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$=$ Editorial $=$

The seventh *Irish Teachers' Journal* is published at a time when teacher workload is receiving increased attention at a policy level. Following many requests to the Department of Education and Skills, a Primary Education Forum has been established to consider the issue of teacher workload, including the workload of principal teachers. To date, there has been little coordination of education initiatives with requests for participation, engagement, responses and involvement in a variety of initiatives or programmes or projects landing on principal teachers' desks at an alarming rate. While each project or initiative is worthwhile in itself, the accumulated effect on teachers in schools is a sense of being overwhelmed with change. The purpose of the Primary Education Forum is to consider all initiatives with a view to assessing their impact on schools and deciding on the sequencing and timing of their introduction. The problem of workload is exacerbated by the increase in the number of education agencies, all communicating directly with schools with their own demands and requests for engagement, involvement and responses. In addition to participating in the Primary Education Forum, the INTO is engaged in its own research on teacher workload. A focus on workload provides an opportunity to revisit our priorities in education.

Change is a natural part of teachers' lives. Teachers constantly engage in change in order to inspire their pupils on a day-to-day basis, learning from each other and seeking out new ideas to enhance their teaching. Supportive leadership, flexibility to innovate and trust in teachers enables change both at school and system level. The pace of change, however, can determine whether developments in curriculum or other education policies are positive experiences for teachers. A new primary language curriculum has recently been introduced in all primary schools in the Republic of Ireland, a review of senior cycle education has commenced, and a new junior cycle curriculum is being gradually phased in to post-primary schools. Children can now avail of two years of state-funded pre-school prior to starting primary school. INTO members in Northern Ireland continue with their industrial action, which is primarily focussed on workload. At a time of significant change it is imperative that teachers are supported in terms of resources and time – time for professional development, time for collaboration and time for reflection and learning. Attracting high calibre students to become teachers, and retaining them in the profession must always be a policy priority. Ireland is fortunate in the quality of its teachers and teaching continues to be considered an attractive profession. The professional work of teachers should never become burdensome, because of an undue focus on bureaucracy and accountability at the expense of professional autonomy, trust and teacher wellbeing.

Articles in this edition of the journal address some of today's priorities in education such as wellbeing and leadership, in addition to assessment for learning, oral language development for children with English as an additional language, a cross-community education initiative in Northern Ireland and the experiences of gay and lesbian teachers in the Republic of Ireland. The INTO is delighted that Professor Dympna Devine of UCD accepted the invitation to write a guest article for this edition of the journal. Professor Devine, a former primary teacher, is the lead researcher on the longitudinal study of children's school

lives, commissioned by the NCCA. Her article on *The power of primary schooling in children's lives – considering rights, equalities and children's lived citizenship*, captures many aspects of children's lives in primary schools today, and raises many questions about their experiences of education. Writing from a sociological perspective, she argues that having a right **to** education is not the same thing as experiencing rights **in** education. She refers to international studies that highlight persistent differences among children in their progression and completion rates through education that are clearly related to social class, gender and ethnic/ migrant backgrounds. She then explores how schooling impacts on children's identities and how understandings of child development shape schooling and reflect how adults relate to children in a school setting.

Professor Devine's article is timely because the INTO has recently commenced a campaign to highlight social inequalities within our schools. The section of her article on equality and schooling notes how austerity in Ireland impacted particularly on children. Professor Devine questions how effective our education system has been in tackling inequalities. She argues that for education to be effective, it must connect with all aspects of the child's cultural and social repertoire. She highlights the importance of dispositions and states that the education system is skewed in favour of children from middle class backgrounds. She draws on the *Growing Up in Ireland* study to illustrate examples of inequalities in Ireland and discusses how social class interacts with children's gender, ethnicity and dis/ability in mediating how children think and learn in school. She concludes by stating that education policy and practice has a profound impact on the power and positioning of children within wider society and by providing an overview of the longitudinal study on children's school lives being carried out by UCD School of Education, a study which is likely to have a significant influence on future curriculum and educational policy developments. Professor Devine gives us much to think about as we address change in education.

Pupil and teacher wellbeing is gaining increasing attention in educational policy at present. The day-to-day pressures of schooling, for both pupils and teachers, has given rise to the need to focus on wellbeing. The Department of Education and Skills published a *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* in 2018. We are delighted that two articles in this edition of the journal address the topic of wellbeing. The first, co-written by Shane Owen, Sinead McGilloway and Jonathan Murphy of Maynooth University, focuses on the role of non-cognitive skills in supporting the development of wellbeing and resilience among pupils in schools and is particularly relevant given the issues raised by Professor Devine in her article. Owen et al provide a rationale for the use of non-cognitive interventions to support the development of wellbeing and perseverance among pupils, arguing that a number of skills beyond academic knowledge are required for academic success in school and for preparing students for modern work, civic and social environments. The authors outline socio-demographic factors that influence the effectiveness of non-cognitive interventions, primarily gender, race/ethnicity and socio-economic status (SES) and argue that a focus on developing non-cognitive skills at second level may assist in addressing some of the issues associated with gender, SES and racial achievement gaps. They also explore the impact of school and classroom culture and ethos on wellbeing and resilience. In the context of the increased focus on wellbeing in the new junior cycle, the authors argue for the

development of a non-cognitive framework which caters for the specific requirements of the Irish educational system.

The second article on wellbeing explores the challenges of implementing wellbeing policies in Irish primary schools. Margaret Nohilly and Fionnuala Tynan of Mary Immaculate College describe a series of workshops organised for primary school teachers in three counties to explore their understanding of wellbeing and the challenges associated with embedding a culture of wellbeing in their classrooms and across their schools. The authors highlight the positive work that is undertaken by schools and trace the emergence of wellbeing as a topic in the Irish educational system from the early years through to junior cycle. They give consideration to various definitions of wellbeing, its importance for pupils, the need for leadership and the challenges faced by teachers in finding time and space to focus on wellbeing. The workshops organised by the authors enabled teacher voice to be heard on this important topic.

Our next article is about school leadership which has evolved exponentially since the more simple days of 'primus inter pares'. The impact of policy on leadership practice in the Irish educational context is the focus of Fiona King's and Mary Nihill's article. They argue that historical, political and economic factors influence education policy development, which then impacts on leadership practice. In their article, they outline the socio-political context of education policy developments in Ireland, referring to the impact of austerity, the increasing attention given to literacy and numeracy, the imposition of additional non-contact hours, a focus on performativity, and demands for accountability. They note also the increased policy focus on strengthening leadership, particularly collaborative leadership, and professionalism. The challenges of supporting teacher learning, the introduction of distributed leadership and the establishment of the Centre for School Leadership are considered. The authors offer an interesting interpretation of current developments as they impact on leadership teams at both primary and post-primary level. Their conclusion highlights the need for a more organic model of leadership, to include both teachers and principals, for more research on the topic of teacher professional learning and for more understanding among teachers and principals of the broader contexts in which educational policy decisions are made.

Ann Marie Gurhy's article, co-written with Zita Lysaght and Michael O'Leary of DCU, is a timely article on assessment. The INTO, in collaboration with the Centre for Assessment Research Policy and Practice in Education (CARPE) in DCU, recently published a research report on standardised testing in Irish primary schools. This article, however, explores assessment for learning (AfL), and students' perspectives on the affective impact of using assessment for learning in mathematics. The article is based on a research project on the use of a lesson study approach to explore the impact of AfL practices on the teaching and learning of mathematics at fourth class level in an Irish primary school. The authors consider definitions and understanding of AfL, before describing the research study. The article focuses on the pupils' perspectives, outlining their experience of AfL as a process in learning mathematics. According to the study, pupils enjoyed the process, gained in confidence and developed an awareness of their own learning in mathematics. It is not often that the pupil's voice is heard in research and this article makes a valuable contribution to our knowledge of how pupils experience learning in classrooms.

A study based in a classroom is also the topic of Aoife Merrins' article, co-written with Sylwia Kazmierczak-Murray and Rachel Perkins. The study focussed on using collaborative teaching and storybooks in linguistically diverse junior infant classrooms to increase pupils' contributions to story-time discussions. Aoife Merrins took an action-research approach to enhancing English language learning in a junior infant classroom by equipping English language learners with oral language skills to enable them to participate more within whole-class discussions. By using storybooks and working with colleagues, the intervention proved to be a success, inspiring teachers to address issues raised within their classrooms through pro-activity, reflection and collaboration.

Education in Northern Ireland is the focus of Shane Bowe's article where he discusses the role of intergroup contact initiatives in promoting reconciliation and educational opportunities for children and young people in Northern Ireland. The author offers a brief outline of the historical background to education in Northern Ireland since 1921, and how division and segregation pervaded much of society. He then refers to a number of approaches to developing cross-community relations, before describing shared education, an approach based on contact theory. While there were many positive responses to shared education, the author also highlights some of its limitations. This article provides an interesting insight into education in Northern Ireland in the context of peace and reconciliation processes.

Our final article in this edition of the journal presents an examination of the experiences of 11 lesbian and gay primary school teachers in the Republic of Ireland at a particular time of major societal change impacting on the lives of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community. The authors, Orlaith Egan and Rory McDaid, describe a research project aimed at exploring the employment-related experiences of members of the LGBT community, at the time of, and in the context of, the marriage equality campaign. This is a timely article reflecting a period of significant sociological change in Ireland and how it manifests itself in the lives of teachers.

The INTO prides itself on being both a trade union and professional organisation for primary teachers in the Republic of Ireland, and for nursery, primary and post-primary teachers in Northern Ireland. The *Irish Teachers' Journal* offers teachers at all levels, North and South, an opportunity to share their research with colleagues and the broader educational community. An engaged, informed and reflective teaching profession is central to a quality education service. Investing in initial teacher education, induction and ongoing professional development and learning enables teachers to be informed, engaged and reflective as they educate children and young people to reach their potential and to follow their dreams. We would like to thank all teachers who contributed articles to this edition of the journal. We would also like to record our appreciation to Professor Dympna Devine, of the School of Education, UCD, who wrote our guest article. Professor Devine provided initial advice to the INTO regarding the establishment of the *Irish Teachers' Journal*. We are grateful to the reviewers who read the draft articles and provided constructive feedback to the authors. The INTO hopes that teachers will continue to write and contribute to the journal.

DEIRBHILE NIC CRAITH, EDITOR

Author Notes

Prof Dympna Devine

Dympna Devine is full professor of education at University College Dublin, where she is director of the PhD in Children and Youth Studies. A former primary school teacher, her specialist field is sociology, with an interest in the social study of childhoods/children's rights and identities, social justice and equalities in education. She is a nominee of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to the National Children's Advisory Council, and an elected member of UCD Governing Authority (2019-2025). She was head of the School of Education from 2014-2019.

Shane Owen, Prof Sinéad McGilloway, Dr Jonathan Murphy

Shane Owen holds two BA degrees in social studies and social care, a HDip in psychology and is currently completing a PhD in psychology at Maynooth University. He is based in the Centre for Mental Health and Community Research (www.cmhcr.eu) and is presently exploring the potential of non-cognitive interventions to improve academic performance and wellbeing at post-primary level. His research interests include human performance in education, child and youth mental health and wellbeing, human intelligence studies, educational intervention development/evaluation and educational policy development. Shane was a recipient of a recent (2019) Maynooth University Student Experience (MUSE) award for his work and impact within the community.

Sinéad McGilloway is founder director of the Centre for Mental Health and Community Research in the Department of Psychology and Social Sciences Institute at Maynooth University (www.cmhcr.eu). She is a chartered psychologist and chartered scientist with the British Psychological Society (BPS) and an associate fellow of the BPS. Sinéad has extensive experience in undertaking engaged policy- and practice-relevant research in the field of health and social care, with a particular focus on child and adult mental health and wellbeing and service evaluation. She is widely published, has won significant funding to date, and is currently leading/supervising a large number of interdisciplinary engaged research programmes and projects, including several which focus on wellbeing in schools.

Jonathan Murphy is a learning and development specialist and senior executive in Enterprise Ireland. He is a program manager overseeing the development of non-cognitive skills in senior business leaders and their c-suite teams. His background in academia stretches from the cognitive neuroscience of learning and memory, to decision making and human performance, to entrepreneurship and innovation. He accumulated over 4,000 hours teaching college students (from level 6-9 on the NFQ) before moving to applying psychology outside of the classroom. Jonathan sits on the advisory board for World Creativity and Innovation Day and is a member of the Heterodox Academy.

Dr Margaret Nohilly and Dr Fionnuala Tynan

Margaret Nohilly, B.Ed (Mary Immaculate College), M.St (Trinity College), foundation course in counselling and psychotherapy, Ed.D (DCU), has worked as a primary teacher, a facilitator for the primary schools support services (PCSP, PPDS, PDST) and as team leader for the health and eellbeing team in the PDST, prior to her appointment in Mary Immaculate College. She teaches policy and leadership in education, lifeskills and SPHE. Her research interests include child protection, SPHE, wellbeing and policy in education.

Fionnuala Tynan, B.Ed. (St Patrick's College), M.Ed. (NUIG), Grad. Dip. (School Planning) (NUIG), Grad. Dip. (SEN) (St Angela's College), M.A. (SEN) (St Angela's College), Ed.D. (University of Lincoln), has worked as a primary teacher, as well as a facilitator for the School Development Planning Service (Primary) and as an inspector with the Department of Education and Skills, prior to joining Mary Immaculate College in September 2015. She currently lectures in educational methodology. Her research interests include inclusive and special educational methodologies, Williams Syndrome, anxiety, individual education planning, learner voice and self-perception of learners with SEN. Her other areas of interests include general learning difficulties, complex learning profiles, and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Dr Fiona King and Mary Nihill

Fiona King is an assistant professor in the Institute of Education (IoE), Dublin City University (DCU). She spent 25 years teaching in a variety of contexts and currently works in the School of Inclusive and Special Education in the IoE where she specialises in inclusive pedagogies, social justice leadership, teacher professional learning, teacher leadership, and change. Fiona is the chair of the Doctor of Education (EdD) programme in the IoE. She is a member of the International Professional Development Association (IPDA) international committee and chair of IPDA Ireland, along with being an associate editor of the Q1 journal *Professional Development in Education*.

Mary Nihill is currently seconded as national director of the Centre for School Leadership. Having started her career as a post primary science and maths teacher, Mary became principal in 1993. In 2005, she was seconded as assistant national coordination to the Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) team and coordinated programmes such as *Misneach* and *Forbairt*. Mary was appointed principal of another school in 2010. She was elected as president of the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals in October 2014.

Dr Ann Marie Gurhy, Dr Zita Lysaght, Prof Michael O'Leary

Ann Marie Gurhy lectures in the area of numeracy at Marino Institute of Education. Her role as a teacher educator and her research interests are informed by her teaching experience in primary schools at all class levels. Key research interests include mathematics, assessment, lesson study, ICT, differentiation and challenge. She is currently involved in EDUCATE (Enhancing Differentiated Instruction and Cognitive Activation in Mathematics Lessons by Supporting Teachers), an Erasmus+ funded transnational project.

Zita Lysaght is a member of the School of Policy and Practice at the Institute of Education,

DCU; she lectures in assessment and research methodology on undergraduate, masters and doctoral programmes. Zita is director of the Assessment for Learning and Teaching (ALT) Project, a member of the advisory board of the Centre for Assessment, Research and Policy in Education (CARPE) and a former chair of post-graduate studies by research and co-chair of the EdD programme.

Michael O'Leary holds the Prometric Chair in Assessment at DCU and is director of the Centre for Assessment Research Policy and Practice at the Institute of Education, Dublin City University. He leads a programme of research at CARPE focused on assessment in education and in the workplace. Current projects include teachers' attitudes to and use of standardised tests, the assessment of critical thinking in higher education, measuring awareness of workplace bullying, the use of situational judgement tests to measure soft skills, the assessment of transversal skills in STEM, and technology based assessment.

Aoife Merrins, Dr Sylwia Kazmierczak-Murray, Dr Rachel Perkins

Aoife Merrins is a primary school teacher in pursuit of a PhD in Education, which is being funded by a DCU Scholarship as part of the INTO 150 anniversary. Aoife is currently on career break from an urban school in west County Dublin. She graduated from St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, in 2013 and has worked predominantly in junior, primary education in both mainstream and language support settings. Aoife completed her Master of Teaching degree in 2017. Her research interests include English as an additional language, oral language in the early years, bilingualism, collaborative teaching and dual language storybooks.

Sylwia Kazmierczak-Murray is a postdoctoral research associate and adjunct lecturer in the Institute of Education, Dublin City University. She is a CORU registered speech and language therapist and an implementation specialist, with experience in educational research and teacher training, clinical and preventive practice, and extensively at leading and managing programme and project implementation in schools.

Rachel Perkins is a research fellow at the Educational Research Centre (ERC), Drumcondra. As part of her role in the ERC, Rachel has managed the administration of a number of large-scale international studies in Ireland including TALIS (2008), PISA (2009 and 2012) and TIMSS (2015 and 2019, at post-primary level). Her research interests include social marginalisation in education and resilience.

Shane Bowe

Shane Bowe is a primary school teacher in Bunscoil Lughaidh Naofa, Carrickmacross. He has been teaching for 15 years and is in the third year of a Doctorate in Education (Ed.D) at Queen's University Belfast. He holds a BA in history and sociology, an M.Ed in educational leadership and management, a H. Dip in education and a postgraduate certificate in education. Shane was awarded an INTO bursary in 2018 for his Ed.D study of shared education and primary school children in schools in Northern Ireland.

Orlaith Egan and Dr Rory McDaid

Orlaith Egan is a primary school teacher. She read for her PME in Marino Institute of Education and her BA in psychology in NUI Maynooth.

Rory Mc Daid is a lecturer in Sociology of Education and Research Methods in Marino Institute of Education, where he currently serves as head of the Department of Policy and Practice. He is a visiting research fellow at the Cultures, Academic Values and Education research centre in the School of Education, Trinity College, Dublin.

The power of primary schooling in children's lives – considering rights, equalities and children's lived citizenship

⇒ DYMPNA DEVINE ⇐

Abstract

Children spend a considerable proportion of their childhood in school. This tells us something about the significance of education not only for children but also for the wider society. This article considers the role of education in children's lives through a sociological lens, outlining key elements of the education system that shape children's childhoods, influencing their experience, not only in their present lives as children but in their future lives as adults. Issues related to power and in/equality are foregrounded, as well as the factors that influence children's engagement with and achievement in school.

Keywords: **Children's rights, citizenship, voice, equality, power, social justice**

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Thinking sociologically about children

Schools are a key site of intervention by adults in children's lives. Children rarely have the choice as to whether they will attend school. In most countries, they are required by law to do so, although the compulsory age range may vary from one society to another. Indeed, the very idea of an education 'system' available to all children is a relatively recent one. In Western societies, it coincides with changing ideas not only of the developmental 'needs' of children but also of the potential usefulness of children to society. Traditionally viewed as sources of cheap labour in factories and on farms, as well as future carers for their elderly parents, from early in the 19th century, children were viewed as essential to the creation of a skilled adult labour pool for emerging industrial societies. The more economically advanced the society, the longer the period of time children spend in formal education. However, like other forms of unpaid work, this wider contribution children make to the betterment of society, through their time in school, is mostly invisible in public policy discourse. Yet in highly competitive education systems children may spend more time on their schoolwork than the average adult working day, when homework and exam study is taken into account.

Given the amount of time children spend in education, it has profound implications for the experience of their childhoods, their rights and their wellbeing. Indeed, the right to education is stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Two provisions are especially important with respect to education: Article 28 defines the right to education and Article 29 defines the purpose of education. This latter

embraces holistic concepts that include recognition of culture, identity, and the development of the child's personality in a spirit of peace, tolerance and equality. Of equal importance are more general principles expressed in Articles 2, 3 and 12 that underpin all other articles. These relate to non-discrimination with respect to different groups of children (birth, race, colour, sex, language, religion, politics, birth or other status), as well as the right for children to have a say in matters directly affecting them and the right to have decisions made in their best interests.

Having a right **to** education is not, however, the same thing as experiencing rights **in** education (Devine and McGillicuddy, 2016) which can vary considerably from one context and from one child, to another. International reviews highlight persistent differences among children in their progression and completion rates through education that are clearly related to social class, gender and ethnic/migrant background. As educational levels in society rise, expectations for progression of children through to higher levels become the norm. Conversely not to progress through the education system has long term consequences for quality of life, health and wellbeing not only for the individual child and their family, but also for the wider society.

In this sense we can speak of school and education as part of a structuring experience in childhood determined by adult expectations of what is appropriate and expected as 'normal' for a 'good' childhood (Devine, 2013; Kjorholt, 2013). However, what is viewed as a 'good' childhood and a 'good' education varies by cultural and social context. In this sense 'education' is never neutral. Sociologically it is viewed as an ideological space in which often competing ideas of what is 'good' for children, connected to what is 'good' for society, take hold.

Children, power and schooling

Education is intricately bound to wider systems within the society (legal, family, religious, political, health, social protection and of course economy) that frame and are part of the cultural construction of childhood(s). Education is therefore embedded in relations of power. Foucault's work is especially useful here in his analysis of the forging of new mechanisms of power in what he terms disciplinary societies (Foucault, 1979), typical of the modern (post-19th century) era. Schooling enables children to be compared, ranked, classified against other children in a system of persistent surveillance and scrutiny in the public space of the classroom (Devine, 2003/2002). The power of such control is not necessarily overtly exercised through (physical) punishment (albeit outlawed in Ireland in 1982), but rather through everyday practices of shaping and encouraging children to conform to certain societal norms. These norms may vary for different groups of children. This is not to suggest however that children are cultural 'dupes' to be moulded as adults require. The very act of learning requires some negotiation. Time that adults and children spend together in school also influences adults through the myriad of responses and complexities children themselves bring to the schooling process (Devine, 2007).

We can then ask questions about the kind of 'truths' or discourses about children and childhood(s) that influence their interactions with adults in schools. How does this connect to ideas of children's rights and their citizenship as active, reflective contributing beings?

(Devine, 2002; Devine and Cockburn, 2018). We can see for example that wider discourses in relation to child development permeate the teaching methods that are used in schools today. For example, child developmental psychology popularised in schools from the 1960s heralded a new focus on the individual needs of each child, feeding directly into 'child-centred' pedagogies and the active involvement of children in their learning. This challenged more authoritarian 'subject-centred' approaches, with a greater focus on the needs of children to be protected and nurtured (Devine, 2008). However, such discourses also reinforced 'truths' around the 'future becomingness' of children (Kjorholt and Qvortrup, 2013) undermining the very idea of children as knowing and competent (Johanson, Berbeck and Kampman, 2004; Christensen and James, 2017). Their capacities as contributing 'useful' members of society were perceived as both delayed and incremental (Devine and Cockburn, 2018). In addition, discourses on individual 'need' dovetailed with the neo-liberal shift in economic policy from the 1980s (especially in Anglo-Saxon societies) that increasingly emphasised an individualistic approach to education, especially the development of individual talent.

Neo-liberal approaches influence education in key ways. First, investment in education becomes predicated on value for money and 'governing by numbers' that compare schools (and countries) in a league table of performance that become markers of quality and excellence (Devine, 2013). As education levels between 'competition states' (Ball, 2009) rise, competition becomes more intense, and the negative consequences of lower levels of education more pronounced. At its extreme, alongside the retraction of the welfare state typical of neo-liberal economic policies (Lynch, Devine and Grummell, 2012), schools compete for resources, funding is allocated on the basis of progress in 'scores' as a discourse of school 'failure' is individualised to difficulties with 'failing teachers' and 'dysfunctional' parenting. School curricula and assessment become defined and shaped in line with market needs and a narrowing of learning to core skills (Apple 2006). These wider intensification and competitive pressures are reaching into children's lives from an increasingly early age as pre-schools and early years settings move through a process of 'schoolification' (Devine and Cockburn, 2018).

When we look at how children and young people experience their education in this wider context, issues of both rights to belong, to be respected, valued and heard, as well as to experiences of in/equality emerge. We can ask if there are spaces and places for agency for children in their relations with adults in schools? An acknowledgement of power relations should take account not only of how adults mould and define the school experiences (and 'schooling' priorities) but also of how children simultaneously have the power to resist, question and articulate their priorities and concerns. The record here is mixed however with research suggesting that where consultation happens, this tends to be tokenistic, serving disciplinary norms of school management. Most recently we see this reflected in a national survey of young people's experiences (12 – 18-year olds) of teaching and learning in schools (DCYA, 2017), identified as a key priority for Comhairle Na nÓg and an area of national policy concern to students in the secondary school system.

Yet, account must also be taken of the mutual dependence by adults on children's willingness to learn. This is the negotiated element of all relations centred on power and

ultimately mediates the cut and thrust (and complexities) of everyday interactions between teachers and children in schools (Devine, 2002). It would be a mistake also to consider children's agency only in terms of resistance to adult control. The influence and change children exert over teachers is also an example of their agency. Time in school is also time adults spend with children when they are influenced by the myriad of responses and complexities children themselves bring to the educational exchange. Like other forms of unpaid work, this wider contribution children make to the betterment of society is mostly invisible within adult centric perspectives.

Understanding children's school lives then involves looking to explore how children's citizenship – understood as their competent, active and reflective 'being' and 'doing' – the give and take of social relationships, is enacted and framed. Devine and Cockburn (2018) speak of the power dynamics involved in this 'lived' citizenship (their experience of belonging and identity) and how it is interwoven with wider questions of equality and recognition.

Equality and schooling

Common sense tells us that schooling is always a good thing. Yet, when we look at patterns within the Irish education system, as well as internationally, questions can be raised about how effective education systems are in tackling wider inequalities in the society. Schools do not operate in a vacuum but are located within the nexus of wider inequalities in the society. Where societies are characterised by high degrees of wealth inequality (e.g. such as the UK and USA) this is reproduced in a more segregated and unequal education system (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009; OECD, 2016). Where societies have higher degrees of social solidarity and a priority on values of equality (e.g. Scandinavian countries such as Finland and Denmark) this permeates an education system where differences on the basis of social class, ethnicity and gender, while still evident, are significantly less pronounced (OECD, 2016). This is especially relevant to the Irish context, given the increasing patterns of child poverty (and homelessness) and the relatively negative impact of austerity cuts on the youngest of our citizens (Cantillon et al, 2017). This latter is itself reflective of the relative 'absence' of power of the younger generation in the Irish policy space (Devine and Cockburn, 2018).

For education to be effective, it must connect with all aspects of the child's cultural and social repertoire. This focus on dispositions in learning is crucial. It is especially important with respect to equalities in education because the dispositions children and young people hold (and that others, such as teachers, hold of them) influence the possibilities they view for themselves as successful and engaged learners. Pedagogy (in its widest sense, as Bernstein (1975) notes incorporating the organisation of time and space in school) positions children and does so with respect to their social class, gender, ethnicity and dis/ability (Devine et al, 2013; Devine and McGillicuddy, 2016; Lareau, 2016; Reay, 2008).

The impact of social class

Perhaps the most obvious example of these dynamics relates to the impact of social class. Research repeatedly highlights significant differences in the educational performance of middle class and working class children. Such research highlights how the education system

is skewed in favour of children from middle class backgrounds – through forms of speech, demeanour, and cultural expressions – a 'habitus' – that is firmly embedded in middle class ways of thinking, doing and 'being' in the world (McGillicuddy and Devine, 2018; Reay, 2008). Feelings of shame and an embodied sense of 'them' and 'us' can leave children on the margins of society feeling like outsiders, unable to access or penetrate the real 'knowing' that is required to 'get on' in school (Devine, 2008). Over time, this gives rise to a sense of disconnection between the child's life at home/local community and that of the school, culminating in its extreme in school absenteeism and early school dropout (OECD, 2016/2012). Where there is a clustering of children in a local community and/or school with similar challenges, the impact tends to be most profound giving rise to a form of cumulative disadvantage that becomes woven into a cycle of inter-generational poverty. Research in Ireland confirms the most negative impact of such clustering in contexts of extreme disadvantage in urban communities (McCoy, Quail and Smyth, 2014). Combined with national polices of league table comparisons across schools, the phenomenon of 'failing' schools/'ghetto' schools evident, for example, in the UK and USA, results in a cycle of despair and marginalisation (Reay et al, 2011).

In contrast, a middle class advantage is compounded by knowing how the education system works (in Bourdieu's (1989) terms 'cultural and social' capitals) and being able to tap into the real requirements of doing well in exams, as well as paying for the additional supports that may be needed to ensure success. The capacity to build and extend children's formal learning through extracurricular activities which add to their cultural capital is another example of how social class advantage can play out in the education system (Smyth 2016). Lareau's (2011/2016) work in the USA epitomises this in her descriptions of the 'concerted cultivation' by middle class parents of their children, strongly in the know of how the education system works.

Social class and achievement in Ireland

Patterns of educational achievement in Ireland indicate that social class differences are strongly reflected in performance in the junior and leaving certificate examinations and in the transfer of students to higher education. We know, for example, that while early school leaving rates are low by international standards (10%), they are concentrated and relatively high, within a cohort of young people (18%) that mainly attend DEIS schools. McCoy et al (2014) show in a longitudinal study of post primary performance, that young people from higher professional backgrounds have an average of two grades higher per subject compared to those from manual backgrounds. Similarly, in the leaving certificate, while 50% of the higher professional group achieve four or more honours, only 20% of those from manual backgrounds do so.

These patterns have their foundations at primary level, evident from emerging data on performance in national standardised tests of reading and mathematics. While we do not have detailed analysis of such patterns by social class at primary level, research confirms substantive and significant differences in the literacy and maths performance of children in DEIS and non-DEIS primary schools (Sheil, Kavanagh and Millar, 2014), notwithstanding significant average improvement in the performance of children in DEIS schools since the

previous analysis in 2009. What this suggests is that while interventions have brought about an improvement nationally in literacy and mathematics scores in primary schools, the gap between those advantaged and disadvantaged children in education performance remains significant. When compared with other national level indicators of performance the gap between DEIS and non-DEIS remains relatively constant while overall average performance is increasing. An important point to note however is that as a phenomenon, education disadvantage is not concentrated in DEIS schools. In fact, analysis of *Growing Up Ireland* indicates that most poor children are not in DEIS schools (Williams et al, 2016).

International comparisons at primary level, in the area of reading shows high levels of comparative achievement by Ireland (Eivers, Gilleece and Delaney, 2017) through *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study* (PIRLS). In the area of mathematics achievement, Ireland is placed above average in maths performance (ranked eighth in maths, and 16th in science, Clerkin et al, 2016). OECD studies comparing the performance of 15-year olds confirm underlying social class inequities in the Irish education system, especially when compared with other similar sized countries. Their research suggests that the more segregation within an education system the less well the system overall will do. Finland is often taken as a key exemplar but also as a good comparator for Ireland because of its size, history and population. Interestingly, the Finnish example is telling because, over a 30-year period, they worked strategically to reduce social class differences and prioritised equality as a key goal underpinning the purpose of their education system, in addition to strong trust in teachers (Sahlberg, 2017).

Differentiation through segregation

The issue of school admissions is an equality issue because, when based exclusively on the principle of parental choice, it enables and facilitates a market-led approach to education, with parents (mostly in the know) 'choosing' the best school for their child (Devine 2011). Coupled with housing policies/residential patterns that segregate communities along both classed and racialised patterns, a cumulative pattern of advantage/disadvantage can arise. Drawing on an analysis of data from the *Growing Up in Ireland* study, McCoy et al, (2014), confirm a 'threshold' effect in the most disadvantaged schools (Urban DEIS band 1) indicating that where concentration of disadvantage goes beyond a certain point, the impact is most profound on levels of student achievement. This is also an issue that arises internationally, with the OECD (2012) recommending 'controlled choice mechanisms' that limit schools' capacities to 'select' students and ensure greater diversity in enrolment across schools. The issue is further compounded in the Irish context because of the denominational character of the Irish education system and the strong intersection between faith and ethnicity. An unintended consequence can arise in what Devine (2011) refers to as a form of exclusion by inclusion and segregation based on faith/ethnicity in a system geared to multiple faith school choices (Byrne and Devine, 2018).

Segregation can also occur within schools through practices of differentiation that become institutionalised through the organisation of children/young people into ability groups/streams. Other research points to the potentially negative impact especially for those who struggle most with their learning, widening the achievement gaps further (Gillborn,

2010; Hallam and Parsons, 2012; Hamilton and O'Hara, 2011). Findings from a national study of teachers in DEIS primary schools in Ireland (McGillicuddy and Devine, 2018) confirmed the potentially negative impact of teacher practices on children's experience, while Smyth's (2011) research with second level students confirms a 'ceiling effect' that is created for students assigned to lower streams in terms of subject choice and a greater tendency toward early school leaving. This research found significant differences on the performance of similar ability children depending on whether they were mixed ability base classes or lower stream classes (Smyth 2009:4). Lynch and Lodge's earlier work (2002) confirms similar patterns.

Gender and sexualities on children's educational wellbeing

Of course, it is not just social class that is important in mediating how children think and learn in school, but how social class intersects with children's gender, ethnicity and dis/ability. One can ask what are the messages in relation to gender conveyed through what and how children learn? How are these reflected in the organisational and pedagogical practices of schools (e.g. gender segregation for subjects, role models in textbooks etc?). This translates into dispositions that boys and girls have for liking/disliking certain subjects as well as the choices they make as they progress to higher levels of study and ultimately the kind of careers they will follow (Smyth and Darmody, 2010). Sexualities and the expression of diverse gendered identities are increasingly to the fore in research as wider societal norms change. An increasing area of concern here is the prevalence of homophobic bullying in school and how/if schools recognise the range of diversities and/or promote heterosexual norms with respect to the gendered 'work' and positioning of young people (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009; McCormack and Gleeson, 2010).

