto Diaries* were written by a man on the verge of nervous and physical exhaustion, bearing a crushing burden which he could not lay down, a burden which would have been oppressive even under normal circumstances. In July 1942 sympathisers from outside the Ghetto made a last attempt to save Korczak. Igor Newerly brought papers to bring him to a safe house on the outskirts of Warsaw. From there he had a chance of escape, to Palestine perhaps. Newerly appealed to Korczak to disband the orphanage and let the children take their chances individually; that way, he argued, some, at least, might survive. Korczak refused to leave or to abandon the children to whom he had devoted his life. He wrote at the time: “You do not leave a sick child in the night, and you do not leave children at a time like this.” On 5 August 1942, a blazingly hot day, the children were lined up outside the Home. Led by Korczak and Madame Stefa and other staff they marched, under armed guard, through the hushed streets of the Ghetto to a railway siding. There Korczak led the children into the cattle cars. They were taken to Treblinka. Outside of there, none of them was ever seen again.

Today both Israel and Poland celebrate Goldszmit/Korczak. For the Poles, he is a revered patriot-martyr, in Israel, he is revered as one of the Thirty-Six Just Men whose pure souls, according to ancient Jewish tradition, make possible the world's salvation. At the site of the death camp at Treblinka in Poland, among 17,000 rocks representing the sites of the places which the murdered in Treblinka came from, only one rock bears a personal name, that of Janusz Korczak, the adopted Polish name of Henryk

Goldsmid.

Conclusion

The UN Convention, finally adopted in 1989 and ratified since by virtually every nation on earth, is a fitting tribute to Korczak's life, work, and ultimate sacrifice. Korczak challenges an educational orthodoxy dominated by management imperatives, control, and measurable learning outcomes. His demand for practical participative engagement in the communal life of educational institutions challenges firmly established administrative order. He also represents a commitment to children which challenges contemporary professionalised, service-based practices. His approach to childhood was imaginative, responsive, and emotional. It was based on love, love of individual children, love for childhood itself. His approach illustrates perhaps the most fundamental problem of childhood: the child's need to be loved and cherished, a need which cannot, ultimately, be met through the mechanism of rights.

CITIZEN CHILD – THE EXPERIENCE OF A STUDENT COUNCIL IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL

Owen McLoughlin, Principal, Scoil Mhuire, Ballyboden

An Ombudsman for Children, Emily Logan, was recently appointed to Irish society. An innovative move, it is a far cry from the not so distant past when children were to be seen and not heard. Part of the interview process for the post involved questioning of the candidates by children for children. One of Emily's first official functions entailed a visit to Scoil Mhuire NS, Ballyboden, in March 2004. The reason for this was her interest in meeting a primary school student council and to address/listen to the student body on their participation in the decision-making within the school. What impressed her most, however, was not the mere existence of a student council, but the fact that representatives from the class groupings were democratically elected earlier in the year by ballot.

SPHE is being mooted as the bedrock of the Revised Curriculum. A student council is the embodiment of SPHE. The aim of the student council is that the students, representative of their peers, will join the other stakeholder groups within the structures of the school and have a real a voice as teachers, parents, management, DES and outside agencies hopefully do.

A wider aim would be to improve the citizenship status of all pupils. During Emily's visit, the children raised many issues that varied from the state of the Health Service to the cost of the 'Luas'. However, in reality the issues that impinge on the children's daily life in school are not the wider societal problems but often quite solvable minutiae.

A case study of a student council was carried out in the Good Shepherd NS, Churchtown, in 2002. Initially, the concept is new to all and brings with it certain hype and expectation by all groups. This gradually settles down to a pattern similar to all other stakeholder meetings. The format of the meetings and communication of the relevant suggestions to all are pivotal to its success. Here is a brief summary of the mechanics of the Council:

- 1 Suggestion boxes are arranged by council members in their respective classes to allow the voice of the student body to be heard.
- 1 Council members sort the suggestions (one boy and one girl per class from second – sixth). The most pressing issues are noted in a specific Student Council notebook brought to each meeting.
- 1 The meetings take place once a month just before the staff meeting to allow for a report or relevant suggestion to be brought to the attention of the staff. At the

meetings, with a teacher present, the suggestions from the last meeting are read out. Follow through on ideas previously discussed then takes place. Reasons for their delay are raised or praise for swift action taken is given.

