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STER eJournal
Special Issue



The STER e-journal is a core output of the STER project, a national higher education initiative that supports education students to share their dissertation research. The STER project actively contributes to building students' research and dissemination capacity by encouraging them to articulate the impact of research on practice and ensuring that they contribute to research-rich environments where practice is investigated, collaboration is valued, and knowledge is shared.

The STER project is a partnership between staff and student volunteers who are committed to promoting a student-led approach to research dissemination. I would like to thank the team of volunteers from Marino Institute of Education who participated in the STER project in 2022, it has been a pleasure to work closely with students and staff who recognise the value of partnership for teaching and learning. I would also like to extend thanks to Marino Institute of Education for providing essential funding for the STER project in 2022.

This is the first ever Special Issue of the STER e-journal, and I'd like to extend my sincere thanks to our Guest Editor, Dr Barbara O'Toole, for her contribution to this fifth volume. Articles focus specifically on the topic of Intercultural Education and have been prepared by education students and graduates of Marino Institute of Education, Dublin, National University of Ireland, Galway and Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. All articles are based on students' undergraduate or postgraduate dissertation research and have undergone a double-blind peer review process. I would like to congratulate all student authors on the quality of their research articles and on their engagement with the publication and peer review process. STER is delighted to support you in taking the first step of your academic publishing journey.

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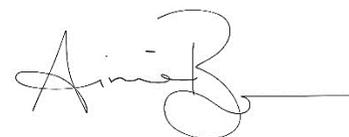
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Message from the Student Team

We are delighted to be back working face-to-face for the STER project 2022. This year, we have been exploring the theme: ‘Education Research: Insights, Innovation and Inspiration’. Over the past few months, we have worked together to ensure that the project and the e-journal embody a collaborative, student-led approach to research dissemination.

The STER e-journal is unique in that it is designed, led and delivered by education students, for education students. The project places education students and graduates at the heart of its research dissemination process. It is a pioneering initiative designed with the main goal of supporting education students and teachers to participate in an engaged education community of scholars and learners.

This year, the e-journal features articles written by students and graduates based on their dissertation research on Intercultural Education. We hope this Special Issue will be of interest to our fellow student cohort, to student graduates and to practicing teachers, by providing insights into the field of education research. We also hope that these articles provide some inspiration and innovation for those who are just beginning their research journey. Well done to all authors, we hope you are very proud to have your work included in this Special Issue.

STER Student Team 2022

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The Irish Intercultural Education Guidelines for Primary Schools, which I helped develop, are now sixteen years old. The guidelines were written in an Ireland before the great recession, and at a time when immigration seemed like still a relatively new phenomenon. They were written in a time before the resurgent nationalism of Brexit and the Trump years, and before the emergence of new global movements for greater equality such as BLM. Given all that has happened in the intervening period, it would be sensible to ask whether or not the guidelines are still fit for purpose. As I have not lived in Ireland or participated in Irish educational debates much over the last decade, I am definitely not the person to propose how revised guidelines might look. But I will offer some reflections on how the Guidelines might be different if they were to be developed today.

One of the things that made the guidelines quite notable when they were first published was that they included quite a few references to the role of emotion both in racism and in intercultural learning. At the time this was quite new: there was little focus on emotion in the academic work on multicultural and intercultural education at the time: for example, while the Scopus research database today shows 113 articles on emotion and intercultural (or multicultural or antiracist) education, only 5 of those articles pre-date the guidelines.

The late 1990s and early 2000s was the period of the “emotional revolution” in psychology and sociology. Influenced by the work Hoffman (2000) on the role of empathy in contributing to pro-social behaviour, the guidelines did place some emphasis on working on emotional dimensions in both questions of discrimination and of human connection. In the years since the guidelines were published the research on the socio-emotional dimension of connection and of discrimination has moved on in leaps and bounds. There is now much more evidence on the role of emotions in moral decision making (e.g., Haidt, 2007) and on the emotions – such as anger, fear, and guilt – experienced by the comparatively privileged during intercultural education (e.g., DiAngelo, 2011). This in turn highlights the needs for a social and emotional learning approach to intercultural education. While this was flagged in the guidelines, I would expect guidelines written today to pay much more attention to this dimension. One of the things that is perhaps better understood now than sixteen years ago, is that emotions are intrinsically linked to our position with respect to other people – our social position (Tormey, 2021). Emotions like love (or liking) position us as being within the same social group as others, while emotions like fear, anxiety can position us as distant from others. Emotions also carry

information about our perceived status with respect to others - emotions like anger and disdain tell us that we see ourselves as in some way superior to others – as being in positions of power (hence we often see anger when comparatively privileged people are challenged through intercultural education).