There has also been considerable research and concern in relation to what is sometimes termed the phenomenon of 'failing boys' and the associated cultures of hegemonic/macho masculinity that eschew achievement in school (Coffey and James, 2016; Connolly, 2006; Francis and Paetcher, 2015). Patterns here suggest mediating effects of 'fear of failure' and resultant disengagement from the 'risks' of learning for boys in challenging circumstances (Pinkett and Roberts, 2019). Undoubtedly we need more substantive research at primary level in this area.

Race, ethnicity and migration on children's everyday lives in school

Race/ethnicity is another important marker in terms of patterns of achievement and recognition and inclusion in the education system. Children from minority ethnicities often struggle to be appropriately recognised and valued for their cultural difference in education systems geared to the majority ethnic norm (Devine 2011, Devine and McGillicuddy, 2019). Equally important is how social class itself intersects with ethnicity – ensuring that it is often poorer minority ethnic children who fare worst in education. Dynamics of inclusion/exclusion based on race and ethnicity in children's social worlds in school are also significant. Research here highlights not only the awareness of even very young children of ethnic markers, but also the cultural work children engage in to manage those differences. School and classroom cultures are key, as is the need for teachers to be

continually mindful of dysconscious bias, that underplays the significance of racism and racist practices in schools (Darmody et al, 2012; Devine, 2011, 2013; Kitching, 2014).

Research with migrant children documents the very active role they play in mobilising family capitals, bridging the relationship between their parents and the local community through the social networks and friendships they develop at school (Devine, 2009). However, research also highlights the challenges that ensue in both accommodating new cultures and systems and the belonging work that migrant children must do in order to succeed. The tendency for migrant children to be clustered in schools in poorer communities, coupled with the challenges of learning a new language all impact on the transition process (Devine, 2011; Darmody et al, 2012). Also identified is the tendency for attitudes toward migrant children to be conditional on the extent to which they assimilate into the culture of the settlement society. For migrant children who have parents invested with strong economic, social and cultural capital, the transition process is smoother, albeit still creating challenges the migrant child must overcome. While migrant children are continuously playing 'catch up' with their native-born peers, it is those who have access to resources of care, wealth and cultural knowledge who are most likely to succeed (McGovern and Devine, 2016). In the absence of opportunities for success and sustained investment in supporting their additional learning and familial needs, a cycle of inter-generational poverty and exclusion can result, something consistently evident in international comparative research (OECD 2016, 2012) with the education of migrant children a noted area of concern.

Leading and teaching for equality and social justice

There is now a clear recognition of the importance of embedding system-level change in widening the remit of school principals, beyond management and administration, to forms of instructional leadership and leading for diversity (Devine, 2012; MacRuairc et al, 2013). In Ireland for example, a national programme of school leadership training is now in place with the establishment of a National Centre for School Leadership. These changes coincide with a stronger focus in school inspections on whole-school processes and evaluations, encouraging schools to draw on comparative exemplars to inform and improve their own practice (OECD, 2013). Simplistic judgment on 'what works' is queried by Alexander et al (2010) who assert that quality education can only be realised by 'deep structure pedagogical change', itself a product of deep learning, deep experience, deep support and deep leadership in schools (Devine, 2011; Hargreaves, 2006). What is clear is the need for an evidence-driven approach based on reflection and evaluation of what is taking place in Irish classrooms and schools.

There has been little focused research on this area in Ireland. Smyth's (1999) national study identified clear differences in outcome and process among second level schools, while studies by Gleeson (2012) point to more subject-centred approaches and the constraints of teaching to the test in a high-stakes system of the Leaving Certificate examination. Smyth et al's (2011) longitudinal study confirms the lack of attention to differentiation in second level schools and the prevalence of examination oriented didactic approaches to teaching and learning. These patterns dovetail with the TALIS study (OECD, 2009), which indicated the prevalence of direct transmission beliefs over constructivist beliefs among the Irish second

level teacher cohort. There are synergies here in findings when related to the recent survey of student experiences of teaching and learning, noted earlier (DCYA, 2017). Nonetheless, Irish teachers across all levels reported high levels of self-efficacy, positive student relationships and disciplinary climates and an emphasis on subject knowledge. More recent research by Devine et al (2013) involved an intensive mixed methods study of how teachers think, talk and 'do' teaching across primary and second level schools. It highlighted distinctions between what teachers aspired to by way of 'good' teaching and what often happened in practice, strongly influenced by the socio-cultural context of their schools. Of particular note however was that neither equality concerns nor children's rights strongly emerged in teacher narratives about why they taught the way they did (Devine and McGillicuddy, 2016). There was clear reference to including the voices of children and being respectful of them, but this was at the level of recognition of individual children (drawing out the quiet/shy child) rather than any structured sense of equality issues related to their experiences of teaching and learning. The research with post-primary teachers especially was the first opportunity they had of speaking with someone about their pedagogy. Of additional concern is not the struggles teachers endured, but the absence of awareness of struggle. This was especially reflected in the narratives of teachers working in DEIS schools. Yet it was these teachers, in both primary and secondary schools, who were least likely to emphasise the importance of professional development to their roles.

Teacher support and retention

These findings connect to levels of support, professional development and retention in the education system, which cannot be divorced from the wider valuing of teachers and education (and children) within the society (OECD, 2005). Internationally, a significant challenge in working with children at the margins is the recruitment and retention of experienced teachers. Schools in challenging circumstances have a continual through-put of early career staff who become 'burned out' with the demands of catering to the diverse needs of their students (OECD, 2012). This suggests that the important focus on wellbeing now emerging in education needs to have also within its remit the wellbeing of teachers, especially those working in challenging circumstances (Darmody and Smith, 2011).

Furthering our understanding of children's school lives in primary schools in Ireland

Education policy and practice have a profound impact on the power and positioning of children in the wider society. Global policymakers such as the OECD increasingly shape who and what matters in education and how children's learning is being directed in particular ways. Key questions are raised about who and what is valued - how children are valued, what is valued in children's learning and if children are differently valued in schools (Devine, 2013). Such questions are bound with the framing of children's identities, how school practice influences children's experience of who they are, as well as what they will become. The neo-liberal sweep that currently permeates education systems globally, creates challenges for children and their families. With the contraction of welfare states, a more competitive and individualistic approach to education takes hold. Children become increasingly reliant on

the webs of care and family supports that influence their capacity to engage with the education system (Devine and Cockburn, 2018). In the absence of sustained investment by the State in a careful and nurturing education, being valued differently leads to cyclical patterns of under-achievement for some children. These become naturalised in global and local policy discourses as deficiencies in children's family cultures, 'parenting' and often their ethnic identities.

In Ireland, primary schools have always been central to the vitality of local communities, the focal point for marrying the love and care for children with national goals for economic and social development. At the foundation of the State, primary schools were central to building a sense of nationhood, the restoration of the Irish language and the moral formation of children into the Catholic faith. Today, primary schools, while still retaining many of the vestiges of the past, are 'noisy' diverse places, a far cry from the more rigid system up to the 1960s when children exited with a Primary Certificate, that for many, marked the completion of their formal schooling. International studies of comparative performance suggest our primary school system is working well. Yet despite the progressive move to more child-centred approaches from the 1970s, wider social change is having a profound impact on the pressures and challenges experienced within schools generally. While we may think of these as epitomised in the annual 'points race' at leaving certificate level, there is creep occurring that influences even the lives of our very youngest citizens. Central among these are pressures to 'perform', and the over-scheduling of children's lives in an increasingly competitive, technologically oriented world.

Such trends are reaching into children's lives from an early age, as pre-schools risk becoming 'schoolified', undermining the centrality of play, creativity and spontaneity so essential in the early years. As children's educational levels rise, progression through higher levels becomes widely expected, and not to progress is a key signifier of educational and ultimately societal exclusion. Our successes in international rankings at primary level mask underlying inequalities in participation and outcomes among groups of children in our primary schools.

Yet we know very little about how these dynamics are viewed through children's eyes. What is it like to be a child in primary school today and how does this change as she/he moves from one class to another, one school to another? Researching children's experiences helps us to understand how their dispositions and learning evolve as they transition through the primary school system. What are the incidents and relationships that shape children's aspirations and ambitions, their wellbeing and engagement in school? Is this different for boys and girls, for children from different social and ethnic backgrounds and children with a range of additional support needs? We also need to understand how teachers and principals experience their roles and the challenges they face in light of rapid social, economic and demographic change. Parents are also key – how do they participate in and experience their children's schooling? Do grandparents have a role to play? What is working in our primary schools? Why and for whom? Do all children have equal chance to succeed?

The NCCA has recently commissioned UCD School of Education[1] to conduct a nationally representative longitudinal cohort study of children's primary school lives. A mixed methods study, involving the collection of national level data in 200 schools, as well as more intensive analysis in a sub-sample of primary schools over five years, it foregrounds children's voices and experiences, in addition to the key perspectives of adults (parents, teachers, principals, and grandparents) who love, care for and work with children in their families, schools and communities. It is the first systematic attempt to track the same group of children annually from pre-school into primary and from primary into post-primary school, providing detailed information on their school lives. A landmark study nationally and internationally, it will provide a rich overview of what is taking place in our primary schools at a time of significant social change. Fundamentally it will facilitate curricular and wider policy planning, informed by a rich evidence base located in the Irish context. At its core is a commitment to a holistic and nurturing education, underpinned by a framework of children's rights and the identification of promising practices that facilitate the enactment of those rights to a just and meaningful experience for all.

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1   The study is led by Professor Dympna Devine, Associate Professor Jennifer Symonds and Assistant Professor Seaneen Sloan, UCD School of Education.

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Supporting the development of wellbeing and resilience in schools: The role of non-cognitive skills

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Abstract

It has been recognised increasingly that academic performance and ultimate success in life require non-cognitive skills that go beyond simply mastering curriculum content. The aims of this paper are to provide an overview of the non-cognitive literature in the context of educational performance and to provide a rationale for the use of non-cognitive interventions to support the development of wellbeing and perseverance among the student body. This rationale is expanded to key areas of concern within the Irish educational system to which non-cognitive approaches may be applied.

Keywords: **Wellbeing, resilience, non-cognitive skills, STEM**

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Introduction

A growing body of evidence suggests that specific skills are required for academic success in school and for adequately preparing students for modern work, civic and social environments. These go beyond the simple mastery of curriculum content knowledge. Thus, Farrington and colleagues (2012) argue that "students must develop sets of behaviors, skills, attitudes, and strategies that are crucial to academic performance in their classes, but that may not be reflected in their scores on cognitive tests" (p. 2). These are commonly referred to as non-cognitive skills which, in an educational context, refer to traits or skills not usually included in tests of ability and knowledge but which are considered to be a factor in academic performance and life success (Kautz, Heckman, Diris, ter Weel and Borghans, 2014; West et al., 2016). Interventions which enhance students' non-cognitive skills have been shown to make lasting improvements in academic performance (Kautz et al., 2014).

For many years now, the intelligence quotient (IQ) has been a long-standing predictor of educational attainment (Lynn and Mikk, 2009). However, according to Kautz and colleagues (2014), non-cognitive skills may predict educational attainment as effectively as (if not more so than) IQ. For example, Duckworth and Seligman (2005) found that self-discipline was a significantly better predictor of educational outcomes than IQ. However, recent evidence also suggests that learning occurs due to an interplay of both cognitive and non-cognitive skills (Farrington et al., 2012). For example, Poropat's (2009) meta-analysis

found that academic performance in primary, secondary and tertiary education was correlated with items on the 'Five Factor Model' of personality, including, in particular, conscientiousness, which demonstrated a large effect vis-à-vis academic performance (r= .19, d= 0.46, grade difference= 0.31). The effect size of conscientiousness was similar to that of cognitive ability (r= .23, d= 0.52, grade difference= 0.35) and as outlined by Poropat (2009), was similar to the effect size of socio-economic status (SES) on academic performance (r= .32, d= 0.68, grade difference= 0.46) reported in Sirin's (2005) meta-analytic review. Likewise, other research has found non-cognitive skills to be a significant contributory factor in academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011, Jones and Bouffard, 2012; Simonsen et al. 2012).

Farrington and colleagues (2012) outline five inter-related categories of non-cognitive skills involved in academic performance including:

1. Academic behaviours – defined as outward, visible manifestations of academic engagement and effort. Farrington et al. (2012) suggest that all other non-cognitive skills work through academic behaviour to affect performance (see Figure 1).

2. Academic perseverance – involving the ability to focus on and persist with academic objectives or pursuits. This comprises skills such as tenacity, delayed gratification, self-discipline, self-control, and grit (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews and Kelly, 2007; Duckworth and Quinn, 2009).

3. Academic mindsets – defined as "the psycho-social attitudes or beliefs one has about oneself in relation to academic work" (Farrington et al., 2012 p.9). Positive academic mindsets are motivational factors which encourage academic persistence. Persistence, in turn, manifests through academic behaviours to affect academic performance. This relationship is cyclical and can be either positive or negative (Farrington, 2013).

4. Learning strategies – the strategies and process employed in order to aid cognitive processes such as thinking, learning and remembering (Farrington et al., 2012). Learning strategies allow students to take full advantage of learning opportunities by maximising the benefits derived from academic behaviours. These encompass a range of variables such as metacognition, study skills and goal setting (Zimmerman, Schunk and DiBenedetto, 2015).

5. Social skills – defined as skills which enable a person to navigate social protocols and interact effectively with others. These involve variables that are beneficial both in academic and career settings such as empathy, responsibility, cooperation and interpersonal skills (Casner-Lotto and Barrington, 2006; Schawbel, 2012).

The often-complex interactions between these inter-related categories and the classroom, school and socio-cultural context, are shown in Figure 1.
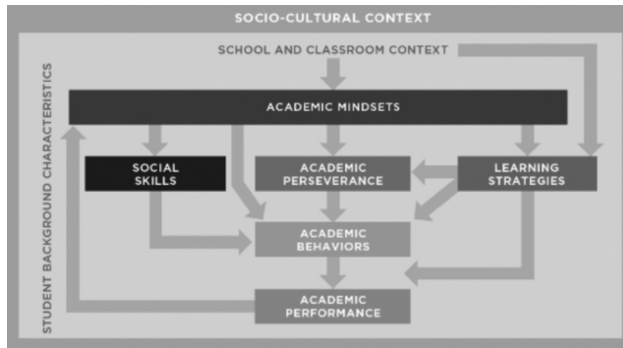
Figure 1: Hypothesised model of how non-cognitive skills affect academic performance within a classroom/school and socio-cultural context. (From: Farrington et al., 2012 p. 12. Reproduced with permission.)

In Ireland, there has been an increasing recognition that non-cognitive skills are important in education. For example, O'Brien's (2008) review makes a strong case for the importance of enhancing student wellbeing and resilience and indeed, these are now recognised as crucial factors in academic success within the junior cycle of post-primary education (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2017). However, wellbeing and resilience are complex constructs which may incorporate, and be influenced by, a range of potentially interacting factors. For example, if resilience is defined as the ability to adapt successfully in the face of adverse conditions, then it is possible that non-cognitive skills, such as academic mindset, may play a role in its development (or enhancement). Broadly speaking, mindsets can be divided into two types including 'fixed mindsets' whereby ability is viewed as unalterable, and 'growth mindsets' which are premised on the idea that effort predicts performance (Dweck, 2006). Growth mindset interventions involve shifting students' rigid/inflexible implicit theories of intelligence toward an attitude which views mental abilities as malleable and capable of being developed and cultivated through effort and tuition. This kind of attitude allows students to engage better with learning opportunities whilst also being able to endure difficulty and not be as easily deterred by initial failures, all of which lie at the heart of resilience (Dweck, 1999, 2006, 2008; Farrington et al., 2012). Likewise, aspects of wellbeing, such as autonomy and personal mastery (Ryff, 1989, 1995), may be linked to, and support the development of, mindsets.

The understanding that non-cognitive skills are a factor in educational performance and attainment has led to the development of a variety of different interventions aimed at increasing academic performance. Broadly speaking these include categories of interventions designed to alter students' theory of learning (Dweck, 1999, 2006, 2008), shift students' behavioural tendencies through attitudinal change (Duckworth, Grant, Loew, Oettingen and Gollwitzer, 2011), develop adaptive attributions (Aronson, Fried and Good, 2002; Yeager, Purdie-Vaughns, Garcia, Pebley and Cohen, 2014), foster productive self-regulatory strategies (Zimmerman, Schunk and DiBenedetto, 2015) and enhance social belonging and wellbeing (Walton and Cohen, 2011).

Mediating and moderating factors

Research suggests that a number of socio-demographic factors influence the effectiveness of non-cognitive interventions. These include primarily gender, race/ethnicity and socio-economic status (SES).

Gender

Gender imbalances exist across education, with males and females outperforming each other in different domains. For example, at present, there are gender imbalances within Irish STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) subjects (Harmon and Erskine, 2017). According to the STEM Education Review Group (2016), this is an issue which requires urgent attention. Likewise, the *STEM Education Policy Statement 2017-2026* (Government Publication, 2017) states that there is a need to overcome gender-related stereotypes concerning misconceptions about STEM abilities. Such stereotypes have been identified as a barrier to optimal educational performance (Aronson, Cohen and McColskey, 2009; Nguyen and Ryan, 2008). For example, Spencer, Steele and Quinn (1999) found that the presence of gender-related stereotypes affected negatively females' performance in maths. A more recent meta-analysis by Picho, Rodriguez and Finnie (2013) concluded that, whilst contextual factors matter, females in stereotypical conditions perform worse on mathematics tests than controls (d =|10.24|).

Some authors have argued that gender imbalance in STEM subjects emerges due to differences in specific cognitive abilities, whilst others have argued that social and cultural factors are responsible (Hyde, 2014; Reilly, Neumann and Andrews, 2017). In either case, non-cognitive interventions have been shown to reduce the magnitude of gender differences in performance. For example, a systematic review by Sabatine and Lippold (in progress) suggests that growth mindset interventions are beneficial to students in general but are particularly useful for reducing 'stereotype threat'. Similarly, when comparing students' grades, Grant and Dweck (2003) found that among those with fixed mindsets, males tended to outperform females, but among those with growth mindsets, females performed slightly better than males. Likewise, Good, Aronson and Inzlicht (2003) conducted an intervention to overcome stereotype threat and found that teaching an incremental theory of intelligence (the proposition that intelligence is malleable and can be developed) led to better academic performance amongst ethnic minority and low-income students when compared to controls but with a larger effect among females.

Several authors have suggested that some of the gender variation in participation in STEM subjects is due to differences between males and females with regard to subject and career preferences (e.g. Stoet, Bailey, Moore and Geary, 2016). However, a systematic literature review by Pennington, Heim, Levy and Larkin (2016) on the mediating variables of stereotype threat, supports the idea that under 'threat conditions', the extent to which an individual can employ their cognitive abilities, appears to be mediated by non-cognitive variables. Put simply, reducing non-cognitive barriers may be an effective means of addressing gender disparities/performance in STEM subjects in Ireland.

Ethnic minority status

Non-cognitive interventions may also be used to address performance disparities in terms of ethnic background. It has been found that ethnic/racial minority students are more likely to have negative experiences in education than their Caucasian counterparts (Aronson, Cohen and McColskey, 2009; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2010). Thus, the enhancement of non-cognitive skills within these sub-groups may allow for a better overall educational experience whilst also improving academic performance. Cohen, Garcia, Apfel and Master (2006) conducted an intervention which aimed to improve the academic performance of minority students by reaffirming their sense of personal adequacy. They found an average treatment effect for African American students of .30 grade points following their intervention; which corresponds to a 40% reduction in what is known as 'the racial achievement gap'.

In another study, Aronson at al., (2002) delivered a mindset intervention which resulted in students' grade point average increasing by .23 points with black students (but not white students) reporting greater enjoyment from the academic process. Walton and Cohen (2011) found that an intervention designed to reduce students perception of threat to their social belonging, was particularly beneficial for minority students, with positive effects on health outcomes and significant increases in grade point average (GPA) for African American students (B = 0.30, t(65) = 2.54, P = 0.014). Similarly, a meta-analysis conducted on 23 studies by Nadler and Clark (2011) found that when stereotype threats were nullified, minority students' scores improved (d = 0.52). These findings speak to the idea that non-cognitive interventions offer a viable means of reducing racial achievement gaps, whilst also promoting wellbeing and allowing minority students to derive a better experience from both the social and academic aspects of education.

Socio-economic status

Socio-economic factors may also influence academic performance; thus, those of lower SES are less likely to benefit from formal education than their more advantaged counterparts (Strand, 2014). According to West and colleagues (2016) "disparities in so-called non-cognitive skills appear to contribute to the academic achievement gap separating wealthy from disadvantaged students" (p. 148). Similarly, research by Liu (2016) on socio-economic achievement differences in the early school years found that disparities in non-cognitive skills can magnify socio-economic achievement gaps. This is problematic because initial differences in the benefit derived from education may increase incrementally over time (called a 'Matthew effect'), eventually affecting overall educational attainment. This is not to suggest that non-cognitive skills are the only factor in determining SES or social background itself. Rather it suggests that they may be among the contributory factors involved in the academic achievement gap which tends to emerge between those at different points on the socio-economic ladder.

Socio-economic factors in Ireland are thought to play a role in the likelihood of school completion and attainment of Leaving Certificate points (Higher Education Authority, 2010; McCoy, Smyth, Watson and Darmody, 2014). Likewise, socio-economic differences are thought to be a factor in the type of higher education institution in which students enrol. According to the Higher Education Authority (2010, 2016), the socio-economic profile of

students attending universities and institutes of technology differs to the extent that the composition of students in universities tends to be skewed towards those in the middle and upper ends of the socio-economic ladder. Considering the potential for differences in non-cognitive skills to magnify socio-economic achievement gaps in education, future research could be directed towards exploring the potential for non-cognitive skills interventions to be used as a means of reducing the extent to which SES impacts the benefits derived from education.

Transition to employment

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2016), educational attainment is strongly related (across all countries) to labour force participation, type of occupation and earnings. Statistics further suggest that those who have attained a third level qualification are almost twice as likely to be employed as those with primary level education (Central Statistics Office, Ireland, 2011). Similarly, in all OECD countries, educational attainment appears to be linked to earnings, with those who have a tertiary level qualification, earning more than those with secondary and primary education qualifications (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2015; 2016). With regard to the Irish context, OECD figures for 2014 show that Irish tertiary graduates in employment (aged 25-64 yrs) earned, on average, 63% more than the OECD benchmark. Likewise, OECD research has linked educational attainment with the ability to retain employment, as well as a number of other social outcomes such as levels of health, trust, democracy and social cohesion (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016).

It is also important to consider the skills which employers desire, in order to ensure that these are better reflected within the educational system. Competency in the core skills of a discipline is a necessary prerequisite for employment, but evidence suggests that broader skills are also desired. For example, Casner-Lotto and Barrington (2006) found that oral communication, teamwork/collaboration, professionalism/work ethic, and critical thinking/problem solving, were the skills which employers valued most among college graduates. Another more recent study by Schawbel (2012) found that, whilst employers valued education, they placed a greater emphasis on competencies such as adaptability, communication skills and positive attitude. The Irish literature reflects similar findings with employers desiring 'soft skills' pertaining to communication, teamwork and problem-solving skills (Department of Education and Skills, 2015). Furthermore, a recent report by the World Economic Forum (2016) suggests that the subject knowledge acquired within technical disciplines will become outdated in the near future, thereby leading to increasing (and disruptive) changes in the thirty-five skills and abilities identified as most desirable across most occupations, Thus, it seems likely that the non-cognitive skills which underlie the learning process and facilitate the acquisition of new skills are likely to become increasingly important in the near future.

The Irish context

The *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* recognises that the role of education extends beyond the "the simple acquisition of knowledge" (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p. 57) whilst, at the same time, concerns have been expressed about the lack of the kinds of skills required to help students engage effectively with the demands of higher education; these relate specifically to critical thinking, problem-solving and independent learning skills (Department of Education and Skills, 2011). Thus, the development of non-cognitive skills is likely to play a key role in helping to address these kinds of issues. For instance, in a comparison of higher versus ordinary level students in leaving certificate maths, the *Chief Examiner's Report* stated:

> At higher level in both papers it was apparent that candidates made a determined effort to complete the entire examination paper. They were prepared to make a number of attempts in many questions and to persevere in solving problems even when, because of errors, the numerical values were not user-friendly (State Examinations Commission, 2015, p. 20).

At Ordinary level, however, the same determination and perseverance were not observed: "there was little evidence of the same diligence and perseverance when problems arose. Candidates at this level generally abandoned the work as soon as difficulty was encountered, rather than trying different ideas" (p. 20). Mutodi and Ngirande (2014) found that students who do well in maths tend to attribute their success to effort and perseverance, whilst unsuccessful students tend to attribute their failure to a lack of ability. Similarly, research on distinguishing features between academically successful and unsuccessful minority and low SES students found that resilience-promoting conditions were associated with more success in mathematics and greater academic engagement (Borman and Overman, 2004). Thus, it seems likely that weaker students, in particular, would benefit from interventions/ programmes designed to enhance non-cognitive skills known to support academic perseverance.

In summary, the development/enhancement of non-cognitive skills at secondary school level may help to address, at least in part, some of the issues related to gender, SES and racial achievement gaps, thereby supporting the provision of an education which reflects the diverse requirements of present and future employers. Previous research has outlined methods of optimising non-cognitive investment and economically streamlining targeted implementation strategies (Cunha and Heckman, 2008; Cunha and Heckman, 2009; Heckman and Kautz, 2012; Dee and West, 2011; Heckman and Mosso, 2014). The ability to implement targeted interventions make non-cognitive programmes ideal for equilibrating Ireland's education goals with the economic vision of a high-skills, knowledge and innovation-based economy (Government Publication, 2004). The research outlined above would suggest that non-cognitive skills, and, in turn, interventions/programmes designed to promote them, should be considered in the context of school and classroom ethos/ culture.

School ethos/culture

As shown earlier in Figure 1, non-cognitive skills also affect academic performance in the context of the ethos and cultures within schools and classrooms. Thus, school cultures which are perceived as supportive by students, predict a variety of positive outcomes. For example, longitudinal research indicates that students' perception of school culture predicts academic engagement which, in turn, influences academic achievement (Wang and Holcombe, 2010; Wang and Eccles, 2013). Similarly, a systematic review by Kidger, Araya, Donovan and Gunnell, (2012) found that students' perception of a supportive environment was associated with better emotional health and wellbeing.

Some schools, in countries throughout the world, have incorporated non-cognitive thinking into their culture. For example, the Life Academy of Health and Bioscience in Oakland, USA, is located in an area with high levels of crime and predominantly caters to the needs of students who are socio-economically disadvantaged (Boaler, 2015; Life Academy of Health and Bioscience, 2016). The school's culture revolves around the understanding that non-cognitive skills promote academic ability. The core principles of the school include fostering academic behaviours, skills and mindsets which fall within the taxonomy of non-cognitive skills outlined earlier. For example, the school's grading system recognises the value of academic perseverance, resilience and growth mindset. When student attainment falls below a passing grade, a designation of 'no credit' is given; this indicates the class is still in progress and is only revised when the student perseveres to meet the required academic standard. By changing how grades are viewed, the school has shifted students' focus successfully toward deep learning through the continual improvement and development of learning strategies. This perspective encourages and rewards resilience, determination and academic perseverance in the face of difficulty. This, in turn, facilitates the development of a growth mindset as there is a clear relationship in the student's mind, between effort, improvement and outcome. The results of this initiative are impressive in that the proportion of students who graduate is higher than nearby wealthier schools whilst the rate of acceptance into third level educational institutions for the school's students, is also the highest in the region (Boaler, 2015; Dweck, 2015).

Similarly, the Knowledge is Power Programme (KIPP), consists of charter schools in the USA which also incorporate a non-cognitive ethos into their school culture. KIPP schools comprise predominantly minority students who are socio-economically disadvantaged (Knowledge is Power Program, 2017). KIPP schools use the term 'character' to describe the non-cognitive skills which they aim to develop. The emphasis KIPP places on non-cognitive skills extend to initiatives such as character development report cards for students. Research on KIPP schools has shown they have a statistically significant positive effect on students' academic performance and academic behaviour (Tuttle et al., 2013; Tuttle et al., 2015). The percentage of KIPP students who complete secondary education (93%) and enrol in third level education (80%) is higher than the US low-income average and national average (Knowledge is Power Programme, 2015). KIPP credits the matriculation and success of their alumni to several factors, notably the development of non-cognitive skills such as grit and self-control (Knowledge is Power Program, 2011).

Research conducted with schools elsewhere in the United States report similar effects in terms of student engagement, increased academic behaviours and improved academic performance (Angrist, Pathak and Walters, 2013; Dobbie and Fryer, 2015; West, et al., 2016). These results were achieved by identifying the non-cognitive skills required by the respective student bodies and then incorporating their development into the school's ethos. This approach provides a means of creating school cultures which are sufficiently flexible to respond to the demands of 21st-century education.

Classroom

Though the academic requirements of each classroom may differ, the approach outlined above is equally valid at the classroom level. For example, given the willingness of many Irish math students to withdraw effort when faced with adversity, it could be argued that this lack of perseverance is related to mindset. In classrooms, perseverance can be promoted through the development of growth mindsets by techniques such as mindset messaging. Growth mindset messages are communications which express the idea that abilities are malleable and can change with effort (for review see Dweck, 2007). There are opportunities for teachers to impart these messages to students, for example how students' mistakes are addressed or the manner in which feedback is constructed and delivered to students (See Figure 2).
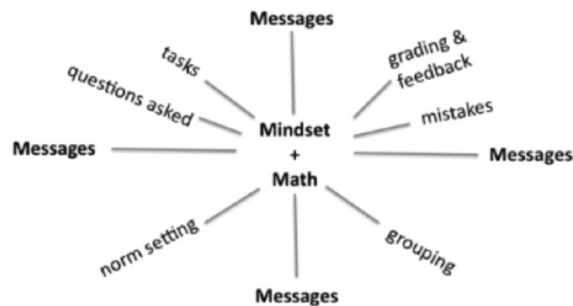
Figure 2: Aspects of classroom teaching that communicate mindset messages. (From: Boaler, 2013, p. 146. Reproduced with permission.)

Broadly speaking, when teachers employ growth mindset messaging in their teaching practice, their students tend to engage in positive learning strategies and have better academic outcomes (Cutts, Cutts, Draper, O'Donnell, and Saffrey, 2010; Schmidt, Shumow and Kackar-Cam, 2015). A specific example is teacher feedback, which plays a role in shaping students' mindsets (Yeager, Walton and Cohen, 2013). Thus, students with fixed mindsets have been found to be more likely to respond defensively to such feedback (Forsythe and Johnson, 2017). Non-cognitive techniques provide teachers with a means of constructing feedback in a manner which reduces such defensive behaviour whilst helping to develop growth mindsets. For example, Yeager, et al., (2014) constructed critical feedback in a manner which assuaged "mistrust by emphasizing the teacher's high standards and belief that the student was capable of meeting those standards" (p. 804). This technique was found to

increase academic perseverance as well as the quality of students' work. Yeager and colleagues (2014) found that similar techniques such as attributional retraining (the adoption of personally controllable attributions following a poor performance) also improved academic performance among minorities and reduced the academic achievement gap.

At the classroom level, non-cognitive programmes can be embedded alongside existing curricula, with the potential for cross-productive effects (Cunha and Heckman, 2009) whilst also maximising utility by using teachers' experience to assess and respond dynamically to students' needs.

Corrective interventions

Another potentially promising application for non-cognitive understandings pertains to interventions designed and tailored specifically to target problematic areas within Irish education. West and colleagues (2016) argue that non-cognitive skills "may be more amenable to direct intervention than cognitive ability" (p. 2). Kautz and colleagues (2014) present a similar point of view stating "that the productivity of later-age investment in non-cognitive skills is substantial" and in cases where the early years have been compromised, focusing on the development of non-cognitive skills is more effective than directly trying to develop cognitive skills (p. 63).

Issues pertaining to the Irish STEM initiative appear to emerge at least partially for non-cognitive reasons. Previous research suggests that employing interventions designed to develop non-cognitive skills such as mindset and perseverance may help to redress the issues in STEM. For instance, Grant and Dweck (2003) explored the effect on academic achievement of a students' orientation toward validating their own intelligence or toward learning goals. These orientations closely align with fixed and growth mindsets (Blackwell, Trzesniewski and Dweck, 2007). The growth mindset orientation predicted better final grades and the ability to recover from an initial poor grade, whereas fixed mindset students often failed to recover from initial setbacks. Similarly, Blackwell, Trzesniewski and Dweck (2007) aimed to promote positive change in classroom motivation by teaching an incremental theory of intelligence. Mathematics grades for both the experimental group (N=48) and control group (N=43) had been reducing prior to the intervention. Post-intervention the control group continued on a downward trajectory, while the experimental group stabilised, resulting in a difference of .30 grade points between the two groups.

In another study, Blackwell, Trzesniewski and Dweck (2007) found that students with growth mindsets did significantly better in maths than their counterparts who, previously, had equally good maths achievements. This divergence was mediated by several variables. Students who possessed growth mindsets were better orientated towards learning goals and deep learning as opposed to just grades. Secondly, regardless of current ability level, students with growth mindsets believed that their abilities reflected their efforts and that their efforts improved their abilities. Students with fixed mindsets tended to believe that effort was a requirement for those who lacked ability and was unnecessary for them. In response to setbacks, students with growth mindsets were less inclined to denigrate their own abilities or employ negative strategies such as withdrawing effort and instead were more likely to engage in positive strategies such as increasing effort. Summarising the research, Dweck

(2008) states that "when students believe that their intelligence can increase, they orient toward doing just that, displaying an emphasis on learning, effort, and persistence in the face of obstacles" (p. 4).