- 1 A round of the Council is begun to listen to new suggestions. The suggestions are noted in the minute book in bullet format and a decision is made, sometimes by vote, to act on a limited number of worthwhile suggestions.
- 1 A modest budget is procured each year from the board and this allows for Council decisions on expenditure on the most pertinent requisites of the children.
- 1 Refreshments are served at the end of each meeting that takes place in the staffroom during class time. Meetings last no longer than a half hour.
- 1 Circle time sessions are recommended back in the class setting.

If we look at the finances as an example, children get their say in the purchasing of equipment most wanted by children. Normally, staff members propose this same purchase of equipment at the monthly staff meetings. The type of item requested by children has not been 'a heated swimming pool' or 'a cafeteria' but rather new nets for the basketball hoops, portable goalposts or a few extra skipping ropes. Giving members a catalogue to propose items for purchase within a small budget affords respect for the child's opinion and most importantly the retort "you never listen to us" becomes suddenly redundant.

The Children's Voice

One of the most interesting aspects of the Student Council is the perspective you get from children. Adult perceptions of schooling obviously centre on the quality of education but this appears to be non-negotiable and not of discussion value to children. Their particularly highlighted concerns include food (consistency among teachers to implement policy), sport (provision of adequate goal-posts and new football gear for girls etc). These issues to be addressed are more real to the children than national issues such as litter and environmental problems so often dealt with in schools. For instance:

You know the milks we're getting, the ones from Donegal, they're not really as nice as the other ones we used to get 'cos they're kinda watery and they taste disgusting, my class was saying...

Tackling this problem and compromising to suit all can be a very real achievement. Other similar remarks from the case study include:

I have a suggestion that you should knock off the radiators on hot days.

A lot of people suggested 'new goalposts' since ours have been taken down, because at the moment my Mam and Dad are giving out because my jumpers are getting dirty by putting them down for goalposts because everybody keeps trodding on them and rolling over them.

When a concession is granted to the student body through the Council it is implicit that the right achieved is linked to the responsibility expected. "We promise to be very good if we can get" ... is a frequent comment. No research has proved that school discipline can be improved through good communication with the student body but it seems very worthwhile to explore this notion.

It is clear from their comments that children perceive adults in the school as having had no consciousness of the need to consult them. The children stated that they have rights as well as teachers, that children have a valid, responsible voice and should not be 'bossed' around by people. They stated that one or more adults (teachers) could ultimately veto a student's suggestion to the Student Council, no matter how valid the suggestion.

I thought it was more like the teachers working together with the students but the teachers still act like they are older... (murmurs of 'they are')... yeah, I know but they're supposed to work together with the kids on the council but the teachers still act like they're old so that if they disagreed about anything, the students aren't getting it.

Sixth class boy

What I like about the development of the Student Council is that it doesn't seem to create adults of children too early. Children get very used to their meeting format and then go out to play with their friends. They have a very clear view of the issues and don't appear to get bogged down in worry or expectation.

Teacher Perception of Student Councils in Primary Schools

The obvious concerns of teachers in our schools at the outset of these councils has been the possibility of 'badmouthing' of teachers by pupils. This simply has not been the case. Teachers were also nervous at the challenges of concessions that may have to be granted to children. However, it has been our experience that children have greatly appreciated the chance to be listened to formally and both teachers and pupils are satisfied with the present set of communications. An important development has been a structure for suspension of members from the council for conduct unbecoming to their election by their peers. This has increased teachers' confidence in the council.

Positive comments made by teachers regarding student councils include the benefits of responsibility being accorded to children, pride, happiness of children involved, a sense of belonging, increased confidence and self-esteem and a growing sense of

partnership. Because it is a recent innovation, it is recommended that the development of the council be gradual with progress being constantly evaluated. 'Think Big and Act Small' is the general rule of thumb, as the notion of according children a real voice is being enough without feeling you have to immediately make sweeping changes to your school environment. For example, fixing the lock on the toilet door might be just as pressing for children as proposing to abandon the school uniform.

Proposed development of the student council communication procedures by teachers include examples such as children being invited to speak to staff, children helping draw up the code of conduct and children editing school magazines with information for children by children.

Getting the students perspective on things was really interesting. Sometimes they saw things in a completely different way to the teachers. Other times the staff at their meetings and the student council were discussing the same things simultaneously. (SEN Teacher).