This link between intercultural education and power is worth unpicking a little. Intercultural policy in Ireland has been critiqued as normalising a power hierarchy with white, heterosexual, Irish-born, settled, Catholics being cemented in a position of benevolent power with respect to those identified as the ‘Other’, who are celebrated only so long as they have something to offer the ‘national us’ (Bryan, 2010). Indeed, Bryan sees the Guidelines in this context as being little more than ‘celebratory interculturalism’ and dismisses them as offering little more than an ‘add-diversity-and-stir’ approach to curriculum. To someone who was deeply involved in the discussions which produced the guidelines, this seems a little unfair: the Intercultural Education Guidelines were not the product of some faceless “Irish state” apparatus, but the results of long discussions between many educational actors and members of a range of communities in Ireland and took very seriously questions of discrimination and inequality. As a result, the Guidelines undoubtedly went much further than many other comparable documents at the time in asking principals and teachers to consider how power operated in the school. The guidelines actually explicitly highlighted that intercultural education is not simply about celebrating diversity, for example, and that identifying and challenging discrimination was a key component of intercultural work. Indeed, they went further and offered an explicit account of institutional and indirect racism and highlighted, for example, that school admission policies that do not take account of nomadism were institutionally racist (p. 15). The guidelines also highlight that intercultural education required a systematic analysis of school policies and practices and proposed that the curriculum be used as a tool for teaching students about challenging discrimination.

But even if the guidelines probably had a lot more to them than educational researchers have always recognised, the guidelines themselves do not explicitly mention the concept of power. It is interesting to compare this to the Senior Cycle Politics and Society specification (developed by some of the same people as the Intercultural Education guidelines) which was launched in 2016. By the time we got to Politics and Society the concept of power was no longer implicit – topic 1 of strand 1 is called “Power and decision-making in the school” – and the rest of the syllabus builds on this. Politics and Society does this, for example, by explicitly requiring that students look at and problematize how ‘Irish’ identity is represented in the school curriculum (Topic 7). If the Intercultural guidelines were being re-written tomorrow, I would expect that, like the Politics and Society specification, they would be much more explicit in addressing the question of power: who has power in schools and in

classrooms, how is that power made to seem legitimate through representations of ‘us’ and ‘other’, and who is benefiting most from the rules and practices that are produced as a result?

The question of power also raises the question as to how revised guidelines could be developed and implemented. Curriculum guidelines have a certain power, but they do not determine what happens in classrooms. Rather, they provide a reference point and a resource to which teachers, principals, and educational researchers (but, unfortunately, rarely children) can refer to support and justify the educational decisions they make. It is possible (perhaps probable), for example, that many teachers and schools ignored the bits of the Guidelines which encouraged them to review their own practices for evidence of direct or indirect racism and to teach about discrimination and inequality. It is possible that, had the guidelines been supported with more continuing professional development, they might have been used by schools and teachers in a way which seemed less like ‘celebratory interculturalism’.

For that to be possible, however, the issue of power would have to be dealt with within of the design of continuing professional development (Wallen and Tormey, 2019). Ultimately any curriculum document is dead until the moment it is lived into being by teachers and learners. Guidelines provide a resource and a framework, but principals, teachers, students, and educational researchers bring the curriculum to life through the bits they chose to pay attention to and the bits they chose to ignore. Sixteen years on from the guideline’s somethings haven’t changed. Those of us with positions of power in classrooms and educational institutions – teachers, principals, curriculum developers, lecturers, and educational researchers – still need to challenge our own assumptions: to reflect, explore, and get out of our comfort zone without at the same time becoming paralyzed by analysis and indecision.

Viewed through this lens, this volume of research by beginning teachers about intercultural education in Ireland is incredibly heartening. It is through work like this that the concept and the practice of intercultural education will be renewed and reimagined in an ever-developing environment.