Non-cognitive strategies for improving academic performance and developing perseverance are not limited to mindset interventions. For example, Duckworth, and colleagues (2011) developed and delivered what is known as a mental contrasting with implementation intentions (MCII) intervention. MCIIs are a metacognitive approach which combine visualisation techniques and self-regulatory goal pursuit strategies in an effort to improve students' academic perseverance. Post MCII intervention, Duckworth and colleagues (2011) assigned the same academic task to both an experimental group (N=35) and a control group (N=31), the latter group not having been exposed to the MCII. The experimental group demonstrated considerably more perseverance, completing 60% more questions.

Likewise, the use of metacognitive strategies has been shown to have a relationship with increased delay of gratification, which in turn has a relationship with effort regulation (r = 0.58) (Bembenutty and Karabenick, 1998).

Looking to the future

The benefit of investment in education is well-established, with a broad range of outcomes linked to such investment (Cunha, Heckman and Schennach, 2010; Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2004; Patrinos and Psacharopoulos, 2011). Similarly, educational investment in disadvantaged youth is an economically efficient approach which reduces the effect of disadvantage, as well as a range of associated economic and societal costs (Cunha and Heckman, 2008; Cunha et al., 2010; Dobbie and Fryer, 2013). The ability to streamline the implementation of non-cognitive programmes by utilising past research (Cunha and Heckman, 2008; Cunha and Heckman, 2009; Heckman and Kautz, 2012; Dee and West, 2011; Heckman and Mosso, 2014) alongside the potential added value of improving academic performance whilst promoting wellbeing and perseverance, should be an incentive for policymakers to consider supporting further research in the area of non-cognitive interventions. Given the recent *STEM Education Policy Statement 2017-2026* (Government Publication, 2017) and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's (2017) *Junior Cycle Guidelines* – which now include 300-400 hours of dedicated time for wellbeing – it is an ideal time to begin developing a non-cognitive framework which specifically caters to the requirements of the Irish education system.

Conclusion

The literature suggests that the development of non-cognitive skills programmes could provide a flexible means of supporting the NCCA's goals of developing student wellbeing and resilience. Non-cognitive interventions have been used to cultivate skills which are conducive to, and perhaps underlie the development of, resilience. Likewise, such interventions have been shown to promote a range of positive social and academic outcomes which, in turn,

help to promote wellbeing. Furthermore, non-cognitive programmes may also provide a means of optimising aspects of Ireland's education system such as redressing specific academic achievement gaps and areas of low performance.

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Challenges in implementing wellbeing in Irish primary schools

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Abstract

This article acknowledges that 'wellbeing' is a term that has become embedded in education policy from early childhood through to second level and questions what is understood by the term wellbeing. A review of literature in the area highlights the consistent efforts of researchers to define the concept of wellbeing. Research studies indicate that it is interpreted in different ways and there is no one universally accepted definition of wellbeing (Gillett-Swan and Sargeant, 2015). In response to the anecdotal confusion about the concept of wellbeing among teachers, a series of workshops was organised for primary-school teachers in three counties to explore the concept of wellbeing. The findings from the research conducted with teachers are presented, highlighting the real challenges that exist in defining and developing wellbeing practices in the primary school.

Keywords: **Wellbeing, challenges, implementation, interpretation, concept of wellbeing**

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Introduction

> Finding a suitable and workable definition of wellbeing has particular relevance when considering children's lives (Gillett-Swan and Sargeant, 2015, p. 142).

There is an increasing interest in the notion of wellbeing, politically, societally and educationally. A review of literature in the area highlights that it is interpreted in different ways and there is not a universally accepted definition of wellbeing that incorporates its multifaceted and multidimensional elements (Gillet-Swan and Sargeant, 2015). Indeed, the terms 'wellbeing' and 'happiness' are sometimes used interchangeably (Bache et al, 2016) and wellbeing is sometimes perceived as being synonymous with mental health. In the Irish primary school context, while wellbeing is considered implicit within the social, personal and health education (SPHE) curriculum, it is not a central theme in education, nor is it recognised as an area of learning. However, schools have always given the upmost consideration to the care and safety and overall flourishing of their pupils and even in the absence of a focus on the area, the wellbeing of students has always been an integral part of daily school life. With the publication of the *Wellbeing in Primary School: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion*, by the Department of Education and the Department of Health in 2015 and an increased focus in education policy in the area of wellbeing, it is becoming embedded in the discourse of primary schools. The focus of this paper is an exploration of

primary school teachers' understanding of wellbeing and the challenges associated with embedding a culture of wellbeing in the classroom and across the school. A series of workshops was organised for primary school teachers in three counties to explore the concept of wellbeing, to listen to teacher needs in relation to the implementation of wellbeing supports in school and to develop practical strategies to support the wellbeing of the school community in each participants' context. Findings from data collected from teachers in both the mainstream and special school context across the workshops highlight the positive work that is undertaken by schools to support wellbeing, but also illustrate the complexities and challenges involved in embedding wellbeing in the school context. The opening section of this paper considers recent education policy developments in the area of wellbeing.

Educational policy developments in wellbeing in the Irish context

Wellbeing is a concept that is changing and developing, and this is evident in the Irish educational landscape. Policy developments in recent years have incorporated wellbeing as a central theme in both the early years and junior cycle education. In 2009, *Aistear*, the curriculum framework in Ireland for all children from birth to six years was introduced, and it includes wellbeing as a central theme. It is one of the four themes in the overall framework that describes children's learning and development. Wellbeing is outlined as having two major components; physical wellbeing and psychological wellbeing. Physical wellbeing takes account of children exploring, investigating and challenging themselves in the environment. Psychological wellbeing focuses on children's relationships and interactions with their families and communities and their need to feel respected, included and empowered. It is recognised in the framework that creative expression and an experience of a spiritual dimension in life can also enhance children's wellbeing (NCCA, 2009).

In early 2013, the *Wellbeing in Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention* were published by the Department of Health and the Department of Education. The particular focus of these guidelines is on mental health, as is evident from their title and their purpose; "these guidelines aim to support schools in developing a whole-school approach to mental health promotion and suicide prevention" (DES and DOH, 2013, p. 3). In 2015, the *Wellbeing Guidelines in Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion* were published. Indeed, they are an adjustment of the post-primary guidelines for the primary school context but with less emphasis on suicide prevention. The guidelines outline a whole-school approach to mental health promotion and the model advocated is based on the World Health Organisation's school model for mental health promotion (DES and DOH, 2015). Considering that all students' needs exist along a continuum of need, from mild to severe and from transitory to enduring (NEPS, 2007), the framework enables schools to review their procedures and processes in supporting the social, emotional, behavioural and learning needs of students (DES and DOH, 2013). The support of external agencies to augment the work of the school may also be required. The guidelines highlight the need for students to enjoy a positive educational experience. The importance of a whole school approach to wellbeing and specifically mental health and the promotion of positive mental health and wellbeing are important messages that underpin

the guidelines; "the whole school approach… is sustained over time and involves students, staff and parents" (DES and DOH, 2015, p. 14). The guidelines consider a number of risk and protective factors for children that influence their mental health and wellbeing. As well as positive relationships with schools and teachers and a sense of belonging and connectedness to school, a positive school climate is recognised as a key protective factor in the school environment. The particular focus on mental health in the guidelines articulates the message in the school context that wellbeing is synonymous with mental health.

In terms of post-primary education, the *Framework for Junior Cycle* was published in 2015. Wellbeing is one of the principles that underpins junior cycle education and it is supported by a number of statements of learning and is incorporated into the key skills of the junior cycle framework. Students will also undertake learning in a new area entitled 'Wellbeing throughout the three years of junior cycle'. Junior cycle wellbeing guidelines were published in 2017. The guidelines promote the central role of schools in supporting pupils' learning about and for wellbeing. Accordingly, students learn about wellbeing through specific curriculum areas and various wellbeing initiatives organised to develop awareness, knowledge and skills about wellbeing. Students learn for wellbeing when their whole experience of school life, both within and beyond the classroom are respectful and caring (NCCA, 2017, p. 17). The guidelines emphasise the importance of the whole school community building and sharing a common understanding of wellbeing. However, the guidelines recognise that arriving at a definition of wellbeing that communicates its multidimensional nature is a challenge. Given that much of the research and policy documentation defines wellbeing in psychological terms, it is often perceived as a combination of sustained positive feelings and attitudes. This approach presents challenges as it ignores the fact that wellbeing and ill-being exist together as part of the human condition and also the individual is seen as being solely responsible for their wellbeing without consideration of the wider societal and context conditions which enable wellbeing to flourish (NCCA, 2017). A definition of wellbeing therefore should communicate the multidimensional nature of wellbeing as being less as a state of being and more of a process of well-becoming. Wellbeing as an area of learning is in its infancy in post-primary education and its implementation and evaluation may well impact on developments in the primary sector in the coming years.

In July 2018, the Minister for Education launched a *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023*. The statement and framework are designed to provide an overarching structure in the area of wellbeing "encompassing existing, ongoing and developing work in this area" (DES, 2018, p. 8). Many of the principles outlined in the wellbeing guidelines in both primary and post-primary schools are reiterated including the importance of a whole-school approach to wellbeing and the risk and protective factors that influence wellbeing in an educational setting. The school self-evaluation process is the approach that schools will undertake to implement the Department's wellbeing policy and by 2023, all schools and centres for education are required to initiate a wellbeing promotion review and development cycle (Department of Education and Science, 2018). There are four key areas outlined in the document that schools must consider in wellbeing promotion; culture and environment, curriculum, policy and planning and relationships and partnerships. These

areas are informed by the *Health Promoting School Process* and are recommended in the wellbeing guidelines for both primary and post-primary schools and developed in more detail in the *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines*. The *Wellbeing Framework* details these four areas through 'Statements of Effective Practice for All' and 'Statements of Effective Practice for Some and Few'. This reference tool is designed to standardise both an approach to reviewing wellbeing in schools and centres for education and to enable them to engage with the statements and develop best practice. It also supports the evaluation process that is inherent to the school self-evaluation process (Department of Education and skills, 2018). This policy statement and framework certainly highlight the priority placed on the area of wellbeing by the Department of Education and Skills, and again will influence developments in the primary sector in the coming years.

Some further perspectives on wellbeing

In considering a definition of wellbeing, it is important to understand wellbeing as a holistic entity. Wellbeing is interpreted as a continuum with ill-being encompassing emotional, physical, spiritual, social and cognitive wellbeing. Simply put, ill-being represents a lack of wellbeing (O'Brien and O'Shea, 2017). In considering the concept of wellbeing, there is need to acknowledge and try to contemplate its relation "to matters of suffering, unhappiness, arrested development and illness (physical, mental, spiritual) all of which are inalienable to the human condition and our individual human journeys" (O'Brien and O'Shea, 2017, p. 6). Teachers and students have knowledge and experience of ill-being as part of the reality of human development and there is space for this experience to be included in an exploration of wellbeing. If it is ignored, students may interpret wellbeing as all positive and ignore the circumstances where wellbeing struggles to flourish and be meaningful in practice. According to O'Brien and O'Shea, "Ill-being can have significant meaning goals which are crucial for human flourishing" (2017, p. 30), an important consideration for schools in their own policy development in the area of wellbeing. Particular consideration will need to be given to the skill development that also accompanies the exploration of wellbeing, especially the development of resilience and coping skills.

The concept of 'accrued wellbeing' is another perspective that is worthwhile for schools to consider when exploring this area. Accrued wellbeing is "an individual's capacity to manage over time, the range of inputs, both constructive and undesirable that can, in isolation, affect a person's emotional, physical and cognitive state in response to a given context" (Gillet-Swan and Sargeant, 2015, p. 143).

> An individual's emotional wellbeing can include feelings such as happiness, satisfaction, worry and anxiety, relationships with peers, family, teachers, significant others, psychological attributes such as depression, and social components of wellbeing such as the ability to make choices including one's spirituality, quality of life and psychological disposition.

> Physical wellbeing includes environmental factors including global and local concerns, physical location, resources, socioeconomic status, financial stability, economic position, safety and security, home environment, and physical health. Cognitive wellbeing includes learning, memory, educational attainment, intellectual successes and failures (Gillett-Swan and Sargeant, 2015, p. 142).

Accrued wellbeing enables an exploration of the many different factors that impact on one's overall wellbeing and takes account of the fact that wellbeing accrual will develop and change across the lifespan and is made up of a combination of experiences and associated feelings and responses, both positive and challenging. Considering the amount of time that pupils spend in school in their daily lives, their sense of wellbeing at school is paramount.

Student wellbeing – why it matters!

"Schools are an excellent location for wellbeing initiatives for several reasons. Children and adolescents spend much of their waking time in school. Thus, students' day-to-day interactions and experiences with peers, teachers and coaches are integral to their wellbeing and are important targets for wellbeing programmes" (Seligman, Randal, Gillham, Reivich and Linkin, 2009, p. 235).

Besides the home and the family, school is the most important arena for young people. In educational terms, wellbeing is frequently related to the social and emotional aspects of learners and links have been forged between wellbeing and academic achievement (Miller, Connolly and Maguire, 2013). Research for the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) found that "children with higher levels of emotional, behavioural, social and school wellbeing had higher levels of academic achievement subsequently (at ages 11, 14, and 16)" (Smyth E, 2015, p. 4). The report also highlighted that a number of factors affect student wellbeing including experiences of academic problems, obesity, loneliness in childhood and adolescence and bullying to name but a few.

Much of the international research shows an association between the quality of relationships between teachers and students and a number of student outcomes, including engagement in schoolwork, feeling a sense of belonging in school, levels of disciplinary problems in school and feeling a sense of academic achievement (NCCA, 2017). The school atmosphere and the general school experience of the student is paramount when it comes to a student describing a sense of wellbeing in school. The *My World Survey* (Dooley and Fitzgerald, 2012) found that the presence of one supportive adult in a young person's life is critically important to their wellbeing, sense of connectedness, self-confidence and ability to cope with difficulties. In the primary school, the teacher is such an important adult in a child's life and is often the one person who makes a significant difference and positive contribution to a pupil.

The literature highlights how worthwhile it is for schools to take time to consider how they can support student wellbeing and how they support student wellbeing on a daily basis. As the exploration of accrued wellbeing highlights, wellbeing is a journey and in terms of childhood, it can be viewed as a process of 'well-becoming' where young people are

developing knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that will sustain them throughout their lives (NCCA, 2017). Schools make a significant contribution on this journey, supporting students in learning 'about' and learning 'for' wellbeing. Pupils learn 'about' wellbeing through various curricula and frameworks such as the *Aistear* framework and other wellbeing initiatives and events that are organised across the school. Pupils learn 'for' wellbeing when their experiences of school life, including day-to-day interactions both in the classroom and beyond the classroom are respectful and caring (NCCA, 2017). Schools that offer a supportive ethos, have a positive and nurturing climate, offer a broad and balanced curriculum that is differentiated to take account of individual student needs, model the types of character skills they would like their young people to embody, have high expectations for their students and give students sufficient opportunities to actualise these expectations can surely be described as happy schools where wellbeing is supported (Kristjánsson, 2012). The inclusion of pupil voice and pupil participation also contribute to a sense of wellbeing. Pupil participation in a school is a term used to "embrace strategies that offer pupils opportunities for active involvement in decision-making within their schools" (Flutter, 2007, p. 344). Pupil voice is a subset of pupil participation and it involves listening and responding to what pupils say about their experiences as learners which can lead to positive developments in the classroom. Genuine participation of pupils in the democratic process of schools benefits both pupils and teachers through better relationships, and hence better learning experiences (ibid).

Taking the above points into consideration in relation to student wellbeing, it must be acknowledged that many of the factors that influence and affect the wellbeing of a student lie beyond the reach and influence of schools. Each student's family and life circumstances will be a pivotal influence on their experience of wellbeing. Economic and political environment and social factors will impact on student wellbeing. Data from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) indicate that the number of families living in consistent poverty almost doubled from 2008 to 2014 and this impacts considerably on the wellbeing of children.

Both the W*ellbeing in Primary School: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion* and the *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* provide definitions of wellbeing which schools can consider using or adapting according to their particular contexts. The definition in the wellbeing guidelines for primary school is based on the World Health Organisation's definition. Accordingly, (wellbeing is) "the presence of a culture, ethos and environment which promotes dynamic, optimal development and flourishing for all in the school community. It encompasses the domains of relationships, meaning, emotion, motivation, purpose and achievement. It includes quality teaching and learning for the development of all elements related to healthy living whether cultural, academic, social, emotional, physical or technological, with particular focus on resilience and coping" (DES, DOH, 2015, p. 9). The *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* define student wellbeing as "present when students realise their abilities, take care of their physical wellbeing, can cope with the normal stresses of life, and have a sense of purpose and belonging to a wider community" (NCCA, 2017, p. 17). While a definition of wellbeing may appear somewhat limiting, it helps provide clarity to schools on what wellbeing is and what elements of wellbeing are of particular importance to a school community. However, in order to get a more comprehensive picture

of developments in the area of wellbeing in the primary school and the context, a series of workshops was undertaken with teachers, incorporating a research component, to unpack the perspective of practising teachers on the topic.

Wellbeing workshops

The current study sought the views of Irish primary school teachers on their understanding of the concept of wellbeing and the challenges, if any, of promoting wellbeing in primary schools. The impetus to undertake the study came from the authors' research in the area and from conversations with primary school teachers where it became apparent that they were concerned that they were not attending appropriately to pupils' wellbeing and they were concerned with where wellbeing sits in the current primary school curriculum. Teachers suggested that wellbeing has become a 'buzz' word in education discourse recently but there has been little to no opportunity for continuous professional development in the area. Both of the authors are working in teacher education, in the area of education methodology, special education and SPHE and have a particular interest in the area.

Primary school teachers in three counties in Ireland were invited to a series of three workshops on the exploration of wellbeing in the primary school. Special schools were also invited to participate. A flyer was sent to schools in the three counties from the local education centre outlining the dates, times and format for the workshops. Professional development on the concept of wellbeing and its practical application in the school and classroom was provided as a component of the initial workshop. For the remaining workshops, the teachers in attendance were invited to outline what they would like continuous professional development on in the area of wellbeing, thereby giving the teachers ownership of the strategies and content developed in the subsequent workshops, thus ensuring it was relevant to the participants' individual contexts. Thus, a participatory approach to the research process was invoked, where teachers became co-creators in the content of the workshops. The outcomes of this approach to professional development proved very successful and resulted in teachers actively engaging in the discourse surrounding wellbeing. This professional development approach also supported teachers' ability to broach the topic with their colleagues and develop a shared understanding of wellbeing. The study adopted a phenomenological approach, describing the common experiences of all the participants in the study as they endeavoured to outline their understanding of wellbeing, the strategies they use to embed a wellbeing culture and the challenges experienced in implementation (Cresswell, 2007). The content that was explored during workshop two and three at the request of the teachers included the development of a whole-school approach to wellbeing, developing wellbeing through the school culture and climate, wellbeing across the curriculum, wellbeing across the continuum of support, the development of self-management and self-regulation and the exploration of feelings and emotions as a component of the SPHE curriculum. While the above was addressed across all workshops, there was a particular focus on feelings and emotions for one group of teachers and a stronger focus on self-management and self-regulation at another set of workshops.

Data were gathered across the workshops on teachers' understanding of the concept of wellbeing, the development of a wellbeing culture in the school and the challenges, if any, of implementing a wellbeing culture. The teachers were invited to provide feedback to specific questions on flip chart sheets of paper during the initial workshop. Questions included: 'What does wellbeing mean to me?', 'What factors contribute to wellbeing in individual children?', 'Where does wellbeing sit with the primary school curriculum?', 'What do you as a teacher do to promote wellbeing in your class?', 'What are the challenges in promoting wellbeing in the primary school?', 'What are my needs as a teacher in this area?' In workshops two and three, a focus group discussion was convened during the workshops, and this was digitally recorded with the consent of the participants. The focus groups allowed participants the opportunity to report on the wellbeing actions they had committed to implementing in their own schools. An evaluation sheet was also filled by the teachers at the final workshop. The evaluation provided the respondents with an opportunity to review the three workshops and the approach to professional development utilised in the workshop process. The data was analysed thematically, following Braun and Clarke's six-step framework, outlined in Table 1 below. Ethical approval for the project was sought and granted from the college where the authors are working. While the teachers shared very practical, effective and exciting approaches to supporting the wellbeing of pupils in their individual classrooms, the findings from the project also highlighted many challenges associated with fostering a wellbeing culture in the primary school.

Table 1: Braun and Clarke's Framework for Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

Step 1:	Become familiar with the data	**Step 4**:	Review themes
Step 2:	Generate initial codes	**Step 5**:	Define themes
Step 3:	Search for themes	**Step 6**:	Write-up

Defining wellbeing

The data gathered with teachers as part of the workshops highlighted that there is a real lack of awareness of the *Wellbeing in Primary School: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion* (DES, DOH, 2015). While these guidelines were sent to all schools following their publication, all 26 teachers participating in the workshops were unaware of their existence and as a result, had not consulted the guidelines as a reference point in either defining wellbeing or developing a framework for planning for wellbeing in the primary school context. The teachers requested an overview of the guidelines in order to become familiar with them as a component of the second workshop. While there were various requests from the teachers in the different counties in terms of the content they wanted explored during the workshops, they were unanimous in their request to familiarise themselves with the structure and content of the *Wellbeing in Primary School: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion*. The lack of awareness of the guidelines may indicate that schools are grappling with an increased focus on the area of wellbeing, unsure of what supports are available. It may also be a symptom of teacher workload.

All teachers participating in workshop one were asked to work in small groups and record on flip chart sheets what the word wellbeing meant to them. There were common thoughts shared on wellbeing from the three initial workshops. Wellbeing for the participating teachers meant children having a sense of belonging to school, an ability to cope with the challenges of day-to-day living, children feeling happy and safe and having a good sense of self-esteem and children having good physical and mental health. When the various definitions of wellbeing, outlined earlier in this paper were presented at the workshops, the participating teachers all preferred the definition of wellbeing outlined in the *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines*; student wellbeing is "present when students realise their abilities, take care of their physical wellbeing, can cope with the normal stresses of life, and have a sense of purpose and belonging to a wider community" (NCCA, 2017, p. 17). While the teachers' responses to defining wellbeing aligned very much with national and international definitions of wellbeing, the teachers all reported that prior to attending the workshops, they had not spent time as a staff exploring the concept of wellbeing or developing a working definition of wellbeing suitable to the school context.

A whole-school approach to wellbeing

The teachers in attendance at the workshops provided feedback on a variety of strategies and initiatives they undertake to support pupil wellbeing. These included a focus on physical education, a variety of reward systems (including for non-academic achievements) and celebration of successes of relevance to the pupils, opportunities for pupils to become involved in extra-curricular activities in school, the introduction of meditation and yoga and a focus on positive praise and affirmation. Teachers in attendance from special schools also identified strategies including the development of an emotional and behavioural programme for particular pupils, involving parents in classroom programmes, working with speech and language therapists and occupational therapists to support individual pupil's needs and involving pupils in decision-making and teachers modelling positive behaviour with staff.

While the teachers attending the workshops highlighted the wonderful work that is being undertaken in schools to support wellbeing, they all reported that this is taking place in individual classrooms and without a whole-school approach or discourse in the area of wellbeing. Time was spent during the second workshop exploring how schools could spend some dedicated time exploring the concept of wellbeing at whole-school level and developing a shared understanding of wellbeing across the school community. As part of this process, schools were encouraged to develop a short action plan to support implementation of agreed priorities. All of the teachers in attendance at the workshops were asked to commit to trying out one or more strategies explored during the second workshop and report back on their experience at the third workshop. There was only one whole-school staff in attendance at the workshops, the other teachers in attendance were representing their school, or at most, two teachers were in attendance from one school.

The teachers reported positively on actions they had implemented in wellbeing following attendance at the workshops. Sample actions included integration of meditation across the school week, exploration of a range of feelings and emotions with pupils, relationship

building with pupils through welcoming the pupils by name in the morning and wishing them well in the evening, thanking the pupils at the end of each day, asking the pupils themselves for strategies to improve their own wellbeing and using children's literature to explore wellbeing issues. While some of the teachers in attendance had reported back to the principal or the whole-school staff about the course and some of the strategies presented across the workshops, none of those in attendance had committed to developing work on wellbeing at whole-school level. Even though the teachers had requested ideas on how to develop work on the topic at whole-school level and had resources to support this work, they committed to developing strategies in their own classrooms initially.

In the final evaluation that the teachers filled in at the end of the third workshop one of the questions teachers were asked was: 'Do you feel as a result of you participating in these workshops that it will impact on wellbeing at whole school level?' While the majority of the respondents answered 'yes' to this question, some of the participants elaborated on their choice noting, "I'm just one teacher of the staff. All the staff together would benefit", while another participant noted: "Unsure, will need an opportunity to address whole staff and if that opportunity isn't immediate, I feel the message from the workshop will be lost". This feedback, coupled with the fact that teachers had focused on positive changes in their own classroom rather than planning at a whole-school level highlights that it is challenging to engage in continuous professional development on behalf of a school and follow up at whole-school level. A whole-school commitment to a particular area, including an investment of dedicated time to the area will almost certainly ensure greater success at the macro level of the school, but given the amount of competing demands on school time, the reality of finding this time is not always easy.

The challenges in promoting wellbeing in the primary school

While the teachers who attended the workshop considered the positive work they are undertaking in the area of wellbeing, all of the teachers highlighted a number of challenges that impact on implementing wellbeing across the primary school. The participating teachers initially recorded the challenges in promoting wellbeing on flip chart sheets and elaborated on challenges during focus group discussions. Time was cited as a major challenges by the teachers. This related to time to address wellbeing in school, the limited amount of time dedicated to the areas of SPHE and PE on the primary school curriculum and the time pressures within the school day. In relation to the implementation of SPHE, one teacher commented; "SPHE can be side-lined to our Friday afternoon or in a multi-class you might prioritise maths in four classes or Irish: there's no time".

In addition to time pressure, the teachers also noted limited resources in the area of wellbeing as a challenge in implementation. Teachers referred to limited guidelines available in the area, limited facilities within the school environment including PE halls, sensory room and yard space for pupils to play freely and also limited professional development available to teachers in the area. One teacher reflected on her approach to wellbeing in the focus group discussion as: "I felt I was pulling ideas for wellbeing out of the sky. I felt what I was doing wasn't linked to any curricular area and I was just pulling it from the clouds". The value placed

by the individual school on wellbeing was reported as a factor that could either support or restrict the focus and priority given to the area.

Teacher confidence in addressing wellbeing in schools was also noted as a factor that impacted on practice in the school. Teachers reported feeling unsure how to address wellbeing and where it fitted in terms of curriculum provision and this was coupled with a lack of awareness of the wellbeing guidelines. 'Death by initiative' and the workload of schools, where initiatives are constantly being promoted also impacted on teachers' capacity to consider embracing yet another area for focus, even though as teachers engaged with the workshop process, they began to realise that wellbeing is woven into many factors in the day-to-day life of the school.

Teachers' personal wellbeing was also included as a challenge in terms of addressing wellbeing at school level. The participants noted that the job can be very isolating and demanding, with obvious impacts on teacher wellbeing: "It's hard when you're in your room and close your door and no one will ask you are you ok for six hours straight, so teacher isolation is tough". A principal who attended the workshops noted: "It's really lonely sometimes to be thinking about the wellness of all of the people in your school community whether it is children or parents or staff members, and thinking, you don't do it to expect people to ask how you are, but every so often it would be nice if other members of the school community reflected…" Certainly, the wellbeing of the staff has a direct impact on the wellbeing of pupils and staff wellbeing must be addressed in order to enhance overall wellbeing among the school community.

Other challenges in addressing wellbeing that were noted by participants were the lack of access to a single programme to support the implementation of wellbeing at school, the rise of anxiety levels among young children and the number of complex needs in any one classroom that a teacher has to address. Children's unrestricted access to social media was another challenge noted by teachers and the strong focus in our school system on results, culminating in the points race at the end of post-primary school, impacts on pupils' experience of wellbeing in their day-to-day school lives.

Discussion

Much of the literature in the area of wellbeing highlights that it is a term that is open to interpretation and indeed to definition. This is evident in the Irish educational context also, where the wellbeing guidelines for primary and post-primary schools offer a definition of wellbeing that differs from that which is presented in the *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* (NCCA, 2017). Developments in the area of wellbeing continue to evolve across all sectors of education from early childhood right through to post-primary level and wellbeing is a key feature of the *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019* (Department of Education and Skills, 2016). While the current study of wellbeing in the primary school context was limited to schools in three geographical areas, the findings from the study elucidate our understanding of the perceptions of wellbeing in the primary school context, inclusive of special schools and also present a variety of challenges faced by schools in addressing the area of wellbeing. It is evident that the wellbeing of students is central to the life of the school and pupils

experience this in a variety of ways; through their relationships with teachers and peers, through the school culture and climate, through a sense of belonging and inclusion in school, and through curricular provision, all of which is integral to a sense of wellbeing. However, teachers reported being unsure of what really is meant by wellbeing and where it fits in. The lack of awareness of the national guidelines that are available to schools in the area of wellbeing presents challenges to schools in familiarising themselves with the concept of wellbeing and the approaches that are recommended to schools in addressing wellbeing at whole-school level. Raising awareness of the wellbeing guidelines and providing continuous professional development opportunities for teachers to familiarise themselves with the content and structure of the guidelines would support developments in schools in the area of wellbeing. This support could be made available to teachers as an online resource as well as through the provision of face-to-face workshops.

What emerged as a key finding from this small scale study with teachers is that, while teachers are undertaking many initiatives and activities to support the development of wellbeing in their classrooms, there is a lack of time dedicated to the development of a whole-school approach to wellbeing. It can reasonably be accepted that there are many reasons why there is not dedicated time devoted to wellbeing at whole-school level; teachers in the workshops reported they were unsure how to approach this discussion at school level, given the multiple interpretations of wellbeing, furthermore while teachers reported that wellbeing was as much about a positive experience of school as well as an area experienced through curricular provision, they remained unsure as to where wellbeing should 'sit' in the context of a school day. The 'protective' factors that support pupil wellbeing outlined in the *Wellbeing in Primary School: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion* (DES and DOH, 2013) include positive relationships with peers and teachers, a positive school climate and a sense of belonging and connectedness to school as factors that build and enhance resilience in children and contribute to their overall sense of wellbeing. Developing a whole-school approach to wellbeing would enable schools to explore all aspects of school life that support wellbeing, essentially the positive experience of community that pupils are exposed to, as well as all of the experiences that contribute to enhancing wellbeing, through both the informal and formal curriculum.

The focus on wellbeing at primary school level is very much on one aspect of wellbeing – mental health. The dominant discourse in relation to wellbeing is a mental health discourse and of course the national guidelines place a particular emphasis on the area of mental health (DES, DOH, 2013). The continuum of support framework proposed by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) is a framework that schools are familiar with and is also a framework that is recommended in the national wellbeing guidelines. The continuum of support has three distinct school-based processes; referred to commonly as 'Support for All, Support for Some and Support for a Few' (NEPS, 2007). In the case of 'Support for a Few', the expertise of other professionals is recommended. While pupils with specific wellbeing needs, in particular those where there are mental health concerns, will require the support of professionals, there is so much that teachers can do every day to promote a school and classroom climate and culture that nourishes pupil wellbeing. Specific curriculum experiences that are provided through SPHE and physical education (PE) provide

opportunities for pupils to develop wellbeing skills and indeed all areas of the curriculum have the potential to contribute to pupil wellbeing (Tynan and Nohilly, 2018). A focus on all elements of wellbeing at school level – emotional, physical and cognitive will enable teachers to realise the potential they have to support pupil wellbeing at so many levels, however an over-emphasis on mental wellbeing may in fact lead teachers to believe they are not skilled in the area of supporting pupil wellbeing.

There is no doubt that there are so many competing demands on teachers' time in the primary school. Although there has been a particular focus on wellbeing in education policy in recent years, it remains that SPHE has the least amount of curriculum time available per week. Teachers participating in the workshops reported that as a result it is often the subject that is not taught on a weekly basis. Despite this fact, teachers expressed an interest in a dedicated wellbeing programme for schools, even though the content of the current SPHE curriculum has so much potential to support pupil wellbeing in a holistic manner (Government of Ireland, 1999). Planning is underway by the NCCA for a revision of the current primary school curriculum. Considering that wellbeing is a key theme in *Aistear* and an area of learning at junior cycle, this could indicate that the theme will be a key component of a revised primary school curriculum. It is important that it is regarded as a core curricular area with adequate time allocation so that teachers can engage with meaningful exploration of the area.

Conclusion

Although a small-scale research study was conducted with a limited number of primary schools, the results have yielded interesting findings that support an understanding of the awareness of wellbeing in primary schools. While many challenges are reported by teachers in the area, schools have the potential to make a significant difference to the lives of the children in their care. The best starting point for schools in relation to wellbeing is to begin a conversation! Recent work on wellbeing by O'Brien and O' Shea (2017) employs a metaphor of 'orientating in wellbeing spaces of concern' which encourages teachers and students to locate and orient themselves on a wellbeing landscape which makes sense to them in relation to their own experiences. Schools should take the time to consider what matters most in terms of wellbeing for the whole school community and from the conversation develop a framework for wellbeing or work towards a definition that encompasses what matters most for the particular school and its community.