If fora like student councils become commonplace in Irish education, the language of children's citizenship and SPHE should evolve within these new structures. Any fears about the establishment of a forum for the primary school voice appear ungrounded. However, token student councils should not be tolerated. Also, the importance of educating and supporting teachers should not be underestimated, as children and adults will need to learn to negotiate in a new way. Teacher unions, parent bodies and boards of management also need to be trained to understand the incoming and potential membership of a council. Children may then take part ownership of the schools they attend and cease to be just the temporary guests. Go on, give it a go!

(Article: Citizen Child – The Experience of a Student Council in a Primary School, printed by kind permission of Solas)

REPORT FROM THE DISCUSSION GROUPS

Part of the attraction of the annual Education Conference is that it gives participants a number of opportunities to sit down and discuss, in an unthreatening and sympathetic forum, many of the issues that are exercising practitioners in schools. This has an extra piquancy since participants come from two separate systems, that of the Republic and the Northern Ireland educational remits. This can add enrichment to the discussions, and challenges participants to look outside the comfort zone of their own system.

In the first of the posed questions for discussion, people were asked to think about SPHE and to examine – in the light of their own experience – if it was being integrated into the formal and informal curriculum of the schools, and if it was succeeding as a model for cross-curricular integration.

In one group, it was felt that teachers cherry-pick some areas that are easier to grapple with, and that teachers can shy away from the more difficult areas, viz. the so-called sensitive issues. Planning, too, was very difficult. This arose from uncertainty in the teaching cohort, who felt that there was an element of inconsistency and vagueness in relation to direction and route for the subject. Some thought that this wooliness would hardly lead to a seamless integration into the curriculum of SPHE.

Others disagreed with this, feeling that much too much emphasis was given to this notion of planning in the subject. If the truth were told, they believed, much of the content of SPHE was being dealt with when teachers were dealing with Religion or SESE. It was possible, according to many, that one could get so diverted and have teachers spending much more time planning than teaching. Others questioned this view.

A lot was said about the difficulties in managing this subject in a multiclass setting – in so far as one can take only with difficulty a lesson in SPHE in one half-hour discrete unit. In this context (ie, multiclass) some saw that there was still a need for importing the occasional ‘consultant’ to deal with areas that could not be comfortably dealt with in a multiclass setting. But generally, teachers felt that it was their experience that parents, by and large, want teachers to teach the children about sex. In fact, there would appear to be a general assumption among parents that teachers will take this work on themselves. Inevitably, some parents will not co-operate with schools but schools, too, must be watchful. They must endeavour to avoid being too prescriptive in values, as many sets of values prevail in the modern Ireland of today.

Some teachers viewed with concern the perception that parents could remove children from the SPHE class. This was retrograde, they believed; curriculum was curriculum, and should be respected and supported in the school, not undermined by parents withdrawing children whenever they chose to do so.

A good deal of support came, too, for the idea of a supporting textbook for the subject.

On a general level, there was a well-supported view among teachers that it might indeed be nigh impossible to deliver on all the strands of the Revised Curriculum. But, across the wide spectrum of participants, it was felt that the whole area of SPHE has little enough chance of forward movement unless there was systematic and long-term support from the children's families to augment the work being done in schools. This was central to advancement. Others were less convinced of this, and felt that for success in SPHE to follow that there would have to be a clear demarcation of boundaries between the responsibilities of home and school.

Practically all participants agreed on the importance and value of SPHE as a subject. The stimulus question posed for them was as follows:

Is it true to say that SPHE is the subject which is potentially of most value to pupils in terms of education for life, and therefore the most important subject for schools to teach in the twenty-first century?

This widespread acceptance and concurrence about the value of teaching SPHE was, it was pointed out, at variance with attitudes when the subject itself was being inserviced. Teachers recalled frequent reluctance among colleagues to accept such staff training, and this was mirrored by those who were involved in the delivery of training with PCSP. One trainer recounted the story of being bushwhacked by a staff who complained that the inservice was wasting their valuable time on such "a mickey-mouse subject".

If, on the other hand, attitudes to the subject were now so positive, then that represented a sea-change in how many teachers regard SPHE since the inception of inservice in the four years since 2001 – the year in which the subject commenced its inservice. It was a signal and seminal change in attitudes, and pointed up probably the success of the inservice initiative and the adaptability of serving teachers and their staffs.