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Attitudes towards immigrant children and their heritage languages within the Irish education system.



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KEYWORDS: Primary Education, Language, Interculturalism, Heritage Language.

INTRODUCTION

This article explores the position and importance attributed to immigrant children's home or heritage languages within the Irish education system. In particular, it examines teachers' perceptions towards using immigrant children's heritage languages as an academic resource to support additional language learning. Additionally, it analyses the importance given to immigrant students' heritage languages as a marker of identity. The intent is to provide a brief synopsis from a larger piece of research conducted for an undergraduate dissertation. This article aims to identify:

- To what extent are immigrant children's heritage languages being integrated into the Irish education system's vision of Irishness and nationhood?
- The level of importance placed on immigrants' heritage languages within the education system as an academic resource and marker of identity.
- Teachers' perceptions towards diversity and immigrants' heritage languages.

The results present evidence that immigrant children's heritage languages are yet to be fully integrated into the Irish education system as a resource for additional language learning and are yet to be given full recognition as an important aspect of the child's identity. The hope is that providing a focus on immigrants' language education will encourage educators to adopt more inclusive approaches, as well as provide motivation to further their knowledge in the area. The ideal goal is to progress towards more inclusive and plurilingual educational policies and practices.

CONTEXT

Prior to the 1990s Ireland had limited experience of inward migration. This changed during the economic boom, where the number of immigrants entering Ireland accelerated rapidly (McGinnity, Grotti, Russell & Fahey, 2018). This event diversified the population to a degree not seen in modern Irish history, with 10% of primary school students now immigrants or children of immigrants (Heinz & Keane, 2018). Roughly 182 languages are spoken in Ireland, with 612,000 people speaking languages other than English or Irish at home, which translates to roughly three children in every classroom (CSO, 2017; O'Connor, 2018). The diverse cultures that immigrants bring are changing Ireland's demographics and creating an increasingly complex multilingual context in which to teach languages (Cummins & Ó Duibhir, 2012). Consequently, the Irish education system must adapt in congruence with the students for which it caters. However, evidence shows that more support is required, particularly surrounding immigrant children's integration and academic achievement.

Immigrants report feeling less like they belong in school than native Irish pupils (Schleicher, 2015). This feeling can be exacerbated by racist attitudes and beliefs (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2005) and the undervaluing of their heritage languages and identities. An example includes an interview with a second-generation immigrant in England, who describes his experience of multilingualism as "when I go down into town sometimes I don't speak Punjabi as loudly as I might like to do because I might get some funny comments from people in the street" (Conteh, 2018, p.36). This highlights the child's awareness of possible reactions towards their multilingual abilities. Additionally, academic achievement gaps are increasing between immigrants and native Irish pupils, particularly regarding literacy (Shiel, Kelleher, McKeown, & Denner, 2016). Upon entering the Irish education system, immigrants need to quickly attain the level of English competency required for academic success (Skinner & O'Toole, 2018). The longer it takes them to reach this required level, the more difficult it becomes to succeed as the curriculum's language demands increase in successive years, forcing immigrants to chase a moving target.

The benefits and importance of maintaining children's heritage languages for their school experience and academic achievement are well documented. First, Little (2010, p. 16) states the "use of the home-language at school affirms the migrant pupil's identity and helps to counteract any tendency to stigmatise him or her for membership of a group that is perceived as linguistically inferior". Second, Sierens & Van Avermaet (2014) find that at a minimum, learning through two languages does not impede language skills development in the child's second language. At best, extensive research shows that these language skills are simultaneously progressed and sustained in the child's first language (Bialystok, 2016). This reflects Cummins' (2011) Interdependence of Languages Theory, where a strong base in the heritage language supports the acquisition of second language; as although on the surface languages appear different, underlying conceptual understandings can be transferred from one language to another. For instance, learning to use capital letters in one language can be applied in the second language (Conteh, 2018). Therefore, simultaneously learning both languages acts synergistically to develop each faster than if learned separately.