Following the work developed with schools as part of this research project, a wellbeing resource is available for primary schools: *Wellbeing in Schools Everyday (WISE) A whole-school approach to the practical implementation of wellbeing* by Fionnuala Tynan and Margaret Nohilly is available to purchase through the Curriculum Development Unit at Mary Immaculate College. www.curriculumdevelopmentunit.com. Tel: 061 204366.

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The impact of policy on leadership practice in the Irish educational context; implications for research

⇛ FIONA KING, MARY NIHILL ⇚

Abstract

Leadership practice in Irish schools continues to be influenced by policy development at the macro level. How this policy is developed, understood and enacted is largely dependent on the current socio-political context both nationally and internationally. This article explores the contexts that influence such policy development along with the impact of policy on school leadership practice. In doing so it considers the drive towards quality, the importance of professional learning, supporting leaders in their role, middle leadership in a new era and a bottom up approach to system improvement. Implications are discussed along with areas for further research. The authors argue for supporting management bodies and principals in: understanding national and international policy contexts and leading professional learning within their schools. A macro level understanding of a distributed leadership perspective in schools is warranted along with a focus on non-positional teacher leadership for enhancing teachers' and students' learning.

Keywords: **Policy development, policy enactment, leadership, middle leadership, professional learning.**

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Introduction

The impact of policy on leadership practice cannot be understood without linking it to the wider socio-political context (Bell and Stevenson, 2015). Therefore, historical, political and economic factors influencing educational policy development will be considered at the outset of this paper. Following this, an exploration of the current educational policy landscape in the Republic of Ireland will be explored before considering its impact on educational leadership practice in primary and post-primary schools. Following analysis of the above, implications for future research will be considered which may be of interest to policy-makers and those involved in leadership practice at all levels of the educational system as they continue to focus on policy analysis and enactment. For the purpose of this paper, leadership practice will be conceived in the broadest sense to include a practice that is formal and informal, individual and collaborative and positional and non-positional.

Socio-political context

Historically there has been a lack of legislation governing policy and practice in Irish schools until the emergence of the *Education Act* (Ireland, 1988). However, the teaching profession has traditionally been highly regarded and trusted in terms of teaching, learning and leadership with Ireland often being referred to as 'the land of scholars and saints'. It is noteworthy that an examination of the complex tapestry that is the Irish educational system led the OECD (2008, p. 340) to describe it as "fragmented, small-scale and voluntarily managed" – a system very different to that in most OECD countries, a system with potential challenges for leadership practice. Additionally, around 2008, Ireland was in a deepening economic recession which resulted in pay cuts for all staff, loss of leadership and management posts in schools largely due to incentivised early retirements, and a moratorium on new posts for many senior, middle leadership and management roles. Overall there was a 7% reduction in the education budget from 2009-2012, once again impacting on leadership practice in schools.

Nevertheless, education was seen as the way out of the recession, with a focus on improving educational standards to compete in a globalised knowledge economy, an economy characterised by a growing interdependence among the world's economies through increased mobility for workers and shared information through digital technology. Education in this context is perceived as an economic resource. Policy text in Ireland evidenced a focus on education as economic output with literacy and numeracy skills seen as "essential for the rebuilding of our economic prosperity" (Department of Education and Skills [DES], 2011, p. 15). This narrowing of focus in education policy from viewing education as a public good to one where education was seen as an export industry plausibly lead to a changed relationship between teachers and the state (Codd, 2005), again impacting on leadership practice in schools where principals were expected to ensure enactment of these new policies.

A plethora of education policies followed and while there is "no single reading of policy texts" (Taylor, 1997 p. 26) the changing policy landscape was generally seen by teachers and leaders as policy borrowing from other countries who had moved towards an increasing emphasis on accountability, productivity, and performativity in a bid to achieve economic prosperity. The level of trust moved from "a perception of integrity" (Bottery, 2006, p. 20) to one based on performativity which tends to exist in a climate of distrust (Sachs, 2006). One example of performativity was the introduction of mandatory, non-contact extra hours for teachers (33 hours outside of school time), as part of the Croke Park Agreement (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2010), and subsequent Haddington Road Agreement (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2013); names given to public sector negotiations that emphasise increased performance management. Principals came under increasing pressure to negotiate with staff the allocation of these additional hours and many at middle leadership felt that "there were discernible tensions as some of the principals... feared that the tenets of the Croke Park Agreement... would adversely affect volunteerism and the spirit of collegiality in schools" (O'Donovan, 2015, p. 257). Another example of performativity includes measuring performance against international benchmarks like PISA resulting in the *Incidental Inspection Findings Report* (DES Inspectorate, 2010) outlining concerns regarding literacy and numeracy attainment

following a drop in the 2009 PISA results. Also, a significant gap in literacy levels between disadvantaged schools and the national average was highlighted (Kennedy, 2013). This performativity coupled with Ireland's economic bailout and a move towards strategic leadership by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) created a "perfect storm" (Hislop, 2011, Conway and Murphy, 2013) resulting in increased accountability within the teaching profession and in particular those in leadership roles. There followed an increased emphasis on the use of international benchmarks to compare and monitor performance (e.g. PISA, TIMMS, PIRLS), along with reporting standardised test results for students to the DES at primary and post-primary level. Despite the fact that the DES has resisted the publication of 'league tables' based on numbers of students in second level schools who gain entry to third level, the presentation of such tables each year by national newspapers, places increased pressure on school leaders to retain a balanced provision for all students and in particular to ensure that students with special needs are provided with the resources to allow them maximise their potential, none of which is reflected in such tables.

Accountability was further evidenced by a need to comply with regulations and professional norms devised by the Teaching Council of Ireland (TCI), all resulting in the existing social partnership between the various policy actors (for example the DES, teacher unions, the Teaching Council, parents and principal bodies) coming under pressure and teachers feeling disillusioned and disengaged (Stevenson, 2014). Important to note here is that heretofore social partnership was very influential in the Irish context with unions influencing many political decisions related to education and educational leadership. At the same time both curriculum development and educational legislation are very centralised "with the Department of Education exercising a great deal of direct and indirect control over most aspects of the system" (Coolahan, 2011, p. 144) arguably putting pressure on leadership practice within and across schools. An awareness of this wider socio-political context is important to facilitate an understanding of the current educational policy landscape and its impact on leadership practice (Taylor, 1997), which will now be explored.

Current educational policy landscape

This section of the paper will provide some background information related to the primary and post-primary school system along with an explanation of current policy development practices to provide context to leadership practice in Irish schools. Further context will be provided through exploration of the increasing emphasis on professional learning and curricular reform in schools adding to the new and challenging leadership practices in schools. This will be followed by a discussion of a new focus on leadership and distributed leadership in Irish schools.

Background

Teacher education programmes have been "over-subscribed, attracting a very high calibre of entrant" up until the last two years where there are smaller numbers applying for post-primary teaching and many primary teachers taking extended career breaks leading to somewhat of "a 'crisis' in teacher education recruitment and retention" (O'Doherty and Harford, 2018,

p. 654) thus impacting on leadership practice in schools. There are similar concerns with regard to applications for principalship in particular – something highlighted in a recent review Coolahan et al. (2017) carried out, commissioned by IPPN and NAPD. This report notes that "Indeed, there is evidence that the post of principal is not now attractive to many high-quality teachers, who see it as an unwelcome distraction from their core educational interests" (p. 184). The authors emphasise the need for re-imagining the role of the principal and recommend "remedy is needed in this area and in the characterisation of responsibility posts in schools if the aspired-for quality of educational leadership is to be realised" (p. 184).

Total responsibility for governance (other than in the Educational Training Board [ETB] sector) is delegated to voluntary boards of management with local government playing a relatively minor role. Historically, the church was quite happy to "concede to the state the responsibility for laying down regulations with regard to curricula, examinations and so on" (p. 144). The state, for its part, did not challenge the church's ownership and control of schools in matters such as teacher appointments and school ethos. This continues to be the situation today in the majority of Irish schools which are privately owned and managed, but State funded. While this affords autonomy to leadership practice it also leads to the unusual situation whereby the employer, (in most cases the voluntary board of management), is not the paymaster or regulator of the professional conditions of its employees.

Another significant factor when considering the policy environment in which Irish education exists is that 57% of Irish primary schools are led by principals with full-time teaching responsibility. There are 3,961 schools in total; 3,115 primary schools, 135 special schools and 711 second level schools (DES, 2017). There is increasing lobbying from teaching principals in these small schools given the dual nature of their role; teaching and leadership and management, as evidenced in the recent submission by the National Principals' Forum (2018) to the Joint Oireachtas Committee of Education and Skills. The reduction in promoted posts of responsibility during the recession has plausibly resulted in many small schools struggling to source teachers willing to undertake the role of principal. This background information along with an understanding of current policy development practices explored in the next section aims to provide context to aid understanding of the impact of policy on leadership practice.

Policy development practices

Traditionally, policy initiatives tended to originate at government level in the DES or through agencies such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment or the Inspectorate. These policy initiatives are then 'rolled out' and supported nationally through the department-funded support services. More recently, a three-year (2016-2019) *Action Plan for Education* (DES, 2016) was launched by the then education minister, Richard Bruton. This plan formed the blueprint for policy development and is reviewed each year. *Action Plan for Education 2018* (DES, 2018) and *Action Plan for Education 2019* (DES, 2019), launched by the new Minister for Education, Minister McHugh, include numerous targets related to performance, arguably reflecting the continued movement towards the global education reform movement (GERM) (Sahlberg, 2007) and the importance of economic capital.

However, there is also a particular focus on "strengthening leadership and promoting professionalisation" (DES, 2017a, p. 37) and "collaborative leadership" (DES, 2019, p. 32) along with promoting innovative and excellent practice in schools. Funding is available to schools to form clusters to collaborate and work together on projects related to teaching and learning. Minister Bruton, when launching the Digital Schools Excellence Fund (SEF) (2017), stated that: "Truly transformative change does not come from the centre but from the ground up, schools and teachers working together and sharing good practice". The emphasis on a bottom-up approach to policy development is a fundamental part of the 2017 three-year action plan. However, the resourcing of this bottom up approach in terms of equipping leadership at school level to actively lead initiatives will require significant investment as the involvement of school leaders in leadership activities beyond their own school has not been a common feature of Irish education. Noteworthy is the recent call for evaluation of the SEF by the DES (DES, 2019). This evaluation may provide clarity around impact on leadership practice and necessary professional learning supports going forward.

Professional learning and curricular reform

Historically there has not been a great emphasis on ongoing professional learning in teaching in Ireland. Granted, many teachers engage voluntarily in professional learning but it is not a requirement for career advancement and the absence of any mandatory qualification for appointment to senior school leadership is an example of this lack of prioritisation of ongoing learning in the profession. Teachers and leaders tend to embark on new practices based on the opinions or experiences of colleagues (Mathews, 2010), as they appear to be deemed more feasible, accessible, practical and trustworthy than independently exploring research-based practices (Landrum et al., 2002; Carter and Wheldall, 2008). The increasing emphasis on professional learning and curricular reform adds to the pressure of leading teaching and learning in a school community whilst teaching full time. This was reflected in the recent reluctance to comply with a new initiative, *Droichead* (Irish word meaning 'bridge'), which would see principals evaluate and advise NQTs in their first year of teaching. This is conceivably a great cause for concern given that much evidence points to an effective leader as "a type of leader who paid considerable attention to the teaching and learning aspects of schools" (Gumus, Bellibas, Esen and Gumus, 2018, p. 29).

However, Morgan and Sugrue (2005) argued that "Consideration should be given to a partnership with a college/university not only to avail of appropriate expertise but also with a view to accreditation of programmes" (p. 8). In 2016, the Centre for School Leadership (CSL), which was set up in September 2015, tendered for a post graduate programme for aspiring school leaders and a consortium of three universities (University College Limerick, National University of Ireland Galway and University College Dublin currently deliver and accredit the Post Graduate Diploma in School Leadership [PGDL]). Practitioners (school leaders) are involved in the delivery of this programme. This cooperative initiative recognises the complementary roles of academic expertise and practitioner experience in the provision of professional learning for aspiring school leaders and will conceivably impact on leadership practice in schools in the future.

Other policies in recent years impacting on leadership practice include those from the TCI that have placed additional emphasis on the education and development of teachers beyond their initial teacher education. The development of a national framework (TCI, 2016) for teachers' learning called *Cosán* (Irish word for 'pathway') acknowledges and promotes teachers' learning and that "all teachers are leaders" (p. 4), leaders of their own learning and potentially that of their colleagues through *Droichead*, along with being leaders of their own classrooms. This arguably has implications for those in leadership roles to facilitate and encourage all teachers to practise leadership of learning, not always an easy task in a culture "where isolated practice still predominates" (O'Sullivan, 2011, p. 112).

Affecting post-primary teachers in their engagement with professional learning is the overriding influence of the terminal examination at second level as a measure of success or failure. The one-dimensional type of learning being promoted in second level schools was commented on by the Chief Inspector, Dr Harold Hislop when he posed the question "Shouldn't we ask whether the emphasis in our practice is tilted towards a learning dominated by exam success or towards the development of deeper learning?" (2015, p. 7). He went on to highlight the importance of "a wide range of teaching strategies, including those that promote problem-solving as well as creative and critical thinking" (p. 12). This tension arguably reflects the accountability and performativity agenda described earlier and places increasing pressure on leadership practice in terms of policy enactment related to increased results to enhance the knowledge economy or a broader focus of education as a public good.

The emphasis on the terminal exam was arguably filtering down to primary schools with evidence of students being 'prepared' for entry to second level. Concern about a one-dimensional teaching methodology approach that did not recognise the many learning styles of students, has led to curricular reform at junior cycle level (JCT, 2014) with a corresponding examination of Leaving Certificate content and assessment currently underway. The reform of the junior cycle curriculum and assessment began on a phased approach in September 2014, and features revised subjects and short courses, a focus on literacy, numeracy and key skills, and new approaches to teaching, assessment and reporting. Schools have more freedom to design junior cycle programmes that meet the learning needs of all students with a new certificate known as the Junior Cycle Student Award (JCSA) awarded after three years of study. This revision has had a difficult birth requiring teacher collaboration and discussion about what is good quality learning. It has challenged teachers to consider their own professional learning needs and has to some degree opened the doors of classrooms. School leaders are also challenged to enact their role as a 'príomh oide' (Irish term for principal teacher), prioritising their role as both lead learners themselves and as key agents in leading the learning of both staff and students (King, 2011). This is evidenced in the relatively recent emphasis on instructional leadership (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985), which connects leadership and learning (Bush and Glover, 2014) by placing the leadership and management of learning as a core activity in schools. This challenges leadership practice to look at leadership of curriculum and instruction in a variety of new ways including engaging students meaningfully and making them active participants in their learning (Flynn, 2014), thus highlighting the need for policy to focus on leadership.

A focus on leadership

The establishment of the CSL in 2015 was a recognition of the vital role of school leaders in mediating and enacting policy initiatives and impacting on the quality of teacher and student learning in schools. The fact that the centre is a cooperative enterprise combining the two professional associations (the Irish Primary Principals' Network [IPPN] and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals [NAPD]) is a significant development and a recognition of the centrality of leadership to school improvement (Leithwood et al., 2004).

CSL has an overarching role in promoting and quality assuring professional learning for school leaders at all levels. The concept of leadership that underpins the development of a model of professional learning currently being researched by CSL, is one that is transformational and instructional in nature. The findings of Day and Sammons (2016) argue that "successful principals draw differentially on elements of both instructional and transformational leadership"(p. 253) to affect improvement to learning outcomes for students, and this is at the heart of what CSL sees as effective school leadership. Over the past three years, CSL has launched a formal mentoring and coaching support service for school leaders as well as commissioning a new post graduate diploma for aspiring school leaders in cooperation with three third level initiations. The impact of this on practice is reflected in an independent evaluation report (Fitzpatrick Associates, 2017) on the work of CSL:

> The establishment of CSL in 2015 gave formal recognition not only to school leadership, its role and importance, but also to the need to examine, review, revise and reform how leadership and leaders are supported throughout their career (p. 92).

In recognition of the importance of professional learning, the centre is currently drafting a professional learning continuum for school leadership, describing the levels at which leadership exists in schools from teacher leadership, through middle leadership, aspiring senior leaders, established leaders and system leaders. Essential components of a model of professional learning have also been identified and build upon the model of learning articulated by the Teaching Council in *Cosán*.

In 2016, the Irish Inspectorate developed a *Quality Framework for Schools* (DES, 2016) which provides a set of standards for two dimensions of the work of schools – teaching and learning and leadership and management. This framework is used by the inspectorate to guide external inspection of schools, but it is also intended to support a wide range of activities in the system such as professional reflection by both teachers and leaders, informing professional development programmes and activities, recruitment and accountability. Both the formation of CSL and the publication of a set of standards that describe what good leadership looks like in Irish primary and post-primary schools, has given a new impetus to leadership development policy and has provided additional workload and pressures on leadership practice in schools. This increasing burden on the school principal has arguably led to the concept of distributed leadership within schools.

Distributed leadership in Irish schools

In Irish education, the concept of distributed leadership is relatively new. The increasing myriad of tasks and responsibilities have left little time for principals to lead, mediate and contextualise policy initiatives for their specific school. Two recent circulars on leadership and management in primary and post-primary schools (DES, 2017; DES, 2018) recognised the necessity to distribute leadership beyond that of the principal and that:

> Leadership in a school context, creates a vision for development leading to improvements in outcomes for learners, and is based on shared values and robust evaluation of evidence of current practice and outcomes. In this way, leadership is distributed throughout the school as a key support for student learning (p. 4).

These circulars emphasise the delegation to distributive leadership and mirrors the development of a concept of a school principal delegating specific bounded tasks to more participatory and collaborative approaches to leadership across the school. However, the benefits of distributed and collaborative leadership can be overemphasised and oversimplified (Hickey, 2017; Youngs 2017). Central to its development is an engagement with its meaning and the micro-politics related to same (Youngs, 2017). While school leadership roles may "demand that responsibility and leadership be shared across the school community" (Hickey, 2017, p. 29), it is important that the concept of distributed leadership is not one which involves distributing responsibility (Youngs, 2017) but instead focuses on shared leadership as envisaged by Diamond and Spillane (2016).

An attempt to move towards such shared leadership can potentially be seen with the recent changes at middle leadership levels. Historically, when posts at middle leadership/management level were introduced they were not conceived of as leadership and management posts but posts of responsibility which provided the means to recompense staff taking on additional duties outside the classroom. A move from seniority as a key criterion for appointments to middle leadership positions to leadership capabilities as the basis of appointment is a significant policy development and hopefully will impact on future practice. This paper will now explore how the above policy initiatives are impacting on educational leadership in Irish schools.

Impact of policy on educational leadership

The impact on leadership will be discussed under the following themes: the drive towards quality; the importance of professional learning; supporting leaders in their role; middle leadership in a new era and; a bottom up approach to system improvement.

The drive towards quality

The publication of *Looking at our Schools Quality Framework* (LAOS) (DES, 2016) is already having a significant impact on leadership in schools. Principals are conscious that the framework is the template that underpins their school self-evaluation process and the external evaluation by inspectors. By providing a set of standards which describe 'effective

practice' and 'highly effective practice', the framework helps school leaders at all levels to identify areas that need development in their school. The fact that the framework "defines school leadership in terms of its impact on learning" (p. 7) is significant in moving the focus of school leaders from tasks of a managerial and/or administrative nature towards activities that have a direct impact on the quality of learning in the school. Furthermore, the framework aims to support those who provide professional learning for teachers and school leaders by focusing on high quality professional learning programmes relevant to teachers and leaders' needs thus emphasising the connection between professional learning and improved practice.

This potentially limits the concept of professional learning to 'courses' and 'programmes' which may or may not have a transformative impact in schools (Kennedy, 2014). Arguably, supporting school-based professional learning in the form of collaborative inquiry models which allow for job-embedded professional learning to focus on what matters most in individual school contexts (Poekert, 2012; King, 2014, 2016) needs to be considered in the context of self-evaluation which appears to be part of "a dual system of internal/external quality assurance" being used in most OECD countries (Brown, McNamara, O'Hara and O'Brien, 2016, p. 9). The impact that the policy drive towards school self-evaluation is having on the practice of school leadership is probably still a little early to measure as engagement with this initiative is still evolving. Central to the success of same is the school's capacity to engage with the process in a meaningful way and the level of trust between the inspectorate and schools (Brown et al., 2016), thus having implications for professional learning.

Professional learning

There is an increasing recognition of the need for ongoing professional learning for leadership (DES, 2018) and a re-focus on the role of school leadership in leading teaching and learning. While there are no mandatory leadership qualifications yet, the policy context for same has been set since 2011 (DES, 2011). However, this has never been progressed or enacted and is missing in subsequent policy documents. There are, however, an increasing number of supports in place through CSL (coaching and mentoring), the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and the universities. While the Teaching Council has highlighted the importance of professional development and learning and is engaging with the profession in terms of a framework for potential mandatory teacher learning for maintaining registration, a number of issues have been raised. This is arguably an important juncture in understanding effective professional development and learning models in the Irish context. Currently in the ROI primary teachers typically engage with professional development courses in the summer in return for up to five extra personal vacation days. The uptake on these courses is very high with most availing of the extra vacation days. However, there is little evidence of the impact of same on teachers' subsequent practice on returning to school the next academic year. Unfortunately, professional development and learning are often considered synonymous with such summer courses, Croke Park hours in schools and 'in-service' that is 'done' to teachers (O'Sullivan, 2011).

Currently the system is very vested in the basic transmission model of professional development and usually in line with the latest national priority. Trying to move towards

professional development and learning being conceptualised as part of being a professional and encouraging teachers to take ownership of same in line with their needs in their context is somewhat challenging. The role of leadership in developing and sustaining teachers' professional learning (King, 2011) is also problematic in the system with many principals not seeing themselves as leaders of learning, especially teaching principals who tend to see themselves as teachers first. Principals' reluctance to exercise leadership of learning was very evident in 2016 with the INTO calling on all schools not to participate in or cooperate with Droichead or any form of probation/induction as part of the TCI registration process. External evaluation of all NQTs was being proposed instead, once again evincing the power of social partnership. However, this position changed in 2017 (TCI, 2017) with a phased introduction of the Droichead process following a clarification that:

> the main objective of the Droichead process is to support the professional learning of the NQTs during the induction phase... a joint declaration is made by the teacher and experienced colleagues, following collective reflection, that through their engagement in Droichead, they have participated in a quality teaching and learning process (p. 3).

The process is now non-evaluative and arguably an attempt to engage principals and other staff members in leadership roles for professional learning within schools. Droichead Quality Assurance (DQA) panels have been established by the TCI and they visit a random sample of schools to discuss the Droichead process in "a spirit of collegiality and collaboration" (p. 7). While the principal may not be directly involved in the process they do support the process and as such professional learning within their schools. Arguably professional development and learning has to be managed and led (Earley and Bubb, 2004, p. 80) or led and supported (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2010) individually and collectively at school level by boards of management and/or trusts. Supporting principals and boards in leading learning is an area of importance. Similarly, encouraging teachers to embrace the autonomy being afforded to them in terms of their professional learning (TCI, 2016) instead of seeing it as something that is done to them (King, 2014) will potentially result in more transformative models of professional development and learning both within and across schools (Kennedy, 2014). Given the vast amounts of money the DES spend on professional learning and development it is arguably timely to consider the impact of same not only on individual teachers and leaders but on the individual and collective efficacy of teachers and schools to achieve equity and excellence in schools (King, 2014).

Supporting school leaders in the role

The establishment of CSL presents a unique opportunity for the development of a coherent continuum of professional learning for school leaders. It mirrors practices in other jurisdictions. Regarding the impact of the work of CSL on school leadership, the evaluation report (Fitzpatrick Associates, 2017) commissioned by the DES on the work of CSL notes that the formal one-to-one mentoring programme led and managed by CSL was "considered

highly effective" (p. 94) by both mentees and the more experienced principals who served as mentors. The significant successes of the mentoring programme (and indeed of the coaching service) was the move away from any focus on targeting school leaders experiencing difficulty to both mentoring and coaching seen as "a valued form of professional development" (p. 94). Similarly, the evaluation of the coaching service was very highly rated by participant school leaders "All features of the support are rated highly, with the confidentiality of the service and the trustworthiness, openness, compatibility preparedness, expertise and quality of support of coaches all very widely commended" (p. 94). At a more strategic level, the introduction of mentoring and coaching as powerful leadership development tools into Irish education will hopefully be seen in the coming years as highly significant in empowering leaders in schools to maximise both their own performance and that of other leaders in the school community, for example teacher leaders and middle leaders.

Middle leadership entering a new era

Reference has already been made here to the evolutionary nature of the concept of middle leadership in Irish schools. O'Donovan's (2015) case studies of three post-primary schools highlights the evolutionary nature of collaborative practice in second level schools in Ireland. She identifies the isolationist culture that is still prevalent.

> Traditionally in Ireland, the teacher has had virtual autonomy in the classroom, operating behind a "closed door" culture... principals express a reticence to counter that culture, in deference to staff sensibilities and micro-politics and to remnants of a culture where the powerful teacher unions vehemently supported the "closed door" system. From a distributed instructional leadership perspective, this presents challenges to principals and school communities to negotiate meaning anew (p. 263).

More recently, the set of professional standards on leadership and management contained within the quality assurance framework, LAOS (DES, 2016) marks a heightened policy focus on leadership and middle leadership and its impact on school improvement. In addition, two circulars on leadership and management in primary and post-primary schools (DES, 2017; DES, 2018) and the development of a continuum of professional learning in leadership (CSL, 2017) signal the further development of this area. The circulars envision a distributive leadership model based on shared responsibilities. However, they also require that post-holders are re-assigned to specific responsibilities in line with the needs of the schools, which is in contrast to Young's (2017) argument for distributed leadership not to be centred on distributed responsibility. Noteworthy in the circular(s) is the role of the BOM/ETB in building leadership capacity within schools. This may help principals in developing skills and a language to engage with middle leaders around the changes envisioned in the transition from posts of responsibility to leadership along with developing a vision for distributed leadership that would result in the building of leadership teams in their school. This requires changes from the bottom up.

A bottom up approach to system improvement

The concept of system leadership in Ireland is somewhat underdeveloped. However, there are a number of avenues through which school leaders at all levels in the system, can have an influence outside of their own school setting. As a starting point in the Irish context the focus for developing system leadership should begin with principals becoming involved in school improvement within and between schools. A focus on this level is justified firstly, because some tangible developments in other jurisdictions of this role (for example SCEL Fellows in Education Scotland, 2018) can provide learning and secondly, because arguably, it is at this level that the professionalisation of Irish school leaders can best be developed and thirdly, promoting system leadership between schools is reflecting one of the recent policy initiatives in Ireland – the Schools Excellence Fund (Bruton, 2017). This recent initiative aimed at supporting clusters of schools that are involved in a wide range of activities, all of which are focused on improving learning outcomes for pupils/students, has the potential to develop the sharing of good practice between schools and for the emergence of system leaders.

The combination of policy initiatives such as the *Quality Framework for Schools* which sets clear definable standards, the embedding of the school self-evaluation process that enables schools to focus on implementing change and improved teaching and learning outcomes and the new middle leadership positions as the model through which this improvement can be achieved is arguably having a significant effect on the practice of leadership in Irish schools. Finally, the emphasis on clustering schools together to share good practice and to explore new innovative approaches, may in the future be a significant policy initiative. Noteworthy however is the importance of all teachers and principals in developing their skills in collaborative practice so that the benefits of such policy initiatives are reaped. Significant here is that leadership is described as hierarchical and aligned with that of formal 'roles' and positions and not necessarily that as envisioned either by the TCI when they talked about all teachers being involved in leadership or by King and Stevenson (2017) in their democratic and organic model of leadership from below with support from above. Further exploration and development around supporting the development of such non-positional leaders from the bottom up is warranted but would require support from the top as principals learn to "let go" (King and Stevenson, 2017) and embrace shared leadership models of practice.

Conclusions and implications for research

Given that everything that happens on the ground is influenced by what is happening at a higher/wider level (Bottery, 2006) it is important that those practising leadership across the education sector have an awareness and understanding of global and national issues and their impact for educational leadership. Many perceive new policies related to educational leadership as the emergence of a new managerialism and accountability agenda whereas "policies do not normally tell you what to do; they create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed" (Ball, 2006, 12). In the Irish context it would be interesting to explore "the differing effects that documents have in

the production of meaning by readers" (Codd, 1988: 239). Supporting principals to mediate policy and to co-ordinate a response to same that is relevant for their context requires social action (Ball, 2006).

While there is an increasing emphasis on distributed leadership both in rhetoric and policy documents, there is little engagement with what this means on the ground and whether it truly represents shared leadership as envisaged by Diamond and Spillane (2016). This "policy fudge" (Torrance and Murphy, 2017) is arguably adding to the varied understandings and representations at school level. It often merely represents 'licensed leadership' where teachers are afforded autonomy and agency if it serves "managerially determined and imposed targets" (King and Stevenson, 2017, p. 660). Arguably an additional focus on a more organic form of teacher leadership from below with support from above (King and Stevenson, 2017) would enhance a collective responsibility for all students' learning despite the existence of a prevailing culture where isolated privatism is more valued (O'Sullivan, 2011). Given the increasing emphasis on teacher leadership for enhancing student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2004) and to meet the needs of increasingly diverse classrooms, an exploration of the concept of teacher leadership and the supporting factors for developing same in schools warrants investigation. Some evidence exists related to developing leadership capacity at intial teacher education level (King, 2017) but this needs to be explored so that schools and leaders are prepared to support newly qualified teachers who are prepared to exercise teacher leadership as part of their professional practice.

For existing principals, research into leading professional learning within their schools could support individual and collaborative professional learning in schools. This could be done in conjunction with higher education institutions, CSL and other stakeholders to foster a culture of professional learning in schools that is relevant to the individual context of the school. It also might support the development of a more organic model of teacher leadership (King and Stevenson, 2017) as practice focused on professional learning and not linked to roles or positions but rather practice shared with colleagues (Spillane et al. 2001). Finally, it could support principals in understanding the capacity building aspect of engaging in models of professional development and learning so that practice is transformative (Kennedy, 2014). Similarly, further research into the impact of current funding of professional development 'courses' or in-service (for example post-graduate courses in support teaching, Professional Development Support Service for Teachers seminars and sustained support models) on the social, cultural and decisional capital within schools could enhance awareness and decision making at policy level.

Overall, the authors argue for supporting management bodies and principals in understanding national and international policy contexts and leading professional learning within their schools. A macro level understanding of a distributed leadership perspective in schools is warranted along with a focus on non-positional teacher leadership for enhancing teachers' and students' individual and collective learning.

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"I love doing AfL and I would like to continue doing it": Irish primary students' perspectives on the affective impact of using assessment for learning in mathematics

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Abstract

This paper reports on one aspect of a doctoral study (Gurhy 2017) that investigated the impact of Assessment for learning (AfL) practices on the teaching and learning of mathematics at fourth-class level in a primary school in Ireland. Specifically, it details the affective impact of AfL and offers unique insights into Irish primary pupils' perspectives on using AfL in mathematics. Findings from quantitative and qualitative sources suggest that the use of AfL strategies and techniques, and the adoption of AfL principles over the course of an academic year, enhanced participating pupils' mathematical confidence, and improved their engagement with, and attitudes to, mathematics. Furthermore, evidence also suggests that by the end of the intervention the pupils readily used the language of AfL, engaged in self- and peer-assessment, showed early signs of self-regulation and metacognition, and played an active role in their own learning.

Keywords: **: Assessment for learning (AfL); mathematics; student voice; self-regulated learning; primary education, Ireland**

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Introduction

Assessment for learning (AfL), aka formative assessment (FA), has been the focus of much research ever since the seminal article by Black and Wiliam (1998) suggested that using AfL would positively impact teaching and learning to a significant degree. Various studies, predominantly in mathematics, have linked effective use of AfL with improved student learning and achievement, increased student motivation and self-esteem, enhanced self-regulation and metacognition, improved teacher professional and organisational learning and better student-teacher relationships. This paper is based on one aspect of doctoral work undertaken by the first author that utilised a Lesson Study approach to explore the impact of AfL practices on the teaching and learning of mathematics at fourth class level in an Irish primary school.

At the time the study was conceived, data from *The 2009 National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading* (Department of Education and Skills [DES], 2010a),

school inspections (DES, 2010b), international reports (PISA, 2009), and the literacy and numeracy strategy (DES, 2011) suggested Irish students were underperforming in mathematics, intimating, as coined by Kirwan and Hall (2016), "a crisis in maths" (p. 376). Contemporaneously, the DES (2011) highlighted that AfL was not used sufficiently widely in schools and concerns had also been raised about teacher assessment literacy. However, while government policy emphasised the centrality of AfL in teaching and learning, few teachers had received assessment-related continuing professional development (CPD). The study aimed to address these issues in addition to incorporating student voice regarding AfL since research in this area is somewhat limited. In turn, this paper focuses on one aspect of the doctoral study: it investigates the affective impact of AfL with specific reference to the student perspective and offers unique insights into children's experiences of using AfL strategies and techniques in mathematics over the course of one academic year. The paper begins by briefly exploring pertinent terminology and literature before progressing to describe the research project.