Participants were of the view that, for schools, much of the thrust of SPHE was learned behaviour and was a function of a positive and supportive attitude in the school itself. If this was worked towards, the task of delivering the subject became so much easier. Participants were also conscious and supportive of the nature of the subject in that it incorporated such areas as health, nutrition, relationships, expression of feelings, one's place in the world, democracy, bullying, and so on. In fact, one person made the point – which was loudly assented to in her group – that it was difficult to think of any area of human interaction and endeavour that was not intertwined with the SPHE curriculum.

Though it was considered generally very important as a subject, some were

reluctant to bestow upon SPHE the accolade of ‘most important subject’. However, teachers who worked in schools designated ‘disadvantaged’ were of the belief that – after school attendance itself – it was their most critical area of concern and their biggest priority.

This belief in the subject among teachers was contrasted with a perceived lowering of the subject’s status within the system. The fact that no in-school planning day (among all subjects) was allocated, many averred, for this subject reflected the poor regard and low priority given to the subject at system level. This angered a lot of teachers in the groups.

There was a fairly wide acceptance of the value of ‘Circle Time’ in the delivery of the subject, but ideally this should be used throughout schools and carried out in a structured manner. If so done, some teachers felt, it could negate much disruptive behaviour and place a lot of emphasis on positive parameters of interaction in schools. Another group were strongly of the opinion that all teachers should be given adequate instruction on the philosophical underpinnings and operation of Circle Time sessions (including in-class support). It was felt that some teachers were ill-disposed to it due to ignorance, while another thought that it would be quite wrong to prescribe ‘Circle Time’ as the “way to go”. Flexibility was essential in this subject.

There was little time to discuss the idea of Pupil Councils at the discussion sessions. One teacher, on this point, recalled what his principal used to tell the pupils when anyone became uppity with suggestions... “This is a school, not a democracy!” However, this viewpoint may not be representative of all teachers.

There was a high level of concern among teachers in their attempts to marry the plethora of resources together to make a meaningful attempt at subject delivery – for example RSE, *Stay Safe*, *Walk Tall*, and *Misneach*. The resource list was very extensive but also unwieldy. There was also a palpable sense that teachers were acutely aware of societal changes, and that they felt that in many instances they were being “left on their own” by parents to deliver an upbringing to their children. This was a function of high employment levels among parents. But with a changing society and school communities, there is a great need for SPHE – it is more pertinent than ever.

Teachers also felt that their efforts were going somewhat unsupported by the system. For example, they were delivering healthy eating programmes to children in an attempt to stem the tide of obesity. But this work was being done, to a great extent, in schools where no PE Hall existed. One teacher put it very succinctly: “We are trying to implement a 21st century curriculum when our schools are of the Victorian era.”

Part 3

Children and Obesity



Children and Obesity

In light of the attention being given to the issue of increasing obesity in Ireland and its likely impact on the health of the population, the Education Committee decided to consider the work of the Task Force on Obesity which reported in 2005. While solving the problem of obesity is not the responsibility of schools, the Task Force made some recommendations of relevance to teachers. Given the focus on food and exercise, a small survey was carried out amongst INTO members in Munster with a view to providing an indication of members' perceptions of the issue. These findings are also included in this section.

THE REPORT OF THE NATIONAL TASKFORCE ON OBESITY 2005 – A SUMMARY

According to the Taskforce, there are studies that indicate that the number of children significantly overweight has trebled over the past decade. Extrapolation from UK data may indicate that there are approximately 300,000 overweight or obese children on the island of Ireland.

Diet and Physical Activity

A balance of food intake and physical activity is necessary for a healthy weight. Research evidence that energy-dense foods (ie, high in fat, sugar and starch) promote obesity is impressive and convincing. A recent Irish survey revealed that over half of the children ate sweets once a day. WHO (World Health Organisation) has expressed serious concerns at the high and increasing consumption of energy-dense and fizzy drinks by children.

Decreasing physical activity has also made a significant impact on the increase in obesity being seen today.

It is now widely accepted that adults should be involved in 45–60 minutes and children in at least 60 minutes per day of moderate physical activity in order to prevent excess weight gain.

Task Force Report, 2005,

p.6

The Cost to Society

Overweight and obesity signal increased risk of medical problems and expose people to psychological problems due mainly to widespread prejudice against fat people. This year, about 2000 premature deaths in Ireland will be attributed to obesity and the numbers are growing. Using the accepted EU environmental cost benefit method, these deaths alone may be costing the State as much as €4 billion per year.