Despite these benefits, the two most used language education models in Ireland are immersion and withdrawal approaches, neither of which encourage the development of the child's heritage language (Department of Education and Skills, 2012). Schools with few children learning English as an additional language commonly use immersion approaches as this is most practical (Wallen & Kelly-Holmes, 2006). These pupils are placed in a mainstream class and taught through the language of instruction. This is also known as the 'sink or swim' approach as few supports are in place for additional language learning (Skinner & O'Toole, 2018). In the Irish context, withdrawal approaches are where immigrant children are integrated in the mainstream class and learning support teachers withdraw them in small groups for weekly supplementary teaching (DES, 2012). Since the introduction of the new Special Education Teaching (SET) Model in 2017, provisions for EAL learners have been combined with support for Special Educational Needs (DES, 2017a). While the model was introduced to provide schools with greater autonomy, allowing them to divide allocations between language and learning support as they deem appropriate, Gardiner-Hyland & Burke (2018) highlight issues with this combined approach. These include the non-existent or limited inclusion of EAL learners in documents and guidelines aimed at supporting teachers under the new model. Fundamentally, they find a lack of support and emphasis on supporting EAL learners under the new model.

While immersion and withdrawal approaches are still most commonly used, Ireland is beginning to make positive progress in encouraging the transfer of skills between languages, with the introduction of the new Primary Language Curriculum. Prior to 2019, the teaching of English, Irish and foreign languages had been compartmentalised, with little emphasis on encouraging the transfer of skills between languages or the recognition of immigrants' prior language skills (Cummins & Ó Duibhir, 2012). The introduction of the new Primary Language Curriculum, aims to overcome these limitations by teaching the English and Irish language through similarly structured curricula, encouraging teachers to promote the transfer of skills between languages (NCCA, 2018). However, the introduction of this language curriculum is relatively new and requires further research to identify the level success in meeting its aims and placing a greater emphasis on first languages.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilises documentary analysis which is the “systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic” (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). It is a form of qualitative research, where data is collected from documents including published literature, curricula, and policies, which informed the findings and analysis of this article. These documents were collected from databases, search engines and libraries such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, Marino Institute of Education Library and Trinity College's TARA repository. The analytic procedure involved “finding, selecting, appraising, and synthesising data contained in documents” (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). Using a method of coding, the information gathered was then organised into themes which formed the article's main findings and discussion.

The results are used to explore the historical influences that affected the evolution of the current education system and to identify how this impacts the approaches taken towards multilingual education. It then evaluates the present multilingual policies and practices, including comparison against language education theory, international best practice, and their implementation within primary schools. Finally, immigrants' experiences within the classroom are explored.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The main finding of this research is that residual effects from historical nationalist ideology, and contemporary monolingual perspectives have reduced the emphasis placed on intercultural and multilingual education, as well as decelerated progress in adapting language policies (Barnett et al., 2007; Wallen & Kelly-Holmes, 2006; DES, 2005).

Hierarchical power relations within the Irish education system and society place immigrant children in subordinate positions, despite the evident importance of heritage languages to immigrant children's success. It is necessary to consider the concept of 'Power' when conducting research in relation to immigrant children's education. BouAynaya (2016) describes 'national identity' as a social construct created by political elites as a means of maintaining governance. This is normally achieved by enhancing social cohesion through the creation of a unified, homogenous national identity. The state and powerful elite have the sufficient levels of financial, social, and cultural capital needed to create self-advantageous identities (Schmidt & McDaid, 2015). Therefore, these groups have the power to include or exclude those that do not fit into this categorisation, creating societal barriers (Best, 2016). This tends to construct a narrow and exclusionary definition of "Irishness". Consequently, subordinate groups that do not match this identity frequently form in society. To be accepted, they must discard their own identity and assimilate. Cummins (1996) notes that schools replicate society's values and attitudes. This main finding is evident within several areas of the education system and society:

HISTORY AND STRUCTURING OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM.

These power-relations are evident in the history and structuring of the education system. Historical nationalist ideologies slowed the pace at which the Irish education system adapted to and addressed multilingual education. For instance, when Ireland became a free state in 1922, responsibility for the Irish cultural revival was placed on schools, in particular the promotion of the Irish-language and the Catholic religion, to provide a marked contrast against the colonial education system introduced in 1831 (Coolahan, 2012). The first attempt to create a new curriculum in 1922, had a large emphasis on the Irish language, often to the detriment of other subjects. This set the framework for all curricula for the next 50 years. Though each had modifications, none changed the underlying nationalist philosophy or ideologies. While there was call for reform around 1924, a report from the Council of Education supported the status quo, adding to the stagnation of the education system (Walsh, 2016).