Literature

Scholars (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2013) argue that FA is an essential process in mathematics education that helps ensure students master the crucial contextual and conceptual knowledge they need to use mathematical procedures appropriately. In the Irish context, the importance of using AfL to enhance the teaching and learning of mathematics is duly recognised (DES, 2011; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2016), with Murchan and Oldham (2017) recently stating that formative assessment tools can be "of particular value" (p. 489) in improving students' mathematics performance at primary level. AfL has variously been described as "an international phenomenon" (Hayward, Higgins, Livingston, Wyse and Spencer, 2014, p. 465), "a teaching strategy of very high leverage" (Hargreaves, 2004, p. 24) and "a powerful catalyst for learning" (Earl and Timperley, 2014, p. 325). For the purpose of this paper, AfL is conceptualised using the following second generation definition generated by the Third International Conference on AfL in 2009 which states:

> Assessment for learning is part of everyday practice by students, teachers and peers that seeks, reflects upon and responds to information from dialogue, demonstration and observation in ways that enhance ongoing learning. (Klenowski, p. 264)

This definition clearly captures the key tenets of AfL, foregrounds classroom practices, highlights the notion of AfL as a bridge between teaching and learning (Wiliam, 2011) and, as argued by Lysaght and O'Leary (2013), views teachers and students as the primary agents of educational change. Throughout this paper, similar to other researchers (Warwick, Shaw, and Johnson, 2015), the term AfL is used interchangeably with the term formative assessment (FA). While acknowledging that some scholars distinguish between both terms (Wiliam, personal communication, September 23, 2012), like Gardner (2012), we believe that the

terms AfL and FA are analogous since they encompass the same assessment principles and practices used to support and enhance student learning.

Underpinning the potential of AfL to impact learning is the recognition of the importance of students as "formative decision-makers" (Brookhart, 2011) and the belief that learners should know where they are in their learning, where they are going and how they can close the gap (Willis and Cowie, 2014). As argued by Andrade (2010), since students "have exclusive access to their own thoughts and actions, they can and should be considered as the definitive source of FA information" (p. 12). Traditionally, however, learners have had a quiet voice (Hayward, 2012). To date, there is little research into students' perspectives on AfL practices. Most studies have taken place outside of Ireland, in tertiary settings, and predominantly investigated students' perceptions of feedback (Williams, 2010). In response, this paper deliberately foregrounds young learners' reflections on their experiences of using AfL practices in their mathematics learning.

The co-evolution of contemporary theories about student learning and self-regulated learning (SRL) is a noteworthy development in this field (Andrade, 2010; Heritage, 2013; Lysaght, 2015). Indeed, SRL is recognised as an important skill that students need in order to meet the demands of 21st century learning (Pintrinch, 2000). As defined by Pintrinch (2000), SRL refers to:

> An active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual factors in the environment. (p. 45)

Put simply, SRL involves students monitoring their own learning processes (Hattie, 2012). Significantly for classroom teachers, Brookhart (2013) argues that learners can be taught to self-regulate through FA:

> When students are assisted into the self-regulation process with FA methods, such as deliberately teaching what students are to be learning and what constitutes quality in that learning, the provision of feedback and opportunities to use it, even unsuccessful students learn. (p. 44)

Furthermore, a growing body of literature acknowledges that SRL includes an important motivational component. It addresses explicitly motivational and affective processes such as goals, task interest, intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy beliefs, attribution, self-esteem, emotions, values, self-concept, outcome expectations and self-evaluation (Andrade and Brookhart, 2019).

It has been suggested that student engagement is integral to academic achievement (Perdue, Manzeske, and Estell, 2009) and that students' attitudes towards mathematics, their motivation to do mathematics and their self-confidence regarding mathematics can directly influence their mathematical achievement (Lim and Chapman, 2013). A recent study by Prendergast and Hongning (2016) found that major work is still necessary in the Irish context

if students here are to develop and sustain positive attitudes towards mathematics. Therefore, it behoves us to explore ways that promote positive attitudes towards mathematics. While some researchers accept that effective use of AfL leads to gains in student achievement (Andersson and Palm, 2017), others believe that AfL can positively impact affective factors such as students' motivation (Gardner, 2012), self-confidence (Stiggins, 2006) and self-esteem (Heritage, 2013). Miller and Lavin (2007), however, caution that the empirical evidence to support such claims is somewhat limited.

Although much has been written about AfL since the early 1990s, Gardner (2012) argues that "the extent of existing knowledge and understanding of such a complex process and set of techniques is still in its early stages" (p. 284) and is a work in progress. Hayward (2012), meanwhile, identifies working with learners to explore their experiences as a research priority in AfL while others (Wiliam, 2016) emphasise the need for further research on AfL in varying contexts. The study on which this paper is based aimed to add to the existing knowledge base regarding AfL, particularly in relation to mathematics and the Irish context.

The research study

The research described here was part of a doctoral study conducted by the first author in the primary school where she taught (see Gurhy, 2017). The larger study involved the introduction of AfL strategies and techniques in mathematics classes with pupils from two intact fourth classes by three teachers – the first author, the other fourth-class teacher and the SEN teacher working at this level.

A key part of this study was the use of peer-to-peer learning as a vehicle of CPD. The three teachers met after school every two weeks from September to June for between one to two hours. This site-based teacher learning community was led by the first author and focused on building confidence and competence in implementing AfL classroom strategies and techniques as well as the principles underlying them. The five key strategies identified by Wiliam (2011) were studied on a phased basis and were implemented and reviewed incrementally in subsequent mathematics lessons. These strategies of FA are:

1. Clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success.
2. Engineering effective classroom discussions, questions and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning.
3. Providing feedback that moves learners forward.
4. Activating students as the owners of their own learning.
5. Activating students as instructional resources for one another.

Various AfL techniques such as 'We are Learning to' (WALT) and 'What I'm Looking for' (WILF), 'Two Stars and a Wish', 'Think Pair Share' and 'Rubrics' were also utilised. Reflective practice and collaborative learning were important components of this process and at each meeting the teachers planned to implement AfL strategies and techniques on a phased basis prior to the next session. Based on the work of Leahy and Wiliam (2012), a standard structure for the meetings was implemented:

- Introduction – sharing of learning intentions.
- New learning in AfL, e.g. a particular AfL strategy and/or technique.
- Review of how things were going.
- Planning for next two weeks.
- Reflection.

The research site and participants

The study was undertaken in Scoil na nAingeal, a vertical, urban, single-sex primary school in Ireland; at the time of the research it had an all-female staff and an enrolment of 438 girls. The last whole school evaluation report on the school described the pupil cohort as "mixed, in terms of socio-economic status and ethnicity" and noted that "a significant number of pupils speak English as a second language" (DES, 2012, p. 1). The research participants included the full cohort of 51 students enrolled in fourth class in the academic year 2012-2013. Mathematics lessons were taught from Monday to Thursday inclusive for one hour each day.

Study design and instrumentation

The study adopted a pre-test/post-test quasi-experimental design with all participating pupils being surveyed in September prior to exposure to AfL and again in June following the intervention. Two instruments were used: the Children's Assessment for Learning Audit Instrument (CAfLAi) and the Attitude Towards Mathematics Questionnaire (ATMQ). Both instruments were administered in class with test conditions matched as closely as possible on both occasions.

The CAfLAi was developed by the first author to gauge baseline data regarding children's use and understanding of AfL strategies and techniques and to measure changes, if any, that had occurred following their participation in the intervention. Modelled on an instrument developed by Lysaght and O'Leary (2013) for use with teachers, it contained 20 statements relating to the sharing of learning intentions and success criteria (LISC), questioning and classroom discussion (QCD), feedback (FB), and peer-and self-assessment (PSA). It also included an extra scale relating to the extent to which children used various AfL techniques (TQ). Children responded to each statement using the scale 'Always', 'Often', 'Sometimes', 'Never' and also had the option of choosing 'I don't understand what this means'.

The ATMQ was comprised of three sub-scales and was designed to measure children's attitudes (8 items), self-confidence (12 items) and motivation (10 items) with respect to mathematics. Items in the ATMQ were drawn from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS, 2007) and Tapia and Marsh's (2004) Attitude To Mathematics Inventory (ATMI) as well as items constructed by the first author.

Scoring across all three sub-scales was undertaken using a four-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from 'Agree a lot' to 'Disagree a lot'. The CAfLAi and ATMQ were piloted twice in Scoil na nAingeal with mixed ability groups from third and fifth classes respectively and revised accordingly. Pre- and post-Cronbach alpha coefficient values were sought to ascertain the internal consistency of the CAfLAi as a whole and for each of the subscales separately for the ATMQ. As can be seen in Table 1, reliability values in most cases

were above the usually accepted threshold of 0.70 (Cohen, Mannion, and Morrison, 2010). Only in the case of the 'Motivation to Engage with Mathematics' scale was a relatively low value of .59 recorded. Further analyses revealed that the removal of one item (item i) raised the alpha value to .70.

Table 1: The CafLAi and ATMQ Sub-Scale Alpha Reliabilities

Scale	Acronym	No of Items	Alpha Pre	Alpha Post
Children's Assessment for Learning Audit	CAfLAi	20	0.76	.84
Attitudes to Mathematics	ATMQ-AT	8	0.89	.77
Self-Confidence in Learning Mathematics	ATMQ-SC	12	0.88	.82
Motivation to Engage with Mathematics	ATMQ-MO	10	0.78	.59

Ethics

Ethical approval for this research was sought and obtained from the ethics committee of St Patrick's College, Dublin City University and it was undertaken in strict adherence to all ethical principles outlined in *Guidelines for Developing Ethical Research Projects Involving Children* (DCYA, 2012).

Findings

Reflecting the design of the study, both qualitative and quantitative data were used to explore the impact of the intervention on the teaching and learning of mathematics, including a number of paired samples t-tests, the results of which are shared initially here, followed by consideration of qualitative data, including pupils' learning logs.

Quantitative data

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF CAFLAI

With regard to the four AfL strategies of the CAfLAi, the data suggest that over the course of the intervention, the children believed that the most statistically significant change in their practice of AfL took place in the LISC strategy, changing from sometimes to often (eta squared=.67). In contrast, the data indicate the children considered that the least statistically significant difference occurred in QCD. Mean ratings here were also lowest both before (M= 3.05=Sometimes) and after the intervention (M=3.25=Sometimes). Eta squared is one of the most commonly used effect size statistics. It helps us determine the relative importance of the results of statistical tests, like t-tests, and is used in this study to indicate the proportion of variance of the dependent variable (students' achievement in mathematics) that is explained by the independent (group) variable (Pallant, 2013). Values range from 0 to 1 and the guidelines proposed by Cohen (1988, pp. 284-287) for interpreting eta squared are:

.01 or 1% = small effect

.06 or 6% = moderate effect

.14 or 14% = large effect

This finding is interesting and appears to confirm findings by Lysaght and O'Leary (2013), albeit from the teachers' perspective, that democratised QCD, with pupil-led as well as teacher-led approaches, is, as yet, not well established in Irish classrooms. According to the data, students also believed that over the course of the project, a statistically significant change had taken place in their use of PSA, changing from sometimes and getting closer to often.

Table 2 presents the overall mean rating for each of the five scales of the CAfLAi in rank order (post-intervention), beginning with the most embedded. The average ratings suggest that, following the intervention, the children viewed the first three strategies, FB, LISC and PSA, as happening often in their classrooms, while the TQs and QCD happened sometimes. Students' responses to statements for the various scales were reasonably consistent, with all scores within 0.5 standard deviations of the mean. Prior to the intervention, average ratings for each scale were lower but the first three strategies had still been placed in the same rank order. Children considered that FB was the most embedded strategy both pre- and post-intervention while, following the intervention, children's responses to the TQ scale showed the biggest mean increase, suggesting that many of the techniques were either new to the children or they were coming from a low base. It has been argued that techniques should be at the heart of changes in classroom assessment practice since it is by using AfL techniques that the AfL strategies become embedded (Wiliam, 2011). Therefore, the apparent increase in student use of AfL techniques in this study could be indicative of changing assessment practices in the classrooms being studied.

Table 2: Post-Intervention CAfLAi Scale Comparisons

	Scale	n	Mean	SD	
1	FB	51	4.29	0.47	Often
2	LISC	51	4.07	0.49	Often
3	PSA	51	3.89	0.47	Often
4	TQ	51	3.47	0.36	Sometimes
5	QCD	51	3.25	0.42	Sometimes

Although results from the CAfLAi t-tests indicated there was a statistically significant difference in pre- and post-test scores for all scales, with large eta squared values, it is necessary to be mindful of the limitations of this instrument, and therefore prudent to draw only tentative conclusions here. While these data appear positive and reflect opinions expressed by the children in their learning logs (short diary entries written by pupils over the course of the project to be discussed later in this paper) and the focus group (FG) interviews, the data provide an approximate measure of the impact of the intervention on children's AfL practices.

Results and analysis of ATMQ

Beginning with the ATMQ-attitudes scale (8 items), a dependent (paired) samples t-test indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between pre-test (M = 2.03,

SD = 0.73) and post-test scores (M = 1.56, SD = 0.42; t (49) = 5.09, p < .001), i.e., post-test scores indicated more positive attitudes towards mathematics. The magnitude of the difference between the pre- and post-test means can be interpreted as being large (eta squared = .35). Table 3[1] presents combined agree percentages for pre- and post-results for each statement in the ATMQ-attitudes scale.

Table 3: ATMQ-attitudes. Note: % Agreeing = Agree a lot + Agree a little. Italicised text highlights statements that were recoded (c, e, g).

Statement	Subscale	n	Combined % Agreeing PRE-TEST	Combined % Agreeing POST-TEST
a. I usually do well in maths	SCM	50	76	96
b. I would like to do more maths in school	*	50	60	70
c. *Maths is harder for me than for most other students in my class*	SCM	50	28	14
d. I enjoy learning maths	PATM	50	80	98
e. *I am not good at maths*	SCM	50	26	6
f. I learn things quickly in maths	SCM	50	58	70
g. *Maths is boring*	PATM	50	26	6
h. I like maths	PATM	50	80	100

A more detailed exploration of the eight statements from this scale revealed that, following the intervention, the combined agree percentages scores for the five positively-worded statements (a, b, d, f, h) had increased by between 12 and 20 percentage points while the percentage of students agreeing with the three negatively-worded statements (c, e, g) had decreased by between 14 and 20 percentage points. Specifically, regarding the three statements which measured students' general affect towards mathematics (d, g, h), results indicated that following the intervention almost 100% of the participants agreed a little or a lot with these three statements. Taking the statement 'I like maths', before the intervention, scores for participants in this study (i.e. 80%) were similar to Irish findings from TIMSS (2011) for a similar cohort while post-intervention 100% of the participants said they liked or somewhat liked mathematics, a significant increase. Results were similar for statements d and g, that is, following the intervention, students' attitudes towards mathematics were more positive. Analysis of the remaining statements suggested that, by the end of the

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1 For discussion purposes, percentage scores for the three PATM statements and the four SCM statements were amalgamated to provide a composite percentage score for these scales which could then be compared with TIMSS data. One child did not complete this questionnaire, hence n=50 for ATMQ. *Regarding statement b, Clerkin (personal communcation, April 15, 2015) suggests it was originally intended to be part of the PATM scale but following factor analysis was found not to represent positive affect in the same way as the other scale items and so was excluded.

intervention, children believed their self-confidence regarding mathematics had increased and their general attitudes towards mathematics were more positive.

Regarding the self-confidence scale of the ATMQ (12 items), a dependent (paired) samples t-test comparing pre- and post-test results indicated there was a statistically significant increase in scores between the pre-test (M = 2.27, SD = 0.63) and the post-test (M = 1.59, SD = 0.40; t (49)= 8.36, p = <.001), and the magnitude of the difference could be considered large (eta squared = .60). Analysis of the results (Table 4) revealed the biggest combined 'agree' percentage increase/decrease was in statement j: 'I get confused in my maths class'. Before the intervention, 64% of students felt that they got confused in their mathematics classes, in contrast to just 14% after the intervention. This appears to confirm findings in other studies (Wiliam 2011), that when teachers use AfL effectively, particularly when they share learning intentions and success criteria, then students are clearer regarding what it is they are supposed to be learning and therefore less confused. A significant difference in the percentage of students who agreed a lot or a little with the statement 'I learn maths easily' was also evident, increasing from 46% pre-intervention to 84% afterwards. Answers to statements c, e and f, relating to feeling nervous about doing mathematics, indicated that after the intervention students felt less anxious when doing mathematics, resulting in a combined agree difference of between 28-32% for these statements. By the end of the intervention, 90% of students agreed a little or a lot that they were very confident when it comes to mathematics (statement g), which seems to confirm findings from the rest of this scale. Furthermore, these findings, suggesting students are less confused, less nervous and like mathematics more, are also confirmed by qualitative data, which will be discussed in the next section.

Table 4: ATMQ Self-Confidence in Learning Mathematics Scale. Note: % Agreeing = Agree a lot + Agree a little. Italicised text highlights statements that were recoded.

Statement	n	Combined % Agreeing PRE-TEST	Combined % Agreeing POST-TEST
a. *Maths is my least favourite subject*	50	40	40
b. *My mind goes blank when doing maths*	50	34	18
c. *Doing maths makes me feel nervous*	50	42	10
d. *When I hear the word maths I start to daydream*	50	30	4
e. *It makes me nervous to even have to think about doing a maths problem*	50	40	10
f. Maths does not scare me	50	66	94
g. I am very confident when it comes to maths	50	62	90
h. Solving maths problems is easy for me	50	52	68
i. I expect to do fairly well in most of my maths classes	50	78	94
j. *I get confused in my maths class*	50	64	14
k. I learn maths easily	50	46	84
l. I think I am good at solving maths problems	50	58	78

Finally, turning to the last scale of the ATMQ which measures motivation, pre- and post-test results from a dependent (paired) samples t-test indicated that there was a statistically significant increase in motivation scores between pre-test (M = 2.04, SD = 0.53) and post-test (M = 1.68, SD = 0.34; t(49)= 4.91, p = <.001). The magnitude of the difference can be considered large (eta squared = .34). Table 5 summarises combined 'agree' statistics for pre- and post-test results for each item in the scale.

Table 5: ATMQ Motivation Scale. Note: % Agreeing = Agree a lot + Agree a little. Italicised text highlights statements that were recoded.

Statement	n	Combined % Agreeing PRE-TEST	Combined % Agreeing POST-TEST
a. I am confident that I could learn difficult maths	50	22	80
b. *I would like to avoid using maths in secondary school*	50	30	14
c. I would be willing to do extra maths	49	59	54
d. When I get into secondary school I would love to do extra maths	50	32	62
e. I think maths is fun because you have to figure things out	50	68	96
f. I think I can do even the hardest maths if I keep trying different ways to find the answer	50	64	92
g. *If I'm not one of the best in my maths class then I don't try at all*	49	6	0
h. I try my best at maths because I want to learn new things	50	92	100
i. I try my best at maths when there's a reward	50	82	66
j. *If I find maths difficult I give up straight away*	50	14	2

The statement 'I am confident that I could learn difficult maths' resulted in the biggest percentage increase of any item in the scale. Only 22% of students concurred with this statement prior to the intervention, whereas 80% agreed with it afterwards. Furthermore, by the end of the intervention 100% of students indicated they would try their best at mathematics because they want to learn new things (statement h), while the percentage of students who revealed that they try their best when there is a reward decreased from 82% to 66% (statement i). This appears to suggest that, following the intervention students felt motivated more by intrinsic rather than extrinsic factors. Similarly, statement j, 'If I find maths difficult I give up straight away', indicates that there was an increase of 12% in participants who were more motivated to persevere, even if the mathematics proved difficult. Statement c, 'I would be willing to do extra maths', is the only item of this scale where there was a decrease in agree percentage scores and that by only 5%.

In conclusion, while once again acknowledging the fact that this is not a true experimental design and that other confounding factors may have been at play, nevertheless, given how

carefully the intervention was designed and implemented, in all likelihood the use of AfL practices did positively impact students' attitudes towards mathematics. The quantitative data from the three scales of the AMTQ seem to indicate that following the intervention, children believed that their attitudes towards mathematics were substantially more positive; they felt more confident about doing mathematics and they thought their engagement with, and motivation to do mathematics had improved.

Attention now turns to a brief exploration of the qualitative data set to investigate whether it confirms the quantitative findings discussed above. When reading the sections below, it is important to bear in mind that some researchers have raised concerns regarding the reliability of self-reported data (Lysaght and O'Leary, 2013), while others have highlighted that school children may comply with the wishes of authority figures in order to please (Coyne, 2010) and so, both these factors must also be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings from the analysis. Additionally, the possibility of the 'Hawthorne effect', where participants react positively to the 'experiment' since they realise they are being studied, must also be borne in mind (Cohen et al., 2010).

Qualitative data

The qualitative data included transcripts and video from focus group (FG) interviews following the intervention, teachers' learning logs, students' learning logs (LL) and the researcher's journal. Employing Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide to thematic analysis, five main themes were identified and are discussed below.

ENJOYING THE AFL JOURNEY

There was considerable evidence from the qualitative data set that the children enjoyed using AfL in their mathematics lessons, e.g. when Maria wrote in her LL: "I love doing AfL and I would like to continue doing it". They regularly used words such as "fun" and "enjoyment" when describing their experiences and seemed to understand the benefits of using AfL:

> I liked the Two Stars and a Wish in the assessment for learning because you see the wish is how you'd make your work better and that would be the main point in the assessment for learning and the two stars are just things that you think you did good. (Kate, FG2)

Analysis of the children's logs overall suggested that they linked their use of AfL with an increased enjoyment of mathematics and the development of more positive attitudes towards mathematics.

GROWING POSITIVITY AND SELF-CONFIDENCE IN MATHEMATICS

Corroborating findings from the quantitative data, students reported a growing positivity and increased self-confidence in mathematics as a result of using AfL practices. Echoing research by Stiggins (2006), Hollie, a pupil with special educational needs, spoke about her increased confidence regarding mathematics:

Well, all the years when I was doing maths, I used to get really nervous when I was doing it, because I didn't think that I was able to do well enough and now I think I'm able to do… now I think I'm more confident and all the strategies and techniques really helped me… like WALT and WILF helped me…by saying what we're learning to do and what's the next step in my learning. (FG1)

Some children highlighted their enhanced ability to solve problems in mathematics while others linked their enjoyment of mathematics with their use of AfL. Lily's comment in her LL was indicative of those of her peers: "Each day I look forward to maths because it's fun and you learn new things".

A CHANGED CLASSROOM DYNAMIC

Many of the ideas expressed by the children in their LLs and the FGs are reminiscent of findings by Williams (2010) and Hayward (2012) in that the children seemed to understand the concept of AfL and could articulate their opinions about using AfL practices. Additionally, they were beginning to monitor their own learning and evaluate their progress. This resulted in a growing awareness of their own learning and suggests that through the process of engaging in AfL strategies and techniques over the course of one academic year, these students were moving towards self-regulated learning:

If we were doing a piece of work that we haven't seen before, and say you're doing a worksheet on it, and then you get feedback, I'd like that because it shows that that's the kind of unravelling you have to do the next time, so that at the end of the year you'll have it perfect. (Ruby, FG1)

Some children identified instances where the teachers used AfL to support their teaching, for example:

I like using all the different techniques and everything, because it actually makes the work easier, but, with the ABCD cards I thought they really made the teacher see how people know what to do, and if they got the right answer, because some people, they mightn't put up their hands to answer questions, and when the teacher said "put up the ABCD cards", you have to put up one, and then teacher will know the answer, but if you get it wrong, she'll have to know where you got it wrong and how you thought it was the right way. (Emily, FG2)

Additionally, while several students referred to teachers as learners, echoing Hayward (2012) most recognised the teacher as overall guide and arbiter in the classroom as the following statement illustrates:

With feedback the teacher would tell you, would show you where you went wrong, and then you could learn from that and say "okay for the next time we're doing it I know now what to do". (Sarah, FG2)

The AfL literature emphasises the importance of children getting actively involved in assessment, especially through using PSA, and highlights the potential of using PSA to increase student self-regulation and achievement (Warwick et al., 2015). By the end of the intervention, the children had developed a good understanding and appreciation of PSA. Ruby wrote the following in her LL:

> I thought the self-assessment was excellent because we were judging ourselves and could learn from our mistakes. Peer-assessment was brilliant for your partner or pair could judge your work and spot mistakes that you might not have spotted yourself.

Using PSA was undoubtedly a highlight for participating children with most favouring peer- over self-assessment. Chloe, however, viewed self-assessment as inclusive of, or almost a prerequisite for, peer-assessment. She commented: "You're going to do the self-assessment before you're going to do the peer-assessment anyways, so you have to kind of check it before you give it to them" and added "If you didn't do self-assessment and you just handed it up to the teacher, then you're actually just taking the lazy way out of it" (FG1). Similar to research by Topping (2010), trusting your peers was mentioned by a number of children as integral to good peer-assessment practice. For example, Hollie remarked: "I think peer-assessment is the best because you get to like trust your friends more, so they'll be more honest with you in the future" (FG1).

While the children enjoyed using PSA, in keeping with other studies (Warwick et al, 2015), it was only when they were given detailed guidance and support from the teachers that they became comfortable using it. They found rubrics and 'Two Stars and a Wish', particularly useful in this regard. Maria explained:

> I really like peer-assessment, but the first time we were doing it I said "Oh no, what will I write down?" but then we got the rubrics and I kind of found it really easy, because the rubric sort of like guided you along and told you what to do, sort of what you're supposed to learn and stuff, and now I think peer-assessment is really good. (FG2)

Similarly, the teachers in this study were happier using PSA once they scaffolded this process with rubrics or other concrete examples of what they expected from students.

UNEXPECTED INSIGHTS

During the FG interviews some unexpected insights emerged. Researchers such as Wiliam (2011) suggest that teachers should only provide students with comments when providing feedback rather than giving grades (or both). However, some students in this study felt they would have liked both comments and grades. For example, Chloe stated:

> I would have liked marks and the feedback. I thought the marks would have taught you how you have done in the year from each test to another and then the feedback

would be saying that this is what you have to do next time and to learn from your mistakes. (FG1)

Additionally, data from the LLs and the FGs suggest that for many of the children rubrics were the AfL tools they valued most. Mia's comment in her LL is typical of what the children thought about rubrics: "The rubric is so good because you feel like a teacher and you can tell people exactly what is good about the work or bad".

Conclusion

In sum, quantitative findings suggest that, first, there was a statistically significant increase in students' use of AfL practices and that, second, children's attitudes, self-confidence and motivation with respect to mathematics had also statistically significantly improved. The qualitative analyses confirm these findings, and provide richer insights, particularly through the student voice, a perspective that some argue is often missing from assessment research and dialogue (Florez and Sammons, 2013). Consequently, both quantitative and qualitative findings provide evidence that suggests the sustained use of AfL strategies and techniques, and the adoption of AfL principles by teachers in the course of their day-to-day work, would enhance primary children's mathematical confidence and improve their engagement with, and attitudes to, mathematics. Additionally, it is worth noting that by the end of this intervention the children readily used the language of AfL, engaged in self- and peer-assessment and showed early signs of self-regulation and metacognition. Furthermore, they clearly articulated their ideas and opinions regarding learning, teaching, AfL and mathematics. In short, the data suggest that children, as young as 10 years of age, attending primary school, are capable of fully engaging in AfL practices and playing an active role in their own learning, thereby developing the core skills of self-regulation.

Recent statistics from *Measuring Ireland's Progress 2017* (Central Statistics Office, accessed 9 June 2019) highlight the low rate of female graduates in STEM disciplines in Ireland. As reported, in comparison to other EU countries, Ireland has the second highest gender differential in STEM areas, pointing to the need for interventions, such as that described in this paper, to contribute to the reversal of such gender imbalance. In light of current work by the NCCA to ensure alignment between assessment, learning and teaching in curriculum reform and implementation (Lysaght, Scully, Murchan, O'Leary, and Shiel (2019), underscored by research highlighting primary teachers' concerns regarding standardised testing (O'Leary, Lysaght, Nic Craith, and Scully, 2019) the findings of this study are timely and important.

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Using collaborative teaching and storybooks in linguistically diverse junior infant classrooms to increase pupils' contributions to story-time discussions

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Abstract

This paper documents the outcomes of implementing a station teaching, oral language intervention in a linguistically diverse, junior infant classroom, in west County Dublin. Storybooks and collaborative (co-)teaching were employed to foster repetitive shared reading and to develop vocabulary, grammar and conversation skills, with the goal of enhancing whole-class story-time discussions. Pupils' oral language contributions were monitored pre-, during and post-intervention, using a contributions checklist, and the study found that English language learners' contributions grew during and post-intervention. Findings highlight the value of storybooks and co-teaching in junior infant oral language development. Resources and lesson planning templates are depicted and evaluated for future use.

Keywords: **Classroom participation, oral language, English as an additional language, English language learners, collaborative teaching, station teaching, action research**

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Introduction

Irish demographics have changed significantly in recent decades (Central Statistics Office [CSO], 2016), which contributes greater linguistic diversity to Irish primary classrooms (Murtagh and Francis, 2012). Pupils with English as an additional language (EAL), otherwise known as English language learners (ELLs), represent 11% of all primary school pupils, a figure which grows in urban areas (CSO, 2016). Having experienced a lack of confidence, knowledge and professional development opportunities in the area of EAL as a primary school teacher, the first author of this article observed that junior infant ELLs were less likely to contribute to whole-class discussions than their native English-speaking peers. Consequently, an oral language intervention was established to support this mainstream classroom with 50% ELLs and 50% native speakers. Oral language activities were derived from current research (Beauchat, Blamey and Walpole, 2009; Massey, 2004) and adhered to language policy and curricula in Irish primary education (Department of Education and Skills (DES), 2017a; 2017b; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), 2015).

The mainstream teacher-pupil ratio was reduced by three collaborating colleagues who facilitated station teaching within the classroom. Storybooks were a focal resource at each oral language station, aiming to increase the contributions of ELLs during whole-class story-time discussions. Action research (AR) was employed as a methodology, which facilitated continuous intervention adaptations relative to pupils' needs and teachers' observations. This paper depicts how this project informed meaningful change in a unique classroom context. Study findings include an evaluation of the intervention and its tools, evidence of increased story-time contributions from ELLs, and details on the experience of collaboration among teachers. The article concludes with recommendations for current practitioners working within linguistically diverse classrooms.

Research background

Why EAL and why now?

Young minority language pupils tend to have lower scores in their oral language performances than their native speaking peers (Dockrell, Stuart and King, 2010). The number of preschool and primary school pupils speaking a foreign language in the home has increased by 62% and 106% respectively in Ireland (CSO, 2016). These figures increase the likelihood of pupils who are at-risk of academic failure (August and Shanahan, 2006) in Irish primary schools, thereby strengthening the need for efficient oral language instruction to support ELLs.

Why oral language?

Oral language development prioritises listening and speaking skills (Morrow, Roskos and Gambrell, 2016). Research has proven a strong connection between early oral language skills and subsequent literacy achievements (Murphy, 2014), which solidifies the importance of oral language junior infant classrooms. ELLs require English oral language proficiency to participate fully in Irish classroom activities, which has been identified internationally as a key instructional challenge due to the language barrier that ELLs are presented with in the early years (Kim, 2008). This strengthens the rationale for this oral language intervention.

How to develop oral language

Language acquisition represents the inherent development and growth of language (Clark, 2016), "a staggering feat" (Saxton, 2017, p. 3) for all language learners, particularly ELLs. The current study focuses on usage-based models of language acquisition, whereby communicative incidents result in language use and learning (Tomasello, 2000), which encourages pupils to actively use language to support their language learning. Previous Irish studies have highlighted the value of enabling children to talk and be heard, resulting in improved oral language competence, coherency and confidence (Cregan, 2012). Nonetheless, the knowledge necessary for teachers to facilitate oral language development is "complex and multi-faceted" (ibid, p. 83), inviting the primary author to delve further into the literature on how to support oral language development within the mainstream classroom to increase ELLs' pupil contributions to whole-class discussions. These strategies are discussed below.

Primary language curriculum: responding to linguistic diversity

Language policy and curricula have been reviewed recently in Ireland, emphasising foreign languages in education (DES, 2017a) and the integration of languages in primary classrooms (NCCA, 2015). English and Irish are the two official languages of instruction here (Carson, McMonagle and Murphy, 2015) and are now integrated for instruction using the primary language curriculum (PLC). This curriculum recognises additional languages within schools, develops positive dispositions towards language, provides progression steps to support differentiation and enables children to explore, receive and create meaning through language (NCCA, 2015). However, teachers have communicated confusion around the practicalities of integrating languages within the classroom (NCCA, 2018). Therefore, it is important to highlight that ELLs have common underlying language proficiency, which supports cross-linguistic skills from one language to another (Cummins, 2001). The PLC recognises this and thereby seeks to integrate language learning by fostering common, language objectives in our increasingly multilingual classrooms (NCCA, 2015).

Co-teaching and storybooks – a solution?

ELLs require mainstream education, programme coherence, and instructionally focussed collaboration among teachers (York-Barr, Ghere and Sommerness, 2007). Therefore, ELLs need inclusive (DES, 2011), coherent (York-Barr et al., 2007) and collaborative (Travers, Balfe, Butler, Day, Dupont et al., 2010) instructional practices. Irish schools now have autonomy in the deployment of special education teachers depending on children's needs (DES, 2017b), which highlights the possibility of inclusive, coherent and collaborative instruction for ELLs in the form of co-teaching.