The Challenge for Society

There is a public health imperative to ensure that relevant environmental policies maximise opportunities for active transport, recreational physical activity and total physical activity. Policy initiatives must be put in place regarding food consumption and physical activity if the rapid increase in the incidence of obesity with all its negative consequences for citizens is to be reversed.

The Government must now look at the totality of policies that influence the type and supply of food people eat and the range and quality of opportunities that are available to citizens to engage in physical activity. This demands a determination to change things if the current status quo is, as things appear, failing.

The Way Forward

The Task Force's social change strategy aims to give people the capacity to change through the development of personal skills and preferences, emerging from supportive and participative environments at work, at school and in the local community and through a dedicated and clearly communicated public health strategy.

For the Taskforce's recommendations (over 80 in all) to be implemented, high level Cabinet support and collaborative thinking will be required.

Yes	159 (66.8%)
No	71 (29.8%)
No response/Don't know	8 (3.4%)

The range of government departments with roles to play is considerable and these are attested to in the Report. Broadly, the pointers are as follows:

- 1 The Taoiseach's Department will need to drive and oversee the actions across all government departments on the issues.
- 1 The private sector must understand and act on the problems.

Yes	42%
Qualified Yes	9%
No	49%

- 1 Public, community and voluntary sectors should work in concert to promote healthy eating and active lifestyles.
- 1 Individuals should be empowered to tackle the issues and should be supported in their efforts.

The recommendations of particular relevance to primary schools include the following:

- 1 All schools, as part of their school development planning, should be encouraged to develop consistent school policies to promote healthy eating and active living, with the necessary support from the Department of Education and Science. Such policies should address opportunities for physical activity, what is being provided in school meals, including breakfast clubs, school lunches and in the case of primary schools, in partnership with parents, children's lunch boxes.
- 1 The emphasis in all schools should be on increased physical activity including participation in sports.
- 1 With a view to achieving the optimum 60 minutes of physical activity per day recommendation (excluding PE time) every child should be enabled, through restructuring the school day if necessary, to achieve a minimum of 30 minutes dedicated physical activity every day in all educational settings.
- 1 All schools should meet the minimum requirement of two hours of physical education per week delivered by appropriately qualified staff.
- 1 The Department of Education and Science should prioritize the provision and maintenance of physical education and physical activity facilities to address the issue of equity and access in all schools.
- 1 The Department of Education and Science should provide resources for adequate teacher training to support healthy eating and active living.
- 1 Nutrition and physical activity levels of school children should be seen as part of the duty of care of each school, for example in relation to catering for school meals, policy on vending machines, and provision of fresh drinking water.
- 1 Vending machines should be banned in primary schools and those in the food and drink industry who have already voluntarily prohibited the placing of vending machines in primary schools should be supported.
- 1 The Schools Inspectorate, in the course of its evaluation of activities in schools, should focus on the prevention of obesity and should further develop its indicators to do this.
- 1 Home-school-community coordinators should incorporate 'healthy life skills' within the wider framework of home visitation and should promote courses and classes for parents, where appropriate.

- 1 The national parents’ organisations for primary and post-primary schools should work with parents and support them in encouraging healthy eating and active living.
- 1 A national, regularly reviewed code of practice, must be developed in relation to industry sponsorship and funding of activities in schools and local communities.
- 1 Evidence-based intervention programmes should be introduced to all primary schools on a consistent basis in line with exemplars of good practice such as NEAPS and the *Food Dude* programme.
- 1 Every child should receive a safe and active passage to school through the provision of safe walkways, cycleways or transport.
- 1 Schools should develop increasing opportunities for physical activity that are inclusive and that are appropriate to age, gender and ability, such as those that concentrate on increasing physical activity among teenage girls.
- 1 The health/immunisation programme in national schools should be used as an opportunity to work in partnership with parents and children in developing life skills which support healthy eating and active living. This programme should also be used as an opportunity to detect, by measurement, children who are at risk of overweight and underweight.