Co-teaching reduces teacher-pupil ratios (Ken-Maduako and Oyatogun, 2015), teacher workload (Tasdemir and Yildirim, 2017) and the isolationism of the specialist teacher (Travers et al., 2010). Despite this, there has been an over-reliance on withdrawal language support in Irish classrooms (Murtagh and Francis, 2012), thereby emphasising the need for inclusive classroom practices (Day and Prunty, 2015). Co-teaching supports mainstream teachers in their teaching of linguistically diverse pupils by delivering small-group instruction within the mainstream setting (Travers et al., 2010), thereby facilitating professional development (Mandel and Eiserman, 2016) and enhancing pupils' learning experience (Tasdemir and Yildirim, 2017) through inclusive instruction.

Storybooks are a "powerful medium for language learning" (Conteh, 2012, p. 80), which validates their use in any language learning context. Shared reading of storybooks occurs in most international, early childhood classrooms (Beauchat et al., 2009; Flynn, 2016). Interactive book reading develops early literacy skills in children from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds (Lonigan and Whitehurst, 1998), while repetitive reading of the same text supports vocabulary accuracy (Penno, Moore and Wilkinson, 2002). In this study, storybooks are used as a mechanism for teaching vocabulary, grammar and communication skills to junior infant ELLs to enhance their oral language skills and to enable them to better access the PLC (NCCA, 2015).

Why vocabulary, grammar and conversation skills?

Young ELLs, who do not retain the same vocabulary size as their monolingual peers, risk experiencing future academic difficulties, since knowledge of vocabulary contributes significantly to pupils' literacy acquisition (Jalongo and Sobolak, 2011). Vocabulary instruction relies on "questioning, clarifying, repeating, pointing to words, supplying examples, and providing 'child friendly' definitions in words that a young child can understand" (ibid, p. 424). Using visual aids also helps ELLs to acquire new vocabulary and improved English skills (Britsch, 2010). These findings influence the design and development of vocabulary resources for this intervention.

Young children's language learning is contextualised and therefore difficult to divide into single dimensions of vocabulary and grammar. Consequently, storybooks become an appropriate medium for vocabulary reinforcement and the teaching of multiple grammatical constructions (Spencer, Petersen, Restrepo, Thompson and Gutierrez-Arvizu, 2019). They scaffold the use of narrative language, with many popular childhood tales adopting repetitive phrases for interaction (Conteh, 2012). Repetitive read-alouds aid vocabulary development, listening and reading comprehension, and understanding of syntax in both primary and secondary languages (Hickman, Pollard-Durodola and Vaughn, 2004). Such findings influence the design and development of grammar resources for this intervention.

Dickinson and Snow (1987) noted the importance of pupil conversation with adults during instructional periods as they found pupils who participate in rich conversations with adults during their initial school years achieve greater academic success in later years. Conversational encounters between teachers and students are "planned educational events", essential to oral language acquisition (Massey, 2004, p. 230). Both language and communication skills are central to pupils' capacity to engage in social relationships and participate in learning experiences (Dockrell and Marshall, 2015), thus strengthening the need for a conversational element within mainstream and EAL teaching, which forms an integral component of this intervention.

Station teaching

This occurs when a small group of pupils rotate from one learning centre to the next engaging in a variety of tasks at each station (Mohnsen, 2008). Co-teachers provide support at each station and are advised to integrate speaking, listening, reading and writing, while demonstrating different forms of thinking and learning, to foster proficient learners and thinkers (Nations and Waite, 2013). Co-teaching provides unique, diverse and specialised teachers, models co-operative and collaborative skills and ensures undivided teacher attention which results in more time being spent on task (Thousand, Villa and Nevin, 2006). Teachers enjoy shared workload, professional growth and partnership, while pupils experience broader experiences, complementary styles and teaching dynamics (Cullen, Gaskell, Garson and McGowan, 2009). This approach supports pupils who respond differently to teaching methods based on learning preferences and aptitudes (Paschler, McDaniel, Rohrer and Bjork, 2009). Small-group settings further enhance ELLs' listening and speaking skills, as the individual needs of pupils are identified and met, while their opportunity for participation is maximised. It also establishes a community of practice

(McNiff, 2002) among collaborating teachers to enhance the teaching and learning experience for all involved. Thus, the proposed intervention ensues.

Study design and methodology

This study aimed to:

a) Promote inclusion during whole-class discussions by enabling ELLs to contribute to story-time.
b) Develop an oral language intervention to further support ELLs in their contributions to discussions.
c) Build upon school's existing co-teaching practices by devising, implementing, and evaluating an oral language intervention.

The research question was 'how can the mainstream class teacher collaborate with the SEN team to support the teaching of oral language for pupils who speak EAL?'

Research context

This research was conducted in a co-educational, non-DEIS, Catholic primary school in Dublin, whose vertical school structure accommodated mixed-gender from junior infants to first class, and girls only from second to sixth classes. The research was set in a junior infant classroom of 16 pupils, ranging from four years and eight months to five years and eight months. There were six girls and ten boys, 50% of whom spoke EAL. The first author noted that teaching language was the greatest challenge of a class with these characteristics. Aside from mainstream differentiation, ELLs were further supported by the existing special education team (SET) through in-class and withdrawal support. Teachers taught phonics, vocabulary and writing twice a week through station teaching. The primary author prioritised the need for oral language instruction, so the SET collaborated to develop oral language stations to support ELLs' speaking and listening abilities.

Action research

Action research (AR) is practitioner-based research, which evaluates personal, professional practice against core values to assess whether daily practice reflects core principles (McNiff, 2002; Whitehead, 2018). Identifying core values enables practitioners to identify whether they are true to such values or a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead, 2018) through conflicting practice. AR is advantageous as it enables reflective teaching practice (Suter, 2006), improved teaching practice and outcomes (McNiff, 2002), and the development of critical friendships within the workplace (Whitehead, 2018), which leads to a "community of enquirers" (McNiff, 2002, p. 25), which contribute developmental change to classroom practice. Participatory AR empowers groups of individuals to improve their lives and ignite social change (Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun, 2012), thereby deeming AR an appropriate pursuit for the participants of this study, who sought to enhance ELLs' oral language development for greater contributions to whole-class discussions.

Project implementation

This intervention was implemented over a five-week period between term breaks, in January and February of 2017. Five books were chosen as weekly focal teaching points (see Table 1).

Table 1: Books used throughout the study.

Week	Book	By
1.	Goldilocks and the Three Bears	Janet Brown
2.	Snow White and the Seven Dwarves	Janet Brown
3.	Puss in Boots	Janet Brown
4.	The Gingerbread Man	Janet Brown
5.	We're Going on a Bear Hunt	Michael Rosen

Co-teaching lessons (45-minutes) occurred every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. There were three colour-coded, mixed-ability groups (two groups of six and one group of four), known as the blue, red and yellow groups. Three teachers read the same part of a text to the groups at each station before focusing specifically on vocabulary, grammar and conversation activities respectively. Each group of children rotated every 15 minutes to the next teacher, with the most capable group, as determined by teacher observation and *Primary School Assessment Kit* results, beginning at the conversation station. The children were exposed to the same text three times during the lesson, facilitating repetitive, familiar reading. Each of the language activities correlated with the elements of the PLC (see Figure 1), which include understanding, communicating and exploring and using language (NCCA, 2015).
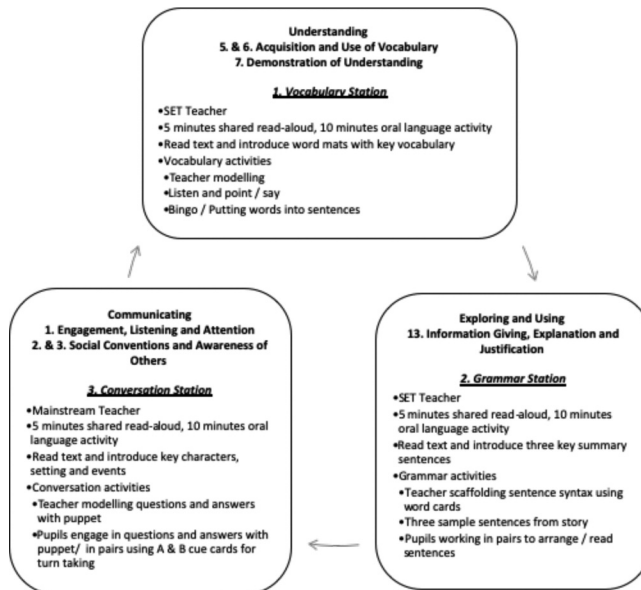
Figure 1: Intervention-in-action and corresponding primary language curriculum elements

Weekly differentiated lesson plans for each group determined the content and activities for that particular group (see Table 2). Lesson plans were colour coded and placed on a clipboard with a pen. Rotating group leaders were tasked with bringing the clipboard from one group to the next so teachers could see the group's lesson plan.

Table 2: Weekly intervention resources

Planning	3 x Lesson plan template
	3 x Clipboards
	3 x Pens
Books	3 x Storybooks (table 1)
Stations	**Days 1-3**
Vocabulary	6 x word mats
	Cubes
Grammar	3 x sentences cut into word cards
Conversation	Puppet
	Cue Card A and B

The content of resources changed each day to correlate with the text that had been read

Participating teachers wrote observations onto each template after each session with each group. An observation key with abbreviations quickened the note-taking process. ELLs were labelled A-H on the templates and teachers noted how these pupils performed at each station. Collaborating teachers prepared new lesson plans and resource activities every Friday, based on that week's observations and reflections.

Data collection

This multi-method study captured learning from a range of research tools, including practitioner reflective journal, lesson plan observations, multiple baseline design graphs and interviews with colleagues. Such tools yielded both qualitative and quantitative data which were triangulated to establish a broad picture of project outcomes. Checklists established the quantity of oral language contributions made by ELLs pre-, during and post-intervention. The practitioner reflective journal, lesson plan observations and interviews with co-teachers qualitatively determined the success of designing, developing and implementing the intervention.

Ethical procedures included seeking university approval and gaining entry through the school's board of management. As this was a classroom-based intervention, all pupils were invited to participate in the study, both independently and with their parents' permission, therefore resulting in convenience sampling. Participating teachers consented to project participation. All participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at any stage during

the research process, yet this never occurred. Data was collected in a consistent manner, which contributes to the validity and credibility of this small-scale study.

PRACTITIONER REFLECTIVE DIARY

The researcher's reflective journal highlighted initial concerns and provided a map to inform an appropriate course of action to ensure meaningful, values-based teaching practice. It recorded thoughts throughout the research process, providing hard copy evidence of evaluative and amended practice. The diary proved professional growth, noting ineffective practice, the process of changing that practice and the outcome of practice change.

LESSON PLANNING OBSERVATION

The lesson planning template included an observation section to facilitate daily teacher notes about intervention strengths/weaknesses and target pupils' progress. These observations informed the following week's lesson plan, so that by week five, the optimum operation of the intervention was established.

INTERVIEWS

Participating teachers were interviewed following intervention implementation, acknowledging the importance of fostering a 'community of enquirers' within the AR process. Colleagues commented on intervention strengths that remained independent to the researcher's reflective diary assertions. The interviews were recorded in the researcher's classroom, transcribed, and checked to ensure validity. Colleagues' identities were protected through pseudonyms.

MULTIPLE BASELINE GRAPHS

All eight ELLs (3f, 5m) were monitored during story-time discussions pre-, during and post-intervention to quantify their oral language contributions and participation levels. Contributions were noted on a checklist and plotted on multiple baseline graphs to illustrate pre-, during and post-intervention contributions. Graphs 1-8 below illustrate ELLs' oral language contributions. Graphs 1-4 represent the weakest cohort of ELLs who were withdrawn for language support, while graphs 5-8 demonstrate the remaining cohort of ELLs. Pseudonyms are used to protect pupils' identities.
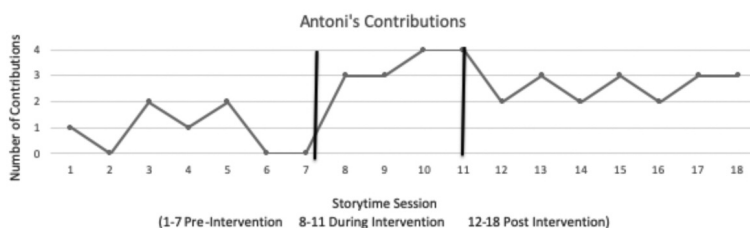
Graph 1: Antoni's oral language contributions.
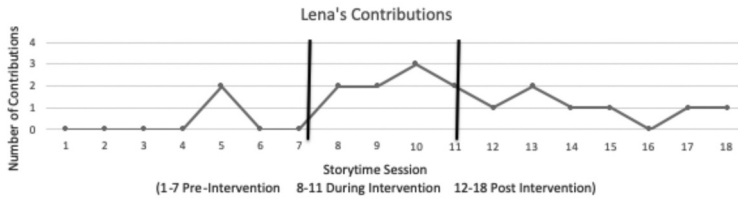
Graph 2: Lena's oral language contributions.
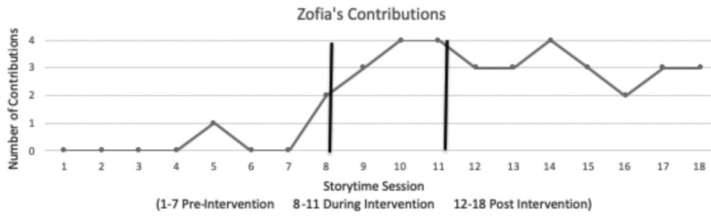
Graph 3: Zofia's oral language contributions.

Graph 4: Luca's oral language contributions.

Graph 5: Paolo's oral language contributions.

Graph 6: Eduardo's oral language contributions.
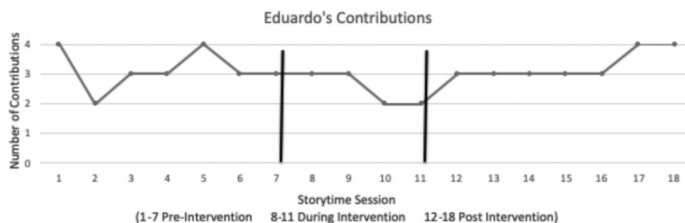
Graph 7: Maria's oral language contributions.
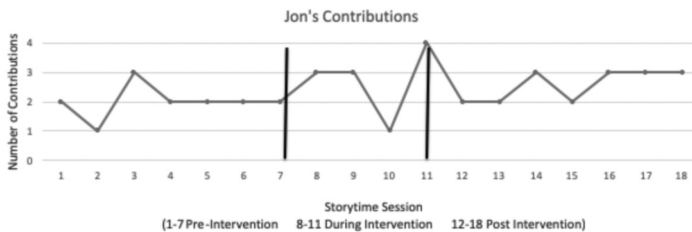
Graph 8: Jon's oral language contributions.

Detailed discussions of graph findings are conducted later in this article.

Data analysis and discussion

Data analysis was conducted in three strands, including the analysis of lesson plans, pupils' contributions and teacher interviews, while the practitioner reflective diary contributed to each of these analyses. Qualitative data wa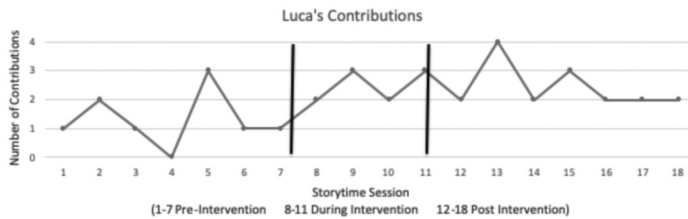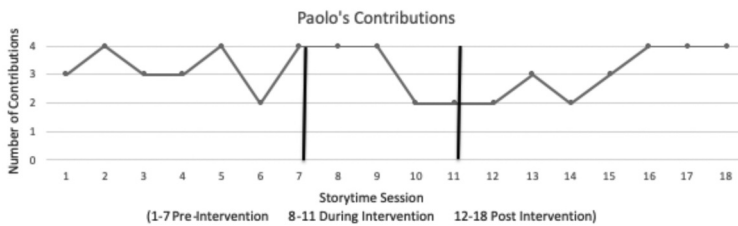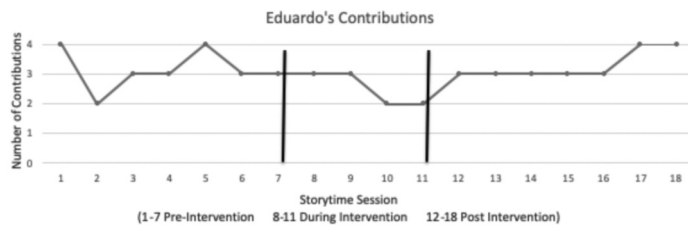s prepared, explored and reduced (Mertens, 2010) by the researcher in consultation with co-authors. Thematic analysis steps were employed for the reflective diary, lesson plans and teacher interviews to identify emerging themes from the research project, which included familiarisation with the data, generation of codes for the data, searching, reviewing and refining themes and subsequent write-up of findings (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The oral language contributions made by pupils pre-, during and post-intervention were mapped onto multiple baseline graphs for analysis. Baseline data on pupils' contributions and the practitioner reflective diary outlined the need for explicit oral language teaching in this junior infant classroom prior to intervention implementation. Lesson plan notes and the practitioner reflective diary provided an opportunity for ongoing, reflective practice, unique to this classroom's environment during the intervention. Collegial interviews, post-intervention oral language contributions and the practitioner reflective diary provided data to determine the overall success of the intervention. These data sources were triangulated to identify emerging themes, which included the need for change, an evaluation of intervention tools, project success and the experience of becoming a community of enquirers through collaborative practice.

The need for change

The researcher noted that there were varying competencies among pupils' oral language ability and confidence[1] in the opening weeks of the journal, stating that some are very competent, others non-verbal (reflective journal). The researcher observed how some ELLs communicated happily with one another during playtime using their native tongue, and recorded embarrassment at finding it unusual to hear their voices, which challenged her core values of inclusion and equality. She wrote: "This should not be strange for me, surely I should know what they sound like? If not, where is the equal opportunity to learn? Is this inclusive practice? My core values are strained in this instance" (reflective journal excerpt). Unequal levels of oral language competence within the classroom and subsequent varying contribution levels challenged the core values of equality and inclusion respectively. This powerful moment highlighted an emerging problem for the researcher. Quantitative data of pre-intervention baseline contributions confirmed ELLs' lack of contributions and the urgent need for change. This represents AR's first stage, when practitioners assess their core values in line with existing practice (McNiff, 2002). A contradiction of values instils the need for change, the first core finding of this intervention.

Intervention tools

Intervention tools included storybooks and lesson planning templates to aid explicit oral language teaching. Collaborating teachers identified, and instigated, necessary changes at each station to ensure project success. This practice was consistent with Lewin's AR cycle (1946).
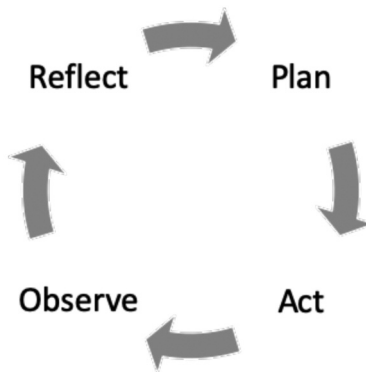

Figure 2: Lewin's Reflective Cycle (1946)

STORYBOOKS

This five-week intervention investigated the use of five well-known tales as resources at each station (Table 1). The research findings advise teachers to:

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1   All italicised texts throughout this paper are direct quotes from reflective diary or interview transcripts.

Use big books with colourful illustrations. The big book characteristics appeared to be effective and engaging (reflective diary) and were commended by teacher participants. One quoted that the the storybooks were big and colourful to keep pupils' attention and the language was appropriate (interview), while the other stated that they had lovely illustrations in them, that they were a good size and felt that they engaged the children's interests (interview). Therefore, storybook size and illustrations were reported to be effective, engaging and appropriate for the intervention. This correlates with existing research which supports the use of picture books and engaging illustrations (Ramos and Mattix-Foster, 2017).

Evaluate storybooks from all perspectives. The researcher utilised books that were available within the school for the entirety of the intervention. The following extract is taken from week five of the intervention:

> The biggest thing that has struck me from today's intervention is the book change… it ticked every box necessary for EAL pupils – repetitive, predictable language, clear illustrations and a simple, easily followed theme. I regret not discovering and utilising similar storybooks before now – yet this epitomises the essence of action research (reflective journal).

Despite researcher scepticism, participating pupils conveyed their favour of books used earlier in the intervention, which highlights the importance of evaluating stories from recipients' perspectives to determine resource appropriateness. Furthermore, recent research has confirmed that fairy-tales are particularly effective in early childhood classrooms (Conteh, 2012), which can inform storybook choice for linguistically diverse classrooms.

Use the same stories to teach English and Irish. The researcher noted an increase in pupil contributions pre-intervention (week five), in which the pupils engaged with a story that had been taught through Irish in that same week (see graphs 1-8). All ELLs either remained consistent or increased their oral language contributions in that week. This demonstrates the potential of dual-language stories in infant primary education to increase pupils' oral language contributions during story-time discussions, which correlates with international research findings (Spencer et al., 2019). Therefore, Irish primary educators can integrate storybooks in both English and Irish for increased participation levels, while also adhering meaningfully to the PLC (NCCA, 2015).

Table 3: Colleagues' comments about the lesson planning template

Interview 1	Interview 2
- easy to use	- accurately evaluated the pupils' participation and learning
- met assessment needs	- effective and time efficient abbreviations
- tracked progress from session to session	- a working document

The comments indicate that the lesson planning template meets the practical, progressive, assessment and user-friendly needs of oral language teaching.

Necessary developments and changes in the lesson plan content. The changes that were made to each station from the start to the end of the intervention are depicted below.

Table 4: Comparison of lesson planning template content from weeks one to five

Station	Vocabulary	Grammar	Discussion
Week One	Average of 15 new words on word mat	Between three and five long sentences with basic punctuation	Questions relative to the specific text
Week Five	Average of seven new words on word mat	Maximum three short sentences with mixture of punctuation	Generic and repetitive questions relative to any text Commended use of puppet

Graph analysis

Pre-intervention graph analysis

WITHDRAWAL PUPILS ARE LEAST LIKELY CONTRIBUTORS

Paolo, Eduardo, Maria and Jon were more expressive pre-intervention than Antoni, Lena, Zofia and Luca. The latter were being withdrawn from the mainstream classroom for further language support. This practice has been prevalent in Ireland (Murtagh and Francis, 2012), despite its negative effects on pupil self-esteem and class cohesion (Travers et al., 2010). While EAL assessments confirmed that Antoni, Lena, Zofia and Luca did not have adequate language proficiency to contribute to discussions, it is possible that their self-confidence was affected by withdrawal practices, deeming co-teaching for inclusion a worthy pursuit within the classroom setting.

BENEFICIAL TO USE DUAL-LANGUAGE, UNIVERSAL STORIES

Lena and Zofia were non-contributory throughout most story sessions pre-intervention, except for week five. The *Three Little Pigs* fairy-tale was read on this occasion and correlated with Irish lessons from that same week which focused on the Irish equivalent of the story, *Na Trí Mhuicín*. Antoni made attempts to contribute in Irish according to the contributions checklist, highlighting his desire to contribute but lack of English language proficiency to participate in previous and subsequent story sessions. Furthermore, it is notable that all ELLs either remained consistent or increased their oral language contributions during week five, which deems the integration of dual-language Irish and English storybooks a likely oral language enhancement approach for linguistically diverse junior primary classrooms.

During-intervention graph analysis

INCREASE IN ORAL LANGUAGE CONTRIBUTIONS DURING INTERVENTION

The AR project implementation phase is represented by story-time sessions 8-11 on the aforementioned graphs. Antoni, Lena, Zofia and Luca contribute more during this phase of the intervention. Usually accustomed to withdrawal support, they appear to become better

at participating in whole-class discussions during the intervention, regardless of language competency. This confirms growing confidence among ELLs for whole-class participation.

INCREASED CONTRIBUTIONS FROM SOME ELLS REDUCE OTHERS'

Paolo, Eduardo and Jon's contributions decrease by story-time session 10, which can be attributed to Antoni, Lena, Zofia and Luca becoming more contributory to story-time discussions at this point of the intervention. Such increased participation results in fewer contributions from others, given time constraints for each story-time session. Tomasello (2000) argues that language use facilitates language learning, so teachers must find new ways for pupils to engage in story-time discussions to ensure all pupils are afforded equal opportunities for participation.

Post-intervention graph analysis

Several conclusions can be drawn when analysing contribution levels pre, during and post-intervention.

GREATER CONTRIBUTIONS TO STORY-TIME DISCUSSIONS DURING AND POST-INTERVENTION.

The percentage of pupils making contributions during all story time sessions was at its highest both during and post-intervention, with 87.5% of ELLs contributing orally to discussions during and post-intervention (see Table 5). This suggests that the intervention engaged and sustained pupil participation during and post-intervention.

Table 5: Findings based on analysis of all graphs

	Pre-intervention	During intervention	Post-intervention
Pupils making contributions in all story-time sessions	50%	87.5%	87.5%

Greatest number of contributions per pupil occur during the intervention. When each pupils' contributions are accounted for individually, 50% make the greatest number of contributions during the intervention (see Table 6). This is the highest proportion of pupils contributing across each stage of the AR project, thereby confirming the intervention's ability to heighten pupil contributions.

Table 6: Findings based on analysis of all graphs

	Pre-intervention	During intervention	Post-intervention
Most contributions made per pupil	37.5%	50%	12.5%

Recommend balance of both in-class and withdrawal language support. Lena emerged as non-contributory post-intervention (see Graph 2). Her surge in contributions during the project implementation might indicate that the intervention had been helping her to

contribute more to discussions. However, the interview conducted with the EAL teacher surmises:

> I suppose being the EAL teacher, what I would have found is that, eh, some of the pupils that I withdraw, in particular [Lena], I would have seen more progress within a smaller group in relation to her oral language skills (interview).

This indicates that despite this project's ability to engage, raise, sustain and support pupil participation, this model cannot be applied to all ELLs. Teachers must identify pupils' needs and offer both in-class and withdrawal support structures to ensure fair and equitable language support (Fleming, 2016).

Collaborative practice and becoming a community of enquirers

McNiff outlines how teachers should work together during the AR process to "become a community of enquirers" (2002, p. 25), which is evident throughout this intervention. Interview data outlines how "we were all working together, eh, on a common purpose with the children's oral language needs in mind" (interview) and "we worked really well together" (interview). This research found that dialogue, dissemination and reflection were important aspects of becoming a community of enquirers.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DIALOGUE AMONG COLLEAGUES

This research relied on collaboration with colleagues and critical friends as the lesson planning template was consistently discussed and revised. The reflective journal documents the collaborative dialogue: "my colleague and critical friend suggested... and my colleagues made the following suggestions for change in next week's set of stations" (reflective diary). Both colleagues commented on dialogue process, stating: "as we went along, the activities were slightly tweaked to accommodate our suggestions" (interview) and once I suggested it, it was ready for the next session, eh, and that was really useful (interview). This constant conversation surrounding the intervention informed ongoing developments that assist its efficient implementation in latter weeks.

SHARING THE EXPERIENCE

Collegial interviews confirmed that co-teaching was very enjoyable (interview). One colleague commended the process, stating: "I'd certainly be bringing this idea to the rest of the staff, in particular within our literacy games intervention that we have in junior infants" (interview). This coincides with reflective notes made within the researcher's journal: "One of my colleagues suggested incorporating it into the existing literacy games intervention which implies that this project has been a worthwhile and effective intervention" (reflective diary). This collaboration promotes collegiality within the wider school community, building on DES recommendations for EAL practice within schools (DES, 2011).

THE ROLE OF REFLECTION ON, AND EVALUATION OF, THE LESSON PLANNING TEMPLATES

As the intervention progressed, the researcher and colleagues became reflective and noted their thoughts on lesson plans. The researcher wrote: "I am delighted with the enthusiasm of my co-teachers who have voluntarily recorded comments on lesson planning templates noting the strengths and weaknesses of the lessons" (reflective journal). One colleague commended the template "as a working document" (interview) which deems the process an ever-changing and reflective one, where adjustments are inevitable. This coincides with Larrivee (2010) who acknowledges that "becoming a reflective practitioner means perpetually growing and expanding, opening up to a greater range of possible choices and responses to classroom situations" (p. 301). This intervention facilitated the professional growth of three colleagues exploring a new way of teaching oral language in an inclusive and collaborative manner.

Limitations

This intervention was developed in response to the researcher's personal AR values of equality and inclusion, which may not correlate to all practitioners' values. The consistent reflections on, and amendments to, the intervention, make it difficult to replicate in another setting, which has implications for reliability and validity. This intervention was designed for a class with numbers significantly smaller than the national average (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018), which limits the generalisability of the results as the sample cannot claim to be representative. The intervention capitalised on the existing SET support, and the timetables being afforded to the class, within a school in which a strong culture of co-teaching was already established through other in-class interventions i.e. literacy games, *Lift-Off Literacy* and *Mata sa Rang*. The interviews were conducted by the researcher which may have affected teacher participants' responses. Furthermore, data collected on pupils' contributions merely recorded the number of contributions made, and did not log the quality or accuracy of such contributions. Therefore, increased contributions from ELLs post-intervention are not indicative of a flawless intervention, but rather a single step in the direction of fostering a more inclusive learning atmosphere that promotes contributions regardless of language competency. It is also important to note that gains recorded post-intervention are not necessarily a product of project implementation and could be attributed to several other factors i.e. maturation in the first year of schooling and the development of confidence as the year progressed. Nonetheless, an increase in pupil participation post-intervention is indicative of an increase in language use (Tomasello, 2000), which lies at the core of this research rationale.

Recommendations

There is scope for further research in collaborative oral language teaching. The PLC establishes progression milestones for pupils to achieve over the course of their primary education (NCCA, 2015), so the co-teaching approach not only maximises the autonomy

afforded to schools with human resources deployment (DES, 2017b), but also provides the grouping platform necessary to differentiate language instruction for individual pupils' abilities. The proposed intervention is current and relevant in an Irish context.

Educational policy recommendations

TAILOR IN-CLASS AND WITHDRAWAL SUPPORT TO PUPILS' NEEDS

DES (2017b) advises schools to deploy resources based on each pupil's individual learning needs. This research employed in-class station teaching, which resulted in most pupils increasing their oral language contributions following the intervention. However, one pupil performed better during withdrawal sessions (interview), so consideration should be given to pupils' performances, within in-class and withdrawal settings, to determine an appropriate course of action to support learning needs.

PROMOTE COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

Nonetheless, collaboration is a "professional necessity" rather than an "optional extra" (Travers, 2011, p. 475). Interventions such as *Lift-Off Literacy* in Irish primary schools have "empowered" teachers to collaborate to support at-risk pupils and strengthen the value of station teaching (Higgins, Fitzgerald and Howard, 2015). This invites policy makers to encourage collaboration among teaching practitioners. The findings documented in this article deem the proposed intervention a suitable tool for implementing the PLC, adhering to SET provision, while also maximising the skills of all collaborating teachers to attain highest academic outcomes within an inclusive learning environment. Three colleagues collaborated to evaluate and adjust the lesson plans, content and conduct. All teachers involved enjoyed the co-teaching of oral language while striving to achieve a common goal. It is highly recommended that co-teaching features among mainstream and support teachers in Irish primary schools to ensure the delivery of high-quality instruction.

Teaching practice recommendations

This study recommends reflection, joint selection of resources among stakeholders, flexible lesson planning and using the final week's lesson plan sample if implementing this intervention in the future (Appendix A).

REFLECTION

Larrivee (2010) acknowledges that unfamiliar practice "leads to a struggle and… conflict" (p. 302), outlining the challenge of diverting from current teaching practice. Nonetheless, every class presents new challenges for teaching practitioners, which necessitates change to meet arising needs. Reflection has been a key component in the development of this oral language intervention and is recommended for future oral language instruction.

JOINT SELECTION OF RESOURCES

Catling (2013) advocates for confidence in, and inclusion of, the children when devising lesson content. The researcher was surprised by conflicting evaluations of book suitability, as her criticism of the lack of appropriate resources was challenged by both pupils and

colleagues, who felt that the books were appropriate, mainly due to their big book characteristics and colourful illustrations. Future practitioners should seek collegial and pupil opinion when reviewing a resource.

LESSON PLAN FLEXIBILITY

It is important to be "flexible" with lesson planning and to "open new avenues where this is potentially beneficial to do" (Catling, 2013, p. 448). The lesson plans from this intervention were consistently adjusted in response to ongoing, reflective practice. Therefore, regarding the lesson plan as a working document is recommended to ensure that necessary changes can be made over the course of the project implementation. This will allow the template to best suit the context and needs of future action researchers.

Conclusion

Figure 3 below outlines the framework that has been generated as a result of this oral language intervention. It recognises the value of station teaching in facilitating small-group instruction and raising pupils' oral language contribution levels, thereby enabling language usage which contributes to subsequent language development.
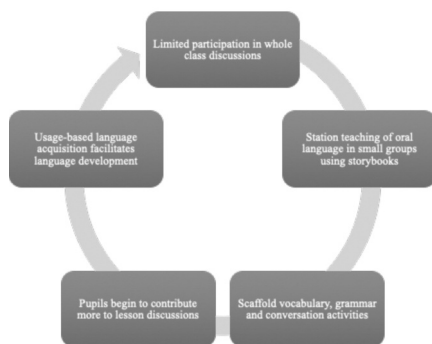
Figure 3: Intervention cycle of increased participation (Merrins, 2017)

This framework can support the implementation of oral language interventions in linguistically diverse, junior infant classrooms. This study set about addressing the issue of varied oral language participation within a linguistically diverse junior infant classroom. This problem was evident by ELLs' lacking contributions. The researcher sought to equip ELLs with oral language skills to become more participatory within whole-class discussions. Small-group instruction within a station teaching setting facilitated this through a more inclusive and conversational classroom atmosphere. Purposeful reflection on lesson plans, storybooks and co-teaching were integral to the development of the intervention. As participants' interaction levels increase, usage-based language acquisition theories unite to highlight the potential for language development through heightened participation levels. This study, despite being small-scale, was a definite step forward for increased contributions

to whole-class discussions by the pupils who participated. This inspires all teaching practitioners to address issues raised within their classrooms through the simple acts of pro-activity, reflection and collaboration.

Ní neart go cur le chéile.

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Appendix A

Oral Language Story Stations

Subject:	English		Strand:	Oral Language				Class:		Junior Infants	
Stations	**Vocabulary**				**Grammar**			**Conversation**			
Element	*Understanding*				*Exploring and Using*			*Communicating*			
Learning Outcome	5. & 6. Acquisition & Use of Vocabulary 7. Demonstration of Understanding				13. Information Giving, Explanation and Justification			1. Engagement, Listening and Attention 2. & 3. Social Conventions and Awareness of Others			
Progression Milestone	**5&6. a**	**C.M.**	**5&6. b**	**C.M.**	**13.a**	**C.M.**	**13.b**	**C.M.**	**1.b**	**C.M.**	**1.c**	**C.M.**
	recognises people and objects and uses appropriate gestures to refer to an object, linking actions with objects.		uses single words and common phrases and understands common pronouns and prepositions.		chooses objects of reference to show understanding and to share meaning, and extends meaning by linking objects of reference.		tells what they are doing and names and describes familiar people, toys and activities.		attends for longer to interesting or familiar stimuli including: actions, gestures, tone of voice, conversations and stories read aloud, and joins in with rhymes, songs and games.		takes part in conversation using appropriate eye-contact while attending to body language, gestures and tone of voice and uses these cues with context to understand new words/phrases.	
	7.b	**C.M.**	**7.c**	**C.M.**					**2&3. b**	**C.M.**	**2&3. c**	**C.M.**
	follows one-step instructions and shows understanding in a variety of contexts by attempting to imitate what they have seen and heard.		shows understanding of familiar story content, characters and vocabulary, and of factual accounts and step-by-step processes.						speaks audibly and coherently at appropriate volume, interacting over a short number of turns with individuals and beginning to communicate readily with others in class.		initiates and takes turns in conversation with peers, small groups and familiar adults.	

Story: We're Going on a Bear Hunt by Michael Rosen

Date: 13th-17th February 2017

	Vocabulary			Grammar			Conversation		
Lesson 1 Stop at "Squelch squerch"	Bear, hunt, grass, over, under, through, river, mud			We're going on a bear hunt. What a beautiful day! We're not scared. *Discuss and arrange these sentences.*			Where are we going? *We're going on a bear hunt.* What kind of day is it? *It's a beautiful day.* What sound does the grass/river/mud make? *Swishy swashy/ Splash splosh/ Squelch squerch*		
Observations	D		H	D		H	D		H
Lesson 2 Stop at "IT'S A BEAR!"	Forest, snowstorm, cave, tiptoe, shiny nose, furry ears, goggly eyes.			We can't go over it. We can't go under it. We've got to go through it! *Discuss and arrange these sentences.*			Where are we going? *We're going on a bear hunt.* What sound does the forest/snowstorm/cave make? *Stumble trip/ Hooo Wooo/ Tiptoe Tiptoe*		
Observations	D		H	D		H	D		H
Lesson 3 Stop at "We're not going on a bear hunt again!"	Front door, upstairs, downstairs, shut, covers.			Oh no! What is that? We're not going on a bear hunt again! *Discuss and arrange these sentences.*			Where do we have to run back through? *Back through the cave, snowstorm, forest, mud, river, grass,* What happens in the end? *We're not going on a bear hunt again.*		
Observations	D		H	D		H	D		H
Notes/ Necessary Changes									

Observations Key:

NC: No Contribution	SC: Some Contribution	GE: Good Effort	NMA: Needs More Attention
IM: Improved	DC: Developing Confidence	PC: Poor Concentration	CMTD: Contributing More To Discussion
ROHO: Relies On Hearing Others	CGC: Contributions Grammatically Correct	UPHR: Using Phrases Heard Repetitively	

The role of intergroup contact initiatives in promoting reconciliation and educational opportunities for children and young people in Northern Ireland

≋ SHANE BOWE ≋

Abstract

This article focusses on the role of contact theory and its impact on government policy and programmes in seeking to bring about reconciliation and educational opportunity for children and young people in Northern Ireland. Offering a brief background to the history of education in Northern Ireland from partition in 1921, it highlights the division and segregation that pervaded much of society and which became entrenched in the education system. Beginning with the contact schemes of the 1970s, it outlines the transition from approaches led by a 'community relations paradigm' to the human rights approach which became more prevalent in recent decades. It outlines the increasing prominence of the most recent contact initiative – Shared education – in promoting not only reconciliation in the state, but also as a collaborative process offering access to provision and educational opportunity for schools and pupils in Northern Ireland.

Keywords: **Reconciliation, contact, government policy, shared education**

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Introduction

Functioning under distinctive administrative arrangements (relative to the rest of the United Kingdom), education in Northern Ireland is operated through a highly centralised system with a number of statutory bodies including the Department of Education, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (primary and post-primary), the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), and, more recently, the Education Authority which regulates the local education and library boards. There are also several non-statutory bodies and voluntary bodies including the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, the Council for Irish-medium schools (primary and post-primary), the Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC) (Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist primary and post-primary schools), and the Controlled Sectoral Council (CSSC), established in 2016. The four principal categories of school in Northern Ireland are 'maintained', 'controlled', 'voluntary grammar' and 'grant-maintained integrated schools' (Byrne and Donnelly, 2006). An understanding of how the present structures of

schooling have been largely defined by religious segregation requires an overview of the education system from the formation of the state.

Church control

From the early days of partition in the 1920s, education in Northern Ireland was operated under a system, which although exclusively state-funded, was controlled by the churches. Increasingly concerned by the degree of influence exerted by the churches, the government initiated attempts to provide integrated education for all students, and enacted the *Education Act 1923,* which excluded religious education from the curriculum (Barnes, 2005). Vehemently opposed to provisions which ceded control of education from the institution of the church, the Catholic Church rejected the Act completely. Whilst levels of Protestant opposition were less vocal, the accusation that religion was to be peripheral within the education system led to a similar rejection of the Act. Barnes (2005) suggests that more amenable to the Protestant churches was the amended 1930 *Education Act* which made provisions for religious education in the school curriculum. Relieving themselves from the associated financial burden of education, the Protestant churches consequently transferred their schools to state control, thus creating a dual system of education at primary and secondary level, consisting of Roman Catholic schools and those under state control (Byrne and Donnelly, 2006). In this regard, Smith (2003) suggests that such an approach led to the segregation of education along religious lines. It also led to the churches exerting control over schools, with both the Catholic Church and the main Protestant churches (Church of Ireland, Methodist and Presbyterian) bitterly striving to safeguard their own interests and preserve their influence over the education system.

Education in Northern Ireland today still operates under a system whereby the majority of pupils are separated according to their religion and ability, and are almost exclusively taught by teachers of their own denomination (Donnelly, 2012). According to the Department of Education Northern Ireland (DENI) (2015), 90% of pupils attend schools that are predominately Catholic or predominantly Protestant. These distinctive structures of schooling have led to the questioning of the role of education in a divided society and how it can promote inclusivity, acceptance and understanding across communities deeply rooted in sectarianism. Pertaining to this, Murray (1985) suggests that these separate school systems have long been a prominent factor in embedding and prolonging division in the country. In this regard, educational research in Northern Ireland from the early 1970s suggests that denominational segregation could potentially be a contributory factor in perpetuating negative intergroup attitudes and deeper societal conflict (Abbott, Dunn, and Morgan, 1998; Cairns, 1987). Thus, Donnelly (2012) contends that the separate education system is reflective of the broader societal divisions inherent in the state, and further perpetuates tensions across the religious divide.

With the onset of the period known in Northern Ireland as 'The Troubles' in 1968, there have been several significant developments which have aimed at challenging the issues and conflicts caused by a separated education system. Initially influenced by policies centring on a 'community relations paradigm' (Emerson and McCully, 2014), several programmes were initiated based on the premise of intergroup contact and centred on the conceptualisation

of reconciliatory education in challenging societal divisions and reducing discrimination and cross-community tensions.

Contact theory

Contact theory is most often attributed to Gordon Allport (1958; 1954) and his hypothesis which presupposes that if the right conditions are present, contact between members of opposing groups can effectively promote positive group relations and reduce negative intergroup prejudices and attitudes (Allport, 1958). Influenced by research into attitudes towards different ethnic groups in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s, Allport published *The Nature of Prejudice* (1958, 1954). Here, he formulated his hypothesis that prejudice (unless deeply rooted in the character structure of the individual) may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals (Allport, 1958). These necessary conditions for optimal effectiveness include (a) equal status, meaning that both groups in the contact situation are treated as equals (b) common goal, where both groups share a common task (c) intergroup cooperation, which involves both groups working together to achieve their common goals and (d) support of authorities, meaning that there is support of the contact by authorities viewed as significant to both groups' members (Berger et al., 2016).

A fifth condition has subsequently been proposed by researchers, and is what Pettigrew (1998) terms 'friendship potential', where encounters present opportunities for participants to become acquainted. In this respect, Blaylock and Hughes (2013) suggest that contact impacts most effectively on prejudice by reducing negative affect (intergroup anxiety) and by inducing positive affective processes (empathy and perspective taking). There are other reasons why cross-group friendships are effective in improving intergroup relations. Firstly, such scenarios offer scope for sustained contact, where participants can spend extensive time in shared activities (Davies, et al., 2011). Secondly, sustained contact will provide opportunities for mutual self-disclosure, where participants can share personal or intimate personal details. This can often lead to the fostering of close relationships and emotional connections (Nieto, 2009).

In support of Allport's contact hypothesis, Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) meta-analysis found evidence of lower levels of intergroup prejudice when optimal conditions for intergroup contact are present. This analysis concluded that friendship is the most favourable form of contact for cultivating positive intergroup attitudes. In this regard, Davies et al. (2011) contend that the development of cross-group friendships requires repeated contact that is intimate rather than superficial in nature. Consequently, such intimate scenarios involve many of the optimal conditions, expedites self-disclosure, and allows for friendship-developing processes to ensue. Loader (2017) suggests that more recent research supports this contact-prejudice relationship, with Levin, Van Laar and Sidanius's (2003) study finding that outgroup friendships predicted lower levels of in-group bias amongst university students, Brown et al. (2007) reporting that amongst secondary schools students more frequent contact with outgroup pupils predicted more positive attitudes, and Binder et al.'s

(2009) study of children in Germany, Belgium and England reporting longitudinal effects of friendship contact on prejudice.

Whilst many studies reflect on the potential for contact theory to positively enhance relations and reduce prejudice between members of opposing communities, Richardson (2011) questions the impact that such contact programmes have had in providing high-quality contact between pupils from across the religious divide, particularly in Northern Ireland. Issues of teacher-training and the lack of research exploring the factors that cultivate interactions in mixed educational settings are other concerns in this regard (Loader, 2017). Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux (2005, p. 703) argue that this reflects a more general limitation of contact research, where the focus has been on the outcomes of contact (measured in terms of attitude and intended behaviour towards the outgroup) at the expense of the "unfolding interaction that occur between groups in ordinary situations". For Pettigrew (1998), it is this limited understanding of what people do and how the settings and context influences interactions which hinder researchers from organising contact programmes to ensure that the potential for friendship is created.

Traditionally, contact theory is premised upon the improvement of relations and the reduction of prejudice and bias, and is therefore aligned with a liberal multiculturalist view that emphasises universal values and common needs as the grounds for sharing and mutual understanding (Hughes, Loaders and Nelson, 2018). However, such encounters can often lead to a sanitising of views and dialogue, or an avoidance of tackling contentious issues in seeking the promotion of harmony. In this regard, Maoz (2011) contends that contact seeking peaceful coexistence between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs was counterproductive to improving relations because they failed to challenge unequal power relations between the two sides. Similarly, in Northern Ireland, where educators are at the vanguard of any cross-community initiative challenging societal divisions, the teachers in Donnelly's (2008) study of contact initiatives often adopted non-confrontational approaches to dealing with divisive or conflict-related issues. Further to this, although Donnelly (2012, p. 548) found evidence of positive cooperation and the fostering of links between Catholic and Protestant teachers, she also identified that relations between teachers are "mediated by an acute awareness of group identity and group difference". In contrast, a critical education perspective seeks to address, rather than ignore these contentious issues, as well as giving recognition to the power inequalities inherent in sustained contact (Nieto, 2009). In challenging the status quo, a critical education approach supports educational programmes and initiatives at school which question racial and ethnic prejudices. This theory therefore moves beyond cultural diversity talk and examines teaching and the curriculum in their historical and political contexts.

Contact initiatives in education in Northern Ireland

The divided nature of society in Northern Ireland is often most reflected in its education system. The segregation of young people from an early age in educational settings only serves to widen the separation gap in their cultural, religious and social lives. As noted, government responses from the 1970s centred on policies and programmes fostering social cohesion

through the establishment of mutual understanding between individuals and groups. These educational initiatives not only focussed on structural change (integrated schools), but also aimed at curriculum development premised upon assumptions derived from contact hypothesis (Niens and Cairns, 2005).

The first phase of government initiatives saw the introduction of a number of contact schemes in the early 1970s across Northern Ireland. Several early programmes were established to help link schools or youth groups from across different social and cultural backgrounds. Later examples included the *Schools Community Relations Programme*, initiated in the mid-1980s which brought pupils from maintained and controlled schools together for school trips, joint projects and activities with a view to facilitating effective contact across community lines. Loader (2017) suggests that as well-intentioned as these schemes were, they were criticised for being short-term in nature and consequently failed to provide opportunities for any meaningful or successful contact. Richardson (2011, p. 334) concurs and suggests that such initiatives involved pupils "following the same activity in parallel groups, with their separateness relatively intact". Consequently, steps to promote more substantive mixing of students (Loader, 2017), saw a shift in government policy towards a focus on structural and curriculum reform, most notably with the introduction of integrated education in the early 1980s.

Structural and curriculum reform

Integrated education

Donnelly, Furey and Hughes (2016) suggest that although the aims of integrated education hold an obvious appeal in a society long fragmented with sectarian tensions, conflict and political violence, it is necessary to examine its context and rationale through the theoretical lens of intergroup contact theory. Therefore, it is a commitment to the ideals of Allport's (1954, 1958) contact hypothesis which resonates through policy documentation on integrated education in Northern Ireland (Donnelly et al., 2016), with Emerson and McCully (2014, p. 4) suggesting that structurally, "the outworking of the contact hypothesis has been the creation of integrated schools". Chief amongst these policy objectives were an emphasis on a balanced intake of pupils (40:40 Catholic/Protestant and 20% other), where Catholic and Protestant children have extended and mutual intergroup contact because of their enrolment in the school (NICIE, 2012). A further stated aim of integrated education was the engagement with group differences and the exploration of the identity needs across the diverse range of pupils registered in the schools (NICIE, 2012).

Beginning in the late 1970s, a group of parents lobbied for legislation to allow maintained and controlled schools to become integrated. Met with fierce opposition from religious groups, most notably the Catholic Church, the 1977 *Education Act* (Northern Ireland) nonetheless provided the legislation for the transformation of existing schools to integrated status (McGlynn, et al., 2004), with the first integrated school established in 1981. Several voluntary parents' groups committed to the establishment of integrated schools were founded, with the most influential of these being the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), formed in 1987, which was praised for being an important watershed for

education in a deeply segregated society (Byrne and Donnelly, 2006). The *Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order* of 1989 was hugely significant in facilitating the establishment of integrated education, although the demand for places in integrated schools hugely exceeded the amount of schools on offer (Morgan and Fraser, 1999). Crucially, the introduction of integrated schools provided scope for the questioning of direct church involvement in the management of schools, and as Smith (2003) posits, provided a model for parents to engage in cross-community measures in Northern Ireland.

Early research into integrated education highlighted the potential it had for challenging societal divisions and increasing cross-community dialogue. Initial studies found that the number of inter-community friendships had increased (Irwin, 1991), with McClenahan (1995) contending that intergroup contact led to an increase in cross-community friendships. Later research indicated several other important factors associated with the promotion of cross-community socialising in integrated schools and included increased dialogue around sensitive issues and the importance of hidden and informal curricula (Wicklow, 1997); a respect for diversity (McCully, 2000); and the production of positive social attitudes to integration (Stringer et al., 2009). Loader (2017) suggests that attendance at integrated schools is associated with more positive attitudes towards the 'other' group, a finding that can be best explained by pupils' more regular involvement with contact schemes in such schools. Further to this, the national document *A shared future – policy and strategic framework for good relations in Northern Ireland* (2004) emphasises the importance of a more shared society through the promotion of educational approaches such as integrated education (Graham and Nash, 2006).

However, despite these positive findings, the provision of integrated education in Northern Ireland has been criticised. McGrellis (2005) argues that despite institutional efforts to promote integrated education, the lack of social interactions outside of school settings have impacted on their effectiveness. Thus, the extent to which reducing the social distance and promoting contact between the two opposing groups transfers outside of the immediate environment of the integrated experience is questioned (Ben-Nun, 2013). Other areas of dispute involve the relative lack of pupils involved in integrated education (only 7% of the overall provision educated in 62 schools, DENI, 2015) with, as noted earlier, demand far outstripping the number of actual integrated schools. More recently, this can be in part attributed to the ongoing success of 'shared education' (see page 120) but suggests that despite this, efforts to build a more cohesive society are hindered by segregation across community divides (McGrellis, 2005).

Further issues centred on resource implications for existing denominational schools, with Byrne and McKeown (2000) contending that the opening of integrated schools had adverse effects on local controlled and maintained secondary schools, a factor which went against the interests of many religious and political groups. Moreover, integrated schools were also accused of failing to address cultural differences in schools and minimising differences, with Donnolly (2008, p. 187) contending that such practices "are likely to impede rather than facilitate the progress of good inter-community relations". Furthering this is the avoidance of controversial issues by teachers and students due to cultural norms and lack of preparedness, which can hamper the potential positive outcomes of integrated education

(Hughes and Donnelly, 2006). Whilst integrated schools are still operational in Northern Ireland and have continued support from NICIE, the introduction of shared education as an initiative fostering reconciliation and promoting educational opportunities but without recourse to structural change has led Loader (2017) to concede that substantial growth in the integrated education sector increasingly unlikely in the near future. Despite this, the importance of integrated education cannot be understated in providing opportunities for implementing multicultural education (McGlynn, 2011), and for promoting peace education for its pupils (Hewstone, et al., 2006). The recent DENI Report (2018) supports this when outlining the positive impact of integrated education, and by stating that integrated education has a key role in contributing to a more inclusive and tolerant society.

Curriculum reform

The major structural change brought about by the introduction of integrated schooling was further supplemented by changes to curricular content across a diversity of subject areas (Niens and Cairns, 2005). The development of such curricular initiatives was premised upon greater cultural understanding, conflict resolution and relationship building (Richardson and Gallagher, 2011). In this regard, Emerson and McCully (2014) argue that the deeply segregated nature of education along with the promotion of the earlier cross-community contact schemes greatly influenced the teaching of controversial issues through a variety of curriculum programmes. Early attempts to implement curricular reform began in the 1970s when the Department of Education (DENI) was given responsibility for community relations and responded accordingly with the introduction of a number of curriculum initiatives aimed at focussing on conflict related issues, including projects in religious education and history (Arlow, 2004). Other initiatives included the *Schools Cultural Studies Project* (SCSP) (1978), where contact was seen as the natural extension of curricular activity, and the *Religion Ireland Project* (1984).

This period also saw the adoption by the government of a more definite community relations policy through the *Education Reform Order* (1989), which led to the inclusion of the cross-curricular themes of 'cultural heritage' (CH), and 'education for mutual understanding' (EMU) in the first statutory Northern Ireland curriculum in 1991 (Niens and Cairns, 2005). With all schools now required to incorporate community relations into their teaching, the implementation of these initiatives further aimed at increasing tolerance through developing greater cultural understanding, as well as emphasising the importance of relationship building. Included as part of EMU's provisions was the establishment of voluntary cross-community contact schemes between controlled and maintained schools, although crucially such partnerships were not a statutory requirement. As an initiative, Arlow (2004) suggests EMU was a brave development in attempting to help change the nature of discourse in Northern Ireland, and as Smith and Robinson (1996) suggest, helped create the conditions for positive dialogue by encouraging people to convey their support for cultural pluralism and political dialogue. EMU was also successful in helping to break down barriers and establish new networks of contacts, with McEvoy (2007) positing that the scheme had relative success in producing evidence of good practice. However, such

initiatives were limited in their impact, with Smith (2003) citing the lack of teacher training and the unwillingness to tackle controversial issues as being attributable to its relative failure.

Shared education – a new approach to reconciliation and educational opportunity

In response to what were perceived as the relative shortcomings of previous contact programmes, shared education was introduced in Northern Ireland in 2007. Crucially, shared education focussed on access and provision to educational opportunity rather than concentrating solely on reconciliation outcomes (Hughes, Loader and Nelson, 2018). It was viewed as an initiative to bridge the gap between the short-term contact strategies and the full immersion of integrated education (Hughes and Loader, 2015), and was established to foster collaborative partnerships between Catholic and Protestant schools. Such partnerships promote the sharing of resources, as well as the joint provision of continuous professional development opportunities for school staff and the delivery of classes to mixed groups of pupils from partnership schools. Essential to the implementation and success of shared education is the empowerment of teachers as co-creators of the collaborative process, as well as improving educational outcomes for pupils, meeting minimum curriculum requirements, and contributing to financial savings (Gallagher, 2016).

The frequency of contact between Catholic and Protestant students was a core tenet of the initiative from the beginning, as it was envisioned that continued contact would provide scope for the building of relationships, and thereby challenging existing patterns of division and separation. Given the political and religious landscape in Northern Ireland, where young people often have limited opportunities for engaging in any cross-community interactions, such an approach was intended to encourage interaction and dialogue without diluting any sense of culture or tradition. Thus, shared education's theory of change supposes that such regular contact will encourage the fostering of positive relationships, ideally through friendship, which will then establish more favourable intergroup attitudes (Loader and Hughes, 2016).

Shared education also creates spaces for critical discourse and the subsequent exploration of controversial issues (Giroux and Giroux, 2006) by bringing together opposing groups to interrogate both current and historical differences pertaining to conflict inequality and social and political disadvantage. In this regard, the importance of young people having an awareness of the past and its continuing influence in the present is highlighted by Leonard (2010) who found that pupils are not only acutely aware of the conflict, but also indicated negative parental attitudes towards the outgroup. More recently, however, Duffy and Gallagher's (2016) study of a shared education partnership seeking to transform contested spaces in Derry, offered scope for reconciliation and social cohesion through contact and dialogue.

Crucially, shared education does not require structural change as it allows participating schools the right to exist separately and promote their own cultural and religious perspectives and retain their distinctive ethos and identity. Whilst guided by the principles of contact theory in terms of achieving reconciliation through regular contact, shared education initiatives differ from previous schemes such as integrated education insofar as it changes

the conditions and settings under which it would happen. Thus, the rights of different groups to their own education system is protected. Such an approach is therefore consistent with the provisions of the *Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986* which proposes to educate children in accordance with the wishes of their parents.

Gallagher (2016) posits that with its emphasis on shared educational priorities, shared education was viewed as a means of promoting reconciliation at a systemic level, while Hughes, Loader and Nelson (2018) agree that the initiative represents systemic change for Northern Ireland. Consequently, it was envisaged that shared education, starting at a school level, would expand across the sectarian divide out into local communities as pupils came into more regular contact with each other. In this approach, a school system is conceptualised as being an interdependent network where positive interdependencies are developed through collaboration. Therefore, the sharing of facilities, resources and collaborative efforts opens up the possibilities of social cohesion and cross-community links across Northern Ireland. Such an approach to reconciliation was careful to acknowledge and emphasise the different contexts and circumstances of communities across Northern Ireland and therefore "encouraged locally tailored programmes of between school collaboration" (Duffy and Gallagher, 2015, p. 110).

From its inception, shared education was funded by two external bodies, Atlantic Philanthropies and the International Fund for Ireland. Initially the initiative was delivered through the *Primary Integrating and Enriching Education Project* (PIEE), implemented by the North Eastern Education and Library Board, the Shared Education Programme, coordinated by the Fermanagh Trust for primary and post-primary schools in Fermanagh, and the *Sharing Education Programme* (SEP), which was managed by Queen's University. Following on from this initial outlay of funding, the Northern Ireland Executive and Atlantic Philanthropies committed to providing a further £58 million for three flagship programmes, including shared education. The *Shared Education Signature Project* (SESP) (2014) focussed on promoting reconciliation and raising educational standards through a collaborative approach to shared learning, while the *Peace IV Shared Education Programme* allocated funds of €35 million to encourage the development and delivery of shared education to schools with limited or no prior experience of the programme. More recently, the *Shared Education Act* (2016) was introduced:

(a) to deliver educational benefits to children and young persons;
(b) to promote the efficient and effective use of resources;
(c) to promote equality of opportunity;
(d) to promote good relations; and
(e) to promote respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion.

The initial phase of the programme, running from 2007 to 2010 (SEP 1) involved 12 partnerships and comprised 65 primary and post-primary schools with almost 3,500 pupils participating in just under 3,000 shared classes. Phase two (SEP 2) saw 12 partnerships made up of 72 schools (primary and post-primary) with over 5,000 pupils participating in over 3,000 shared classes (Gallagher et al., 2010). Presently, the number of schools participating

in the SESP numbers 583 nationwide, accounting for over 59,000 pupils in nurseries, primary and post-primary schools (DENI, 2018).

Evaluation of shared education as a 'contact initiative'

Much of the research on shared education partnership programmes has focussed on pupils' attitudes to the 'outgroup', with many studies indicating that the model is effective in the promotion of positive inter-group evaluations. Hughes et al. (2010) found that not only did the curriculum-based focus of the programme ensure regular and sustained contact throughout the school year, but also that participation in shared education was associated with reductions in in-group bias, increased numbers of cross-group friendships and reduced intergroup anxiety. Of particular interest was the finding that those pupils attending partnership schools in areas divided by conflict reported more positive attitudes towards the outgroup in contrast to those students in non-partnership schools who lived in areas where relations were generally accepted to be more amicable (Hughes, et al., 2010).

Other studies suggest that the scheme has been positively received because of its adoption of a network approach to establishing mutual cross-community support. In this regard, Fishkin et al.'s (2007) study concluded that shared education was positively endorsed by many parents because of the improvement in quality of education, regardless of education provider or perceived erosion of identity. Furthering this point, Knox's (2010) study of teachers highlights the positive impact of the model in the breaking down of school boundaries. Elsewhere, Duffy and Gallagher's (2015) case study of a shared education partnership seeking to transform contested space in Co Derry/Londonderry, found great enthusiasm amongst primary school pupils to engage in opportunities to make friends and work and play together with other children from schools across the religious divide. The DENI (2018) Report identified many positive outcomes for those pupils participating in shared education initiatives including evidence of the development of skills and attitudes, a greater sense of empathy, and enhanced respect for inclusion through learning with others, as well as pupils taking on greater leadership roles within partnerships. Finally, the success of the shared education model in Northern Ireland has inspired initiatives in other conflict societies. A number of shared education programmes have been initiated in Israel, Macedonia, Bosnia, Cyprus and Croatia (Hughes, Loader and Nelson, 2018).

However, it is noteworthy that several studies highlight some potential areas of concern regarding the initiative. These include a certain reticence among both pupils and staff in addressing issues of difference (Hughes, 2014), an existence of a hierarchy of taboo subjects (Loader, 2017), and evidence of engagement with different political perspectives in the school context being framed as sectarian or controversial (Donnelly, 2008). Furthermore, survey data indicate that approximately 10% of pupils attending shared education schools reported to feeling uncomfortable whilst participating in the initiative, with Hughes et al. (2010) reporting issues with sectarian intimidation and name-calling. Equally, Loader and Hughes (2017) question the extent to which post-primary pupils formed lasting friendships through participation in a shared education programme. Loader and Hughes (2017) also highlighted other limitations of shared education programmes, stating that within the school setting opportunities for interaction were likely to be inconsistent and impacted by class size and

composition, the subject being taught and the extent to which interactions were facilitated by the teacher. Further to this, there was limited scope for pupils to continuing to build rapport outside of the school settings as they returned to their own schools after classes were finished. Ultimately, students were unlikely to meet locally because of the limited provision of shared venues and activities, with poor transport links as well as residential segregation having major influences in this regard (Loader and Hughes, 2017).

As a programme premised upon successful intergroup contact across community divides, shared education at present has not penetrated all demographic areas of Northern Ireland. Noting the increased number of participating schools and pupils across both the primary and post-primary sectors, the DENI (2018) Report states that there is still a significant number of schools who are not engaged in shared education programmes. A reticence amongst school leadership to engage in shared education, or schools having issues with finding local partnership schools are some of the reasons cited in this regard. Thus, there is still further work to be done in both understanding the reasons for non-participation in shared education, but also in demonstrating the practical benefits of inclusion for school leadership, parents and the wider community.

A further concern of shared education as a contact initiative, is the extent to which children from other faiths and ethnicities in Northern Ireland are included in its principles and objectives. One of the chief provisions of the *Shared Education Act* (2016) is that shared education means the education of "those of different religious belief, including reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young persons" (DENI, 2018, p. 62). However, much of the literature and findings on the social and educational outcomes associated with participation in shared education are chiefly concerned with pupils from the two main faiths in Northern Ireland. In this regard, there needs to be a greater emphasis on how intergroup contact impacts upon the now significant number of children attending controlled and maintained who are neither Catholic or Protestant. Although the DENI (2018) Report outlines many future policy strategies for inclusion, educational provision and advancement of children, it fails to specifically make reference to children of 'other' religions in Northern Ireland in terms of potential shared education outcomes. Whilst beyond the scope of this paper to address in significant detail, the omission of a significant portion of the population from educational policies could lead to questioning the extent to which those students from minority ethnic backgrounds possess the same education rights.

Despite these limitations, there are many reasons to be cautiously optimistic about the potential of shared education to offer long-term opportunities for reconciliation and educational benefits for pupils. It is envisaged that such benefits will in turn contribute to the wider government goal of the creation of a more cohesive society. The widespread prominence across Northern Ireland of an initiative which makes "existing boundaries between schools of different management types much more porous without challenging parent/pupil cultural identities" (Borooah and Knox, 2013, p. 944), can help foster positive collaboration and dialogue across community divides, and be a force for effective change, peace and educational opportunity.

Conclusion

Education assumes a hugely prominent role in fostering peace, reconciliation and preparing its young people to live and work together in deeply divided societies. This article examined many of the contact initiatives and programmes implemented by governments and independent groups over the past four decades in Northern Ireland. Briefly highlighting the power and influence of the main churches over education since the early days of partition, and the resulting segregation of schooling on denominational lines, it further outlined the prominence of contact theory as the guiding theoretical framework in driving efforts towards reconciliation. Although these programmes were premised upon regular and repeated contact and were influenced by a community relations paradigm, they were often found to be limited in both their scope and influence.

The most recent initiative – shared education – introduced in 2007 was implemented to address many of the limitations of the previous approaches by prioritising inter-school participation and collaboration through sustained contact and positioning educational provision and opportunity alongside reconciliation. Financially aided by external bodies including Atlantic Philanthrophies and the International Fund for Ireland, and supported by government policy and legislation, the shared education model provides support for schools and helps to bridge the institutional boundaries which divided schools. In contrast to other contact schemes, most notably integrated education, shared education allows participating schools the right to exist separately and thus promote their own culture and identity. Consequently, the initiative has been successful in establishing school networks, fostering positive links, developing positive attitudes amongst pupils, and establishing comprehensive planning amongst teachers across school partnerships in Northern Ireland. Even if the initiative has attracted criticism in the form of its impact on addressing controversial issues, its potential for long-term friendship development, and for not penetrating all demographic areas of Northern Ireland, it has been most favourably received across the state. Whilst the road to peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland is still a long and complex one, research shown in this paper, most notably in the form of shared education, has indicated that regular and sustained contact, an acceptance and recognition of the past, and a stronger will to work more closely and collaboratively across communities can provide a sound educational platform for children and young people moving forward.

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Lesbian and gay teachers and Ireland's marriage equality referendum: Rainbow recognition or rancour redux?

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Abstract

This article presents an examination of the experiences of 11 lesbian and gay primary school teachers in the Republic of Ireland during, and directly following, a time of heightened focus on the rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community in Ireland. The research data for this study are drawn out of two rounds of semi-structured interviews with these teachers who were working in the greater Dublin region. The first set of interviews was carried out from December 2015 to February 2016 and explored the employment-related experiences of the participants during the Marriage Equality (ME) campaign and its subsequent enactment in 2015. Follow-up interviews were then conducted in March and April of 2017, to investigate the sustainability or otherwise of the changes previously reported. The data from the initial interviews point to some positive experiences of recognition during the ME campaign. Evidence from the follow-up interviews, indicate that these advancements in recognition are, for the most part, fragile, and dissipate once the high-profile ME campaign recedes. While not uniform, this is particularly the case in certain Catholic schools, where misrecognition based on their "despised sexuality" (Fraser 1995, 77) is maintained. The paper concludes by identifying the need for more robust responses on the part of all partners in Irish education to secure equal recognition for lesbian and gay teachers in Irish schools.