In its submission to the Task Force, the INTO outlined the relevant section of the SPHE curriculum which referred to nutrition and healthy eating and stated that many schools had healthy eating policies in co-operation with parents. The INTO also demanded that all schools be provided with proper facilities in order to enable teachers to implement

the full physical education (PE) curriculum. In responding to the launch of the Task Force report, the INTO reiterated its view that schools alone could not solve the problem of obesity. The INTO, however, welcomed the Task Force’s vision in relation to creating a healthy society and acknowledged that schools had a role as one

1	No indoor facilities	39.1%
2	Resources	13.9%
3	Ideas/Inspiration/Expertise	11.3%
4	Time/Curriculum Overload	10.4%
5	Weather	10.4%
6	Class Size	6%
7	Fear of Litigation	4.3%
8	Hall too Small	3.5%
9	Hall Timetabling	0.8%

of the major influential bodies in children’s lives.

The Task Force's vision is expressed thus:

An Irish society that enables people through health promotion, prevention and care to achieve and maintain healthy eating and active living throughout their lifespan.

Pre-1960	2 (0.8%)
1960-69	26 (11.0%)
1970-79	79 (33.2%)
1980-89	62 (26.1%)
1990-99	39 (16.4%)
2000+	29 (12.2%)

STRAITENED BODIES: A SNAPSHOT OF PE TEACHING AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ACROSS MUNSTER

The Task Force on Obesity recommended that increased time be given to physical activity in schools as part of the solution to addressing the increasing number of children in schools who have weight problems. This section includes a brief overview of some teachers' perceptions on the issue of obesity and overweight problems among children in primary schools in three Munster counties and its relationship with physical education in schools.

During the month of January 2005, survey forms were handed out to INTO members attending their AGMs in District XI (the counties of Clare, Tipperary and Waterford). Two hundred and thirty eight completed forms were returned to the Education Committee and the following data emerged from that research.

The research is not scientifically weighted but it does give a good indication of teachers' engagement with the PE Curriculum and how they view the fitness and activity levels of the children in their care. This was considered particularly relevant by the Education Committee given that the Task Force on Obesity was about to report, including as one of its recommendations that there would be increased time for physical activity in schools.

It is essential to consider activities which may be affected by weather and to plan an alternative activity which can be taken indoors...

(Revised PE Curriculum Teacher Guidelines, p.35)

PE Facilities

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had adequate PE facilities. Responses are outlined in the table below.

TABLE I: HAS YOUR SCHOOL PE FACILITIES?

The majority of respondents stated that they had PE facilities in their school, but many qualified their response with comments such as "...yes, but it's currently in use as a classroom".

Time Allocated to PE

The longest reported time spent at PE was three hours per week. The shortest was zero. Some people did not respond to the question while others explained their lack of engagement by indicating that they did not have a class eg, resource teacher or principal teacher. Removing the non-responders and those without a class, the average time spent at PE was 54 minutes per week.

This might be viewed against the background of *OBESITY: The Policy Challenges: The Report of the National Task Force on Obesity, 2005*, which states:

It is now widely accepted that adults should be involved in 45-60 minutes, and children should be involved in at least 60 minutes per day of moderate physical activity in order to prevent excess weight gain.

(p.6)

The number of teachers indicating that they would like to spend more time on PE in school was more than two to one. Again, this is, probably, a function of the paucity of facilities for the subject.

TABLE 2: WOULD YOU LIKE TO SPEND ADDITIONAL TIME ON PE?

Number of Overweight Children in Classrooms

Respondents were requested to estimate the number of children in their class whom they considered to be overweight. This question reveals teachers' perceptions about the 'weight' problem, as does the following question, but perceptions therein are about obesity. In the sample, out of the 238 teachers surveyed, 213 had class teaching responsibilities. These 213 teachers had between them 5,108 pupils, giving an average class size for the sample of 24. The largest class recorded in the sample was 40, the smallest consisted of five pupils. With over five thousand children under consideration, a reasonable picture of the status quo can be given, albeit through the eyes of the teacher.

Of these 5,108 children, 531 of them were perceived by their teachers as being overweight (10.4%) – one in every ten. The highest figure recorded was five children out of a class of ten. There were several teachers recording a zero figure for overweight children in their classes.

Obesity Among Children

Respondents were asked to estimate the number of children in their class they considered to be obese. In total, 128 children were perceived as being obese, (2.5%) – one in every 40. The above data are in line with the figures reported in the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC study), a study conducted in 2001–2002 in 29 countries worldwide. Therein, 9.5% of Irish 13 year-olds were recorded as overweight, and 3% obese.

They are significantly lower than the figures, however, in the *North South Survey of Height, Weight and Body Mass Index in Ireland, 2002*, where 28% of Irish nine year-olds were recorded as overweight, and 8.5% as obese.

Children and Exercise

Respondents were asked whether they thought children had sufficient exercise at home and at school. An overwhelming number of teachers felt that children did not get sufficient exercise at home. Of the 238 teachers who responded, only 20 (8.4%) felt that they did, while 213 (89.5%) felt they did not. Seven of those surveyed

gave no response to the question or answered "don't know". In relation to pupils receiving sufficient exercise at school, teachers were fairly evenly divided, with 110 (46.2%) answering "Yes", and 117 (49.2%) answering "No". There were 11 non-responses / don't knows. These responses would appear to suggest that teachers feel that the well-

being of children in the weight/obesity arena is not being supported nearly as well

in the home as it is in the schools. There may be some correlation between respondents reporting that they did not have adequate indoor PE facilities (49%), and those stating that children did not get enough exercise in school (49.2%).

PE and Gender

Teachers were asked whether they agreed with the statement “In general, boys take more interest in the PE class.” Although surveys generally portray primary school girls in Ireland as more likely to be overweight, the perception of the teachers in this sample was that, in general, there was little enough difference in enthusiasm for PE between boys and girls. When the question above was posed, 105 (44%) agreed with the statement that they perceived boys’ enthusiasm to be greater, while 121 (51%) thought not. A small number of respondents (12 teachers) taught in single-sex schools.

This finding indicates that teachers are of the view that girls are just as participative in the PE class as boys. However, it is unclear whether girls are likely to be as active out of school.

Impediments to PE Teaching

Responses to this question were varied and quite discursive. For analysis, the responses have been grouped and are outlined in the following table.

TABLE 3: IMPEDIMENTS TO PE TEACHING

It is manifestly clear that – above all other factors – teachers find the lack of indoor facilities the main impediment to the teaching of PE.

Profile of Respondents

Respondents were requested to indicate when they had received their initial teacher education. Responses are outlined in the table below.

TABLE 4: YEARS OF INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION

Conclusion

It would appear, from all the data above, that either the overweight/obesity problem in counties Clare, Tipperary and Waterford is not as pronounced as most recent surveys indicate is the case on a national scale, or that teachers do not perceive it to be as great a problem as is commonly suggested. SLÁN 2003 would seem to indicate that there is little variation in prevalence between urban and rural areas. Perhaps the problem has been overstated and a sort of industry cum hysteria has emerged in relation to this question. Further research would be required in order to compare teach-

ers' perceptions with scientifically measured BMI figures. In this context the findings of a recent survey by the ESRI (2005) are worthy of brief consideration.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND BODY MASS – ESRI REPORT

The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) conducted a study in 2005 on the issue of physical activity among schoolchildren, which also included fifth and sixth class pupils in primary schools. Its report stated that primary schools seem to be worse off than second-level schools regarding the availability of sports facilities and were more dependent on off-site facilities. Physical activity among children included PE, usually once a week, extra-curricular school sports activities and out-of-school participation in sports. It was found that parents' participation in sports had a positive effect on children's participation. It was also found that the level of sports facilities in schools had a positive effect on sports participation in schools.

The ESRI study also examined the link between participation in sports and obesity and weight. In the primary school sample, 3.8% of boys and 4.3% of girls were obese and a further 15.7% of boys and 15.8% of girls were overweight. However, there was no strong pattern of association between participation in sport and obesity and weight. It is thought that the lack of relationship between physical activity and risk of obesity may arise because measures of physical activity may not capture real variations in energy expenditure or because variations in energy expenditure are too small to

counteract the effects on weight of other factors such as diet. However, there is some indication that high levels of exercise, well in excess of minimum recommended levels may have an effect on body mass.

The ESRI recommends a more integrated approach to children's sport, to include PE, extra-curricular activities and participation outside of school and calls for an improvement in sports facilities in primary schools. While supporting the promotion of physical activity, the report warns that policy on physical activity should not become overly focused on its relationship with body mass. Therefore, a focus on healthy eating may also need to be supported among schoolchildren if the issue of weight and obesity is to be addressed. As part of the SPHE programme, schools have a role in educating pupils about health and nutrition, and are supported through healthy eating initiatives.