Keywords: **LGBT, teachers, Ireland, marriage equality, change, recognition**

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Introduction

This research paper explores the experiences of a selection of lesbian and gay primary school teachers in the Republic of Ireland during, and directly following a time of heightened focus on the rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community in Ireland. The campaign to secure marriage equality (ME) and important changes to employment equality legislation were of particular importance. Firstly, the paper provides an analysis of the relevant national and international social and scholastic contexts. Next, theories of recognition, which provide an insightful perspective for critical analysis of the experiences of LGBT teachers, are outlined. The paper proceeds to describe the methodology undertaken to generate the research data upon which the remainder of the paper is based. The findings of this study are divided into two sections; the first section highlights the experiences of 11

lesbian and gay teachers around the time of the ME campaign, while the second section focuses on the teaching lives of these participants over a year later, particularly examining the sustainability of positive changes identified in the first round of interviews. The data are then analysed through theories of recognition, drawing especially on the work of Nancy Fraser. The paper argues that the ME campaign and other legislative changes certainly resulted in some positive developments. However, the sustainability of these developments proved tentative in the absence of systemic support to promote and legislate for LGBT inclusive curricula and the equal recognition of LGBT people in our schools. Lesbian and gay teachers continue, in the main, to experience Irish schools as overwhelmingly heteronormative institutions wherein they are subject to routine and continued misrecognition based on their sexual orientation. While not universal, this is particularly the case in the Catholic schools that feature in the lives of the teachers in this study.

Social and scholastic context

2015 was a momentous year in the struggle for full LGBT equality and recognition in the Republic of Ireland. In May of that year, a proposal to change the Constitution so that two persons may marry without distinction as to their gender (DJE, 2015a) was passed by 62% of the voting electorate. Prior to the referendum, in April 2015, the *Children and Family Relationships Act* had been enacted (DJE, 2015b) radically changing issues such as donor-assisted reproduction, guardianship, custody and access and adoption. In July 2015, the *Gender Recognition Act 2015* (DSP, 2015) was enacted, enabling transgender people to achieve full legal recognition of their preferred gender. Finally, on 8 December 2015, the *Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2015* (DJE, 2015c) was enacted amending the earlier provisions of Section 37.1 of the *Employment Equality Acts* (EEA) (DJE, 1998, 2004). Although the EEA prohibited discrimination in relation to employment based on sexual orientation, Section 37.1 of this act had excluded religious-run institutions, which retained the right to protect their religious ethos. While it had never been tested in the court system, this exemption allowed religious-run institutions to discriminate against LGBT employees on the grounds of their sexuality and was of particular importance to Irish lesbian and gay teachers.

While understood as public schools, 96% of Irish primary schools in 2010-2011 were under denominational patronage (Coolahan, Hussey, and Kilfeather, 2012), with 91.1% of these being under the patronage of the Catholic Church (Darmody, Smyth, and McCoy, 2012). The Catholic Church deems homosexuality to be "intrinsically disordered" (Libreria Edittrice Vaticana, 2003 cited in Fahie, 2016). It is unsurprising, therefore, that many Irish primary schools hitherto displayed strong elements of heteronormativity and homophobia (Fahie, 2016; Gowran, 2004; Lillis, 2009; Neary, 2019; Sheils, 2012). Prior to amendment, Section 37.1 caused significant stress for LGBT teachers, many of whom reported conflict between their personal lives and the Catholic ethos of their schools (Sheils, 2012) and was described as having an overall 'chilling effect' on LGBT teachers (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network [GLEN], 2012). Importantly, however, Neary (2013b, p. 56) predicted that "the repeal of Section 37.1 will not be a magic wand that removes the presence of homophobia or heterosexism." Furthermore, latterly, Neary (2018) alerts us to the significant gap between legislative changes and recent statistics regarding homophobia in Ireland.

This is important contextual information for those who may be employed in Irish schools. The strongly heteronormative culture of the vast majority of denominational schools in Ireland means that LGBT teachers' disclosure of sexual identity is rarely an option (Lillis, 2009; Gowran, 2004). According to Mayock, Bryan, Carr and Kitching (2009), only 9.8% of the LGBT teachers in their sample were open about their sexual orientation in work. Neary (2013b, p. 57) concludes that the inability to disclose ensures that LGBT teachers have "a myriad of multifaceted factors [which] shape their everyday negotiations of school life". Among these factors is the challenge for the LGBT teacher of having to negotiate between their personal and professional identities. Fahie (2016, p. 19) states that this fosters "a degree of tension between […] professional obligations [such] as [being] good/authentic teachers and the need to protect their privacy".

LGBT teachers must negotiate between what might be seen as split identities – their public sexual orientation and their private sexual orientation – in ways that are not the norm for heterosexual teachers (Gowran, 2004). This leads to invisibility and silencing across schools, with the wholesale denial of lesbian and gay existence among staff. For Lillis (2009), the assumption of heterosexuality positions the LGBT individual as 'not in school', which impacts on the teacher identity and interpersonal relations with teaching colleagues, the parents of pupils and pupils themselves. Along with invisibility and misrecognition, the LGBT teacher is victim to denigration in the form of homophobia (Mayock et al., 2009). All of Gowran's (2004) participants reported experiencing homophobia, whether directed at them personally or in relation to someone else. Additionally, 21.6% of Mayock et al's (2009) participants reported witnessing incidents of homophobia directed against teaching staff.

Research in the Irish context resonates clearly with findings from other jurisdictions. For example, studies examining the relationships between teachers in the USA and their students and colleagues, have found that LGBT teachers must negotiate faculty interaction carefully and make decisions about revealing their sexual orientation accordingly (Connell, 2015; McKenna-Buchanan, Munz and Rudnick 2015; Mayo, 2008; Wright and Smith, 2015). Disclosure of sexual orientation is also a serious concern among LGBT teachers in Australia (Jones, Gray and Harris, 2014; Ferfolja and Hopkins, 2013; Rasmussen, 2006), Canada (Meyer, Taylor and Tracey, 2015) and the UK (Gray, 2013).

In addition to the impact of homophobia on Irish teachers, education has the "definitively cultural task of legitimating and distributing various cultural forms and practices" (Baker et al., 2009, p. 144). Schools lay the societal benchmarks for what is deemed as acceptable or legitimate: "schools and those within them regulate and police heterosexuality and corporeal or emotional deviation from constructed heterosexual gendered norms increases one's vulnerability to harassment…" (Foucalt, 1978, cited in Ferfolja, 2013, p. 162). Furthermore, schools are also responsible for educating young citizens about local and global inequalities and injustices (NCCA, 1999). In order for the above to take place, teachers themselves need to be comfortable and invested in doing this work. This is especially the case for LGBT teachers (Lillis, 2009). Support groups such as Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) and teachers' unions, such as the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) have worked assiduously with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to provide support for LGBT teachers, and to develop resources to aid the inclusion of LGBT issues and address

homophobic and transphobic bullying in Irish schools. One really important contribution to this was the development of the *Different Families, Same Love* resource by the INTO LGBT teachers' group, available in all primary schools in Ireland since September 2015 (INTO, 2017). The resource includes good practice guidelines for inclusive schools, advice on class-appropriate use of language, and lesson ideas for classes in line with social, personal and health education (SPHE) curriculum objectives.

Although the teaching of LGBT issues is far from common practice across schools globally, research shows that those schools that have adapted LGBT inclusive curricula have seen a significant reduction in homophobia and provide a safer and more welcoming environment for LGBT students and staff. The *US National School Climate Survey* (Kosciw et al., 2015) indicated that school-based support, such as LGBT inclusive teaching, supporting educator role models and comprehensive anti-bullying policies, promotes LGBT school personnel wellbeing. US students who learned about LGBT issues at school described feeling more resilient (O'Shaugnessy et al., 2004), and reported fewer incidents of LGBT-related bullying (Russell et al., 2010; Elia and Eliason, 2010; Kosciw et al., 2008; Lipkin, 1999). Similar findings emerged from the literature in Canada (Taylor et al., 2015), Australia (Gray, 2018; Ferfolja and Stavrou, 2015; Gray and Harris, 2015; Ferfolja and Hopkins, 2013; Tiffany and Hillier, 2012) and the UK (Stonewall, 2017). Furthermore, Ferfolja and Stavrou (2015) outline the positive outcomes generated by sexual diversity policies in schools and sexual diversity professional development opportunities for staff and students. These outcomes included a reduction in homophobia experienced in the school, a greater openness in lesbian and gay teachers regarding talking about gay issues with students, colleagues and parents, and a feeling of not needing to hide one's sexuality within the school.

Rainbow recognition

Theories of recognition provide an insightful perspective for critical analysis of the experiences of LGBT teachers. Recognition is vital for the development of positive self-image. As humans, we internalise the messages we receive from those around us regarding our identity. When these messages render as illegitimate those aspects of our identity which we view as foundational, they can work to injure our perception of our own worth. Positive self-image is constructed through the receipt of positive messages about foundational aspects of our identity. When one of the interlocutors within this conversation experiences the "subtle humiliation that accompanies public statements as to the failings of a given person" (Honneth 1992, p. 189), the results can be quite deleterious.

Fraser argues for a conceptualisation of recognition as a matter of status and calls for an examination of institutionalised patterns of cultural value for their effects on the relative standing of social actors. She argues that when these patterns constitute some actors as inferior, excluded, wholly other, or simply invisible, then we can speak of misrecognition and status subordination (Fraser 2000, 113). Fraser further contends that:

> To be misrecognised... is... to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction
> and prevented from participating as a peer in social life... as a consequence of

institutionalised patterns of interpretation and evaluation that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem (Fraser 1998, 141).

Therefore, misrecognition works to "restrict how an individual relates to him/herself in relation to others and thus obstructs autonomy" (Carlson and Linville, 2016, p. 892). Fraser argues that the mode of collectivity for members of the LGBT community is one of 'despised sexuality' (Fraser 1995, p. 77). In critiquing social structures, Fraser (2000, p. 114) outlines that "misrecognition is juridified, expressly codified in formal law; in other cases, it is institutionalised via government policies, administrative codes or professional practice. It can also be institutionalised informally – in associational patterns, longstanding customs or sedimented social practices of civil society". Thus, the formal informs and supports the informal.

Methodology

Sample generation

As this study was directed at a specific, hard-to-reach population (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011), a mixture of purposive and snowball sampling (Denscombe, 2010) was employed (see Figure 1). Initial contact was made with the LGBT teachers' sub-group of the INTO, and initial participants were asked if they could suggest others who might be interested in the study from among their acquaintances.

In line with the aims of the investigation, participants needed to be primary school teachers who self-identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual, and who had worked in the Irish primary school setting before and during 2015. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that participants varied in gender, age, job status (permanent/temporary), and in the types of schools in which they have worked, e.g. ethos and gender (see Table 1). A sample of 11 participants was obtained, six women and five men, all identifying as cisgender. They ranged in age from 27 to 52 at the time of the first interview. Over the course of the two rounds of interviews, all participants were teaching in schools in Dublin, with the exception of one participant who taught in a large, suburban town outside the city.
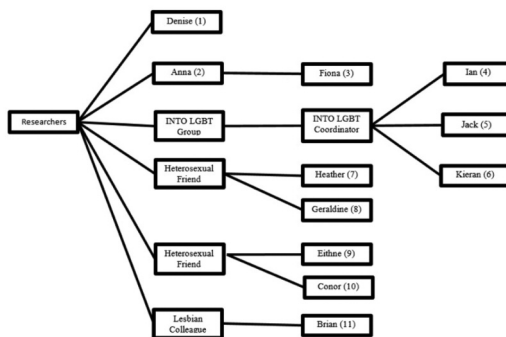

Figure 1: The use of purposive and snowball sampling in sample generation.

Table 1: Description of research participants

Name	Gender Identity	Employment Status		School Type	
		Interview 1	Interview2	Ethos	Gender of Pupils
Denise	Female	Temporary	Permanent	Catholic	Co-educational
Anna	Female	Permanent	Permanent	Catholic	Girls
Fiona	Female	Temporary	Temporary	Catholic	Co-educational
Ian	Male	Permanent	Permanent	Inter-denominational	Co-educational
Jack	Male	Permanent	Permanent	Catholic	Co-educational
Kieran	Male	Temporary	Permanent	Multi-denominational	Co-educational
Heather	Female	Temporary	Permanent	Multi-denominational	Co-educational
Geraldine	Female	Permanent	Permanent	Catholic	Boys
Eithne	Female	Permanent	Permanent	Catholic	Co-educational
Conor	Male	Permanent	Permanent	Catholic	Co-educational
Brian	Male	Permanent	Permanent	Catholic	Boys

Data Collection

Data were generated through semi-structured interviews. Two rounds of interviews were conducted, the first between December 2015 and February 2016 and the second between March and April 2017. Questions on the initial interview schedule explored participants' own experiences of schooling, why they decided to choose teaching as a career, their experiences on their programmes of initial teacher education, and the process of seeking employment as a gay or lesbian person. Questions also explored their relationships with colleagues, pupils and parents. Participants were asked about their experiences in school life before and during the ME referendum, and now, after the referendum, and their experiences with the amendment of Section 37.1. Participants were also asked about their personal engagement, and the engagement of their school, with recent, national, pedagogical initiatives targeting homophobia, in particular the INTO *Different Families, Same Love* initiative. The follow-up interview explicitly explored perceptions of the sustainability of any of forms of recognition described in the initial interviews. Thus, the questions were tailored for the individual participants. Discussion about the INTO initiative served as a focus point for investigating the sustainability of positive change. Interviews ranged from half-an-hour to just under two hours, with the average interview time being approximately 40 minutes.

Data analysis

Data consisted of 22 interview transcripts and attendant field notes. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms were used to conceal participants' real names, the names of schools and any further identifying information. Ireland's educational community is quite small, so all efforts were made to minimise identification. Initial coding was undertaken at sentence level, with over 260 sentences coded in the first round of interviews and over 290 in the second. Coding was undertaken in line with the constant comparative method (Merriam, 2009). This involved simultaneously coding and analysing data to develop themes,

continuing to compare experiences in the data to refine these themes and their relationships to one another. Themes that arose from the first round of interviews included:

(1) displays of heteronormativity in schools;

(2) homophobia;

(3) self-censorship of personal lives on the part of participants;

(4) silence and lack of recognition surrounding homosexuality;

(5) job precarity and fear around employment equality legislation;

(6) positive changes brought by the marriage equality campaign; and

(7) displays of resistance against marriage equality and pedagogical initiatives targeting homophobia.

Coding of the second round of interviews focussed on themes five, six and seven above and are the focal points of this paper. Finally, member checking (Creswell and Miller, 2000) with participants was employed to establish the trustworthiness of the data.

Positionality

The first author, who undertook all of the interviews, identifies within the LGBT community. She has experience of working in schools in Ireland in a variety of roles but maintained a silence about her sexuality when working in schools with a religious ethos. In the context of the research, reciprocity was felt to be ethically and methodologically important the interviewer therefore disclosed her sexuality when approaching possible participants. It was found that this fostered a willingness to engage with the research and contributed to the basis of trust, which was so central to the research project. The second author identifies as an LGBT ally (Jones, Brewster and Jones, 2014).

Findings

Recognition of lesbian and gay teachers during the marriage equality referendum

Most of the participants described the ME campaign as a positive time in their school, where change and awareness were generated through discourse of LGBT existence and rights to equality. Throughout the interviews, positive changes were noted across many tiers of the school population.

The most encouraging findings to emerge from the study were the many reports of positivity displayed by pupils towards ME; not one report of any pupil, across any school, expressing negativity towards LGBT rights during the ME campaign emerged. According to Denise, "[t]hey were asking me what I was going to vote, and I just put it back on them and they said, 'I don't understand why you wouldn't vote yes'. They were all extremely positive". Participants reported that the children were speaking about LGBT rights on a day-to-day basis. Brian, for example, noted how "it was constantly coming up in News Today[1]".

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1 News Today is a literacy activity carried out generally on a Monday whereby pupils report their news from the weekend and the teacher may facilitate discussion around these topics and write them in report format to be used as a writing task for pupils.

Participants claimed that discourse around this topic educated pupils on what was previously viewed as a "taboo" subject. This seemed to affect the levels of pupil homophobia. Six participants pointed out that they were yet to hear the word 'gay' being used by pupils in a derogatory way since the start of 2015. Conor observed that "[t]here's no snigger like there used be". These findings coincide with Norman and Galvin's (2006) claim that the act of homophobia can be related to a pupil's limited personal experience of LGBT issues. When pupils were afforded the opportunity to discuss and learn about LGBT rights, their negative use of LGBT terms appeared to be reduced.

Denise believed that much of the positivity coming from the pupils over the ME referendum was fuelled by their parents. Brian also reported positive parental support; indeed, once ME was voted in and Brian and his partner got engaged, parents came in to congratulate him. Furthermore, in the run-up to his wedding, one parent expressed confusion as to why he wasn't telling the children about his "good news" and that it was a something to "celebrate". Brian's experience is particularly progressive when compared with Lillis's (2009) findings and is particularly telling as Brian teaches in a Catholic school.

Many of the participants reported an improvement in the level of recognition they received from their teaching colleagues over the ME referendum. It seemed the ME campaign shone a light on the existence of LGBT people and families, which in turn removed the taboo and allowed for a space for LGBT people to be asked about or discuss their everyday lives. Anna, Conor, Geraldine and Eithne, for example, expressed how their colleagues had started to acknowledge the existence of their partners. Anna reported that the referendum campaign instigated conversations around the lives of LGBT people. This created the opportunity to disclose her sexual orientation to her teaching colleagues. Anna declared that "they would now ask how [her] girlfriend is". Most notably, for Geraldine, the oldest participant of this study, the legislative changes of 2015 meant that she could now "finally share" about her partner who she deemed as "absent" in school discourse before this. After 25 years of "hiding it" she proceeded, over a "nerve-wracking" two days, to disclose her sexual orientation to each of her colleagues. She did this individually, by informing them of her plan to marry her female partner. Her disclosure was received very positively: "[W]hat I'm really surprised about is that so many people were overjoyed for me. I'm looking around and I am stunned by some of the beautiful reactions that I've received from people". ME afforded Geraldine the opportunity to marry her long-term partner and share this news with her teaching colleagues, positioning her as a peer capable of equally participating with them in social life. Geraldine described the liberation this time brought to her professional life:

> The deep breath that I was able to take, it was such a deep breath of relief. I feel this enormous weight just pushed back, lifted. I feel freer in myself. I feel I'm a bit more vocal because actually in my staffroom I was very silent. It's more I don't have to be worrying about what I say.

Support from the school principal for the inclusion of LGBT issues during the school day over the ME referendum varied for the participants. Anna, who worked in a Catholic school, commented that her principal seemed to avoid the fact it was happening. Furthermore,

Geraldine's principal, also working in a Catholic school, stated that she wanted the school to be neutral during the campaign and requested a pupil to remove the 'Tá'[2] badge that they had worn into school. However, many participants reported acts of support and positivity from their principals over this period. Contrary to Anna and Geraldine's experience, although Eithne was cautious, her principal showed enthusiasm for the display of the yes campaign badges in their Catholic school:

> I would have worn the badge in – the Irish one 'Tá'. I actually brought them into school and asked [name of principal], 'Is it alright if I wear this?' She looked at me and said 'Of course it is' and asked if she could have one of them, to wear herself.

Kieran's principal in a multi-denominational school showed huge upfront support by suggesting he should leave school early the Friday of the ME referendum vote, to allow him to travel home in good time to meet his family and cast his vote.

In October 2015, within the first term of school following the passing of the ME referendum, the *Different Families, Same Love* poster and accompanying lesson plans were distributed to schools all over Ireland. As of February 2016, four of the 11 participants had displayed the poster in their classrooms: Kieran (multi-denominational school), Ian (inter-denominational school), Anna and Fiona (Catholic schools). Kieran's school fully embraced this resource:

> It has been put up everywhere. It's up in every single classroom, in corridors, on doors. They are all behind this idea that this is a school for all kinds of children, for all kinds of family, for all kinds of teachers.

Ian's school also embraced this resource. He stated that he and many of his teaching colleagues had utilised the lesson plans as part of SPHE planning, and in support of this, his principal suggested to him that they should also invest in some LGBT inclusive books for the school. Anna and Fiona put the poster up in their classrooms and carried out a lesson plan around it. However, they were the only teachers in their schools to do so.

Contrary to this, Heather, who was on a temporary contract in a multi-denominational school, explained that the posters were up in her school. However, for reasons of conflict between her obligations as a good/authentic teacher and her need to protect her privacy (Fahie 2016) she had not yet put it up in her classroom. In line with Neary (2014), Heather emphasised that she was on a temporary contract and therefore did not want pupils or parents finding out that she was lesbian. She feared that introducing the poster could put her in a situation where she might find herself having to be dishonest to her pupils in order to protect her privacy:

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2 'Tá' is an Irish language word, used to answer in the affirmative to the question about ME in the referendum.

I'm just really afraid of opening a can of worms. I'm not sure if I am comfortable enough or secure enough within myself and within my job to be able to talk openly to the children. If the children have questions and they're asking me about my personal life, and if I have to lie to them, then I feel bad as I am not doing a good job of being a teacher.

Jack attempted to introduce the poster in his Catholic school, but "was specifically told not to by [his principal]". When he tried to discuss this with her, she said that "[they] are not using that poster unless the Department of Education requires us to".

Thus, it is clear that the ME campaign helped to advance respect and recognition for some components of the teaching lives of the participants. However, the evidence that less than half of the participants were willing or able to utilise the INTO resource, accords strongly with Fahie's (2016) assertion that issues relating to sexuality in the classroom continue to create an intolerable level of discomfort for gay and lesbian teachers. Neary and Rasmussen (2019) conclude that the reluctance to teach about gender and sexuality diversity in Irish primary schools is due to the entanglement of sexual progress and childhood innocence that exists in our schools. The ME campaign brought with it an assumed continuation of progressiveness that provided cover for the undercurrent of reluctance towards LGBT+ inclusive teaching (Neary and Rasmussen, 2019). In this context, it was important to establish if any of the advancements evident in the first round of interviews would remain following the reduction in the general social positivity surround ME campaign. Would they have enough impact going forward to disrupt the heteronormative culture (Neary, 2013a) of Irish schools, or would even these gains be lost again over time?

Sustainability of changes

The progression noted in the form of positive recognition of participants' LGBT lives by their teaching colleagues, seemed to remain relatively stable into the second round of interviews. The ME campaign afforded a degree of freedom from the previous hindrance of constant self-censorship. Denise stated that she now "would talk more freely about everything in the staffroom." Jack told of how his colleagues continue to recognise his sexuality during lunchtime chat: "They would ask 'How are you? Anybody on the scene?'". Both Conor and Brian's partners were invited to staff weddings in the year in question, as were the partners of their straight colleagues. Geraldine, who got married during the past year, speaks of how "people see me differently, they actually see me as 'being married'. That gives you some credence. They now speak about [name of wife]. [She] is named. I name her, they name her."

This may appear as the achievement of reciprocal recognition and status equality with straight colleagues. However, with the exception of Kieran and Eithne, participants whose colleagues give recognition to their personal lives, do so only on a one-to-one basis during the school day or in a group of three or less while in the staffroom. Participants indicated that their colleagues may still be under the impression that participants' LGBT lives should only be spoken about privately. Ian, for example, recounted that 'in the open arena of the staffroom they don't ask me about him'. Fiona had changed employment to another Catholic

school since the first interview, and illustrated the discomfort displayed separately by two of her new colleagues after she spoke of her 'girlfriend' in open conversation within the school. Fiona described that "it was very clear that she [her colleague] was uncomfortable and kind of like 'Oh no, don't talk to me about it' kind of just backing away". Fiona derived from this interaction that her colleagues "mightn't then feel it's appropriate to say across a table or when it's not a one-on-one situation". Another colleague returned to Fiona to "reassure" her: "don't worry, I won't tell anyone", indicating again that it was something not to be spoken about openly in the school. Both Heather and Ian expressed reservations that if they were to get married, whether their marriages would be recognised through celebration, equally to that of their straight colleagues, within the school community. Thus, according to Ian:

> I don't know if I was getting married would there be the same celebrations. I don't know if there would be two male balloons brought out. I still think there would be reservations about a same-sex wedding being celebrated in front of the children.

While all but one participant in this study was retained in their school from interview one to interview two, important information emerged regarding employment circumstances for both Fiona and Anna. As Fiona was on a temporary contract, it was required of her to re-interview with her school to retain her teaching position for the 2016/2017 school year. Despite doing so, Fiona was not re-employed by that school. Fiona expressed that she felt her school "had their suspicions" about her sexuality, and that this fundamentally stood against her being kept on. She felt the interview panel prioritised questions about how she would uphold the Catholic ethos of the school, while ignoring her previous contributions to other elements of school life, such as co-curricular activities. Importantly, a senior member of staff had warned Fiona the year before, against wearing a badge in support of ME:

> I was wearing the 'Yes' badge one of the days in school. I was walking out and one of the senior teachers was like "I would hide that badge if I was you" and I asked "Why?" and she said "Oh, I would like to see you in the school a bit longer".

Anna underwent interview for promotional opportunity during the 2016/2017 school year. On discussing how she had kept her sexuality a secret in school other than with her closest colleagues, Anna stated that she was glad she had done this as she believed it would have negatively affected her interview chances.

Of the 11 participants in this study, Kieran was the only one who did not actively hide his sexual orientation from his pupils. Although seven of the 11 participants expressed a desire to be open, the barrier of resistance in the perceived possibility of participants to be honest and 'out' to their pupils is still very much intact. Participants confirmed that fear of judgement from parents stands firmly as the main reason for this. Fiona expressed "you hear comments and that from parents. I would be worried that it wouldn't go down well with parents. I think the children would be fine, but the parents probably not".

Some teachers indicated slippage in pupils' respect and recognition of LGBT rights. For example, three participants reported hearing the word 'gay' being used as an insult by pupils during the 2016/2017 academic year. Interestingly, in the light of Norman and Galvin's (2006) findings, these three participants had not utilised the INTO poster or carried out any lessons around LGBT rights. On the contrary, participants that reported a continuation of pupil positivity towards LGBT rights, and who specified that they had yet to hear homophobia among pupils in their school since the ME referendum, are those that had specifically used the INTO poster and/or addressed LGBT issues from a positive standpoint that year.

The number of participants that had used the poster and accompanying lesson plans upon release in the 2015/2016 school year remained the same for the 2016/2017 school year, four out of 11. However, the 2016/2017 school year brought with it notably more support from three principals, those of the three non-Catholic schools in the study: Kieran's (multi-denominational school), Heather's (multi-denominational school) and Ian's (inter-denominational). This support ensured the posters and lesson plans were entered into the school SPHE policy as something to be utilised every year as part of relationship and sexuality education at all class level across the school. Kieran, Heather and Ian reported that the resource was then utilised not only in their own classrooms, but in most classrooms in their schools. Anna, employed in a Catholic school, was the only participant to use the poster and lessons plans this year when it was not part of her school policy, and she was the only teacher in her school to use it. Geraldine illustrates what happens when it's left on the shoulders of the "gay member of staff" to fight for LGBT inclusion in the school day ("fly the flag"). Despite her efforts nobody in her school had used the poster or lesson plans. She spoke of how her staff were not necessarily "against" using them, but that there was a silence and a lack of execution:

> Although my principal said to me that the poster is great and we have to put it up, there's a big gap between saying and it actually happening or being discussed. I don't want to be putting myself out there to be promoting all the LGBT issues as they are not just my issues, they're issues for all the kids and their extending families.

Heather described the difference it made to her when it was written into school policy:

> Ok, It's in the policy now so I know I have backup and I'm not going out here on my own taking this big risk by teaching these lessons that nobody else is teaching. We're all teaching these lessons and we're all creating this acceptance and awareness now so it's not just me... so because I knew I had that support; I was very confident.

Fiona, who used the poster and lesson plans in 2015/2016, had since changed to another Catholic school and decided against using the resources the following year since she had not seen them up anywhere in her new school and remained hesitant to introduce it herself. Jack stated that despite his efforts in his school, "Nobody is using it still". He also shared that "the poster was in fact taken by [his] principal to the board of management and they said that it couldn't be used as it was against their Catholic ethos". This is a prime example of the strength

of denominational ethos in the maintenance of heteronormative school structures, an issue consistent with previous reports (Fahie, 2016; Gowran, 2004; Lillis, 2009; Neary, 2019; Sheils, 2012). Jack spoke in depth of how his school's Catholic ethos is used as an "excuse" to reject and prevent LGBT visibility within his school. Brian, who had sought out the poster but had yet to utilise it in his classroom, explained how he had put off using it out of fear that it conflicted with his school's Catholic ethos and felt it would be necessary to speak with his principal first. Participants' reports of where the proposed inclusion of LGBT issues was explicitly challenged, identified specific religious school figures who sought to uphold the religious ethos of the school. Anna, for example, spoke of how a nun attached to the order associated with her school, and the principal of her school, were both against the idea of an anti-homophobic bullying bulletin board, which could be used to display the poster and other relevant material. Furthermore, Denise reported that during the ME campaign, a nun on staff spoke out against addressing LGBT issues to children in the run-up to the referendum. While the sample size and methodology in no way establish causation, it is important, nonetheless, to note this potential link. It is also noteworthy that the only schools which forbid or deliberately prevented the use of the material, were Catholic schools.

Discussion

Rainbow recognition or rancour redux?

Despite some minor gains for some of the participants over the period in question, it is clear that Irish lesbian and gay teachers continue to experience routine and continued misrecognition on the basis of their sexual orientation. It would appear that only two teachers, Kieran and Eithne, experienced anything approaching the status of a full partner in their social interactions (Fraser, 1998) in their places of work. Yet, even Eithne, who has witnessed parental homophobia, cannot fully participate as a peer in her profession. Kieran is the only participant in this study to be unproblematically out to all partners and across all tiers within his school. This singular position sets his school up as unique across the schools in this study. There is no doubt that Irish LGBT teachers continue to experience social interactions within their school that constitute them as "comparatively unworthy of respect of esteem" (Fraser, 1998, p.141). While these may not be consistent and all-encompassing, it serves to devalue their sense of self-worth in relation to their professional identity and obstructs their sense of autonomy (Carlson and Linville, 2016). While the public discourse attendant to the ME campaign, and the aligned legislative changes, succeeded in challenging a certain degree of the misrecognition of lesbian and gay teachers in Ireland, such rainbow recognition is, for the most part, a fragile phenomenon. The continued erasure of participants' sexual identity from curricular initiatives, the re-emergence of homophobic insults by pupils and the silo-ing of conversations about partners with colleagues into one-to-one interactions provides evidence of this.

It is the assertion of the authors of this paper that the main reason for misrecognition of lesbian and gay teachers' lives in Irish primary schools lies within church/state relations. While it is evident from the foregoing that certain schools eschew or circumvent the obligations of their Catholic ethos to provide a more inclusive school culture for their staff,

and perhaps their pupils and families, this is not the norm across this sector of Irish primary schools. There is ample evidence that principals and managers continue to employ school ethos to frustrate social change and obfuscate drives towards sexuality equality. While difficult to prove in the context of those areas now legislated for, protection of ethos continues to be drawn on in support of the sedimented social practices of civil society (Fraser, 2000) which lie outside of legislation, such as LGBT pedagogical initiatives.

Conclusion

In 2014, Neary argued that the removal of Section 37.1 would not act as a magic wand in the erasure of homophobia in Irish schools (Neary, 2013b). Full recognition for lesbian and gay teachers demands this erasure. The heightened emphasis on LGBT rights through the ME campaign created a temporary space within which aspects of homophobia across Irish society were open to challenge. These challenges were also experienced within Irish primary schools. The teachers in this study reported examples of greater recognition of their sexual identity by some of their colleagues and the wider school community. This was particularly evident in the acknowledgement given by some colleagues and parents to the existence of their partners, the absence of verbal, homophobic insults previously common between pupils, and very clear commitment to LGBT rights by certain pupils. While these moments of recognition certainly improved the experiences of these teachers, there was a continued sense that they remained comparatively unworthy of full respect. Thus, many positive experiences of recognition during the ME campaign, emerged as fragile phenomena in follow up interviews. While not uniform, this is particularly the case in certain Catholic schools, where misrecognition based on their lesbian and gay teachers' "despised sexuality" (Fraser, 1995, p. 77) is maintained. This is acutely the case in relation to pedagogical initiatives which affirm the participants' own sexual identity, such as the *Different Families, Same Love* campaign. The institutionalised misrecognition of these teachers' identities via school policies, which forbid such initiatives, and many of their colleagues' professional practice, whereby they refuse to use the materials, shows the disparity between theory and practice, and deprives gay and lesbian teachers of their lawful recognition. The modicum of oxygen afforded to such initiatives by the more genial discourse on LGBT issues during the ME campaign, has been steadfastly contained.

Institutionalising respect and recognition require radically robust responses on the part of the partners in Irish education. This will include, but will not be limited to, continued public emphasis and legislative support for the use of LGBT appropriate material and content in all Irish schools, situated within broader political actions targeting sustained cultural change within our schools and systems. Until then, flurries of rainbow recognition will remain the exception to the rule.

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