LANGUAGE EDUCATION MODELS.

This perspective can still be seen in today i.e., the Irish education system is theoretically bilingual (English/Irish), in a largely English-monolingual society, that is becoming increasingly multilingual. Suitable language education models must be chosen to match the needs and abilities of the children it supports. However, this is frequently not the case in Ireland, with reasons for choosing a language education model often being ideological, logistical, or traditional (Barnett et al., 2007). This is seen in the most frequently chosen language education models, immersion, and withdrawal approaches,

neither of which focus on developing or using the child's heritage language as an academic resource; a lack of emphasis compounded by the 2017 SET Model. A plurilingual classroom is one where multiple languages are learned to varying extents, linguistic tolerance is valued and intercultural experiences and communication across languages are promoted (CoE, 2007). However, despite plurilingual approaches being promoted internationally, the Council of Europe (DES, 2005, p.12) argues that the "emphasis noted elsewhere on plurilingualism is not as noticeable in Ireland, nor are the Council of Europe instruments such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and the European Language Portfolio (ELP) put to use or even known by the teaching profession at large". This highlights the somewhat slow pace at which the Irish education system has adapted to linguistic diversity, initially because of the emphasis placed on creating a homogenous Irish identity.

CONTEMPORARY MONOLINGUAL PERSPECTIVES.

Additionally, contemporary monolingual perspectives present within society and the education system, inhibit the emphasis placed on immigrant children's home languages. First, this can be seen where Hancock (2018) notes that teachers may perceive that diversity and children's heritage languages create problems, rather than viewing them as a resource from which to draw. This devalues home languages and positions them in a deficit perspective, with little importance given to plurilingual abilities. Schools can therefore reflect the idea of dominant and subordinate languages and identities. These language hierarchies may present themselves in multiple ways within the education system; for instance, in the idea that multilingualism is enrichment for majority groups but a threat for linguistic minorities (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2014). This means that learning certain languages, such as English, are prioritised over others (Van Avermaet, 2018). Both majority and minority group children internalise these ways in which languages, cultures and identities are viewed. The importance of teacher-student relationships is emphasised repeatedly, where teachers can challenge or reinforce the status quo, either empowering or disempowering pupils (Cummins, 1996). Second, although intercultural and multilingual aims are promoted in schools in Ireland, these are often viewed through a monolingual lens. Policies and guidelines can exacerbate this perspective. For instance, the language the Intercultural Guidelines use to describe one of its aims includes to raise "awareness within the educational community of issues that arise from increasing linguistic diversity" (NCCA, 2005, p.5). Third, this is reflected in how immigrant children's language abilities are assessed (August, Shanahan, & Escamilla, 2009). Bialystok (2018) highlights that many linguistic assessments are carried out through children's second language. This lack of mastery over the assessment language automatically places the children at a disadvantage, inhibiting them from performing well, inaccurately

representing their true abilities (PISA, 2013). Hancock (2018) consequently finds a disproportionate number of immigrant children placed in low ability groups in classrooms.

Power imbalance may be most readily apparent during the interactions between the dominant and minority groups. McGinnity et al. (2018) suggests that social interactions between minority and majority groups greatly impact societal attitudes towards diversity, particularly the quality of such interactions. Overall, negative interactions are more influential than positive. Skinner & O'Toole (2018) emphasise Vygotsky's research highlighting that learning is a social activity and it is therefore important that pupils are not segregated within schools, and that positive intercultural interactions are promoted. Separating pupils, for instance during withdrawal programmes or ability grouping, stigmatises the minority group, reinforcing social stratification as well as creating an identity of 'Otherness' (Van Avermaet, 2018). Consequently, during withdrawal programmes, these children are not getting full access to the mainstream curriculum, and the benefits of translanguaging and cross-language communication are not realised, issues compounded by the new 2017 SET Model (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2014). Translanguaging is a process of combining the languages at one's disposal to increase communicative ability (Conteh, 2018, p.37). Valuing linguistic diversity benefits both majority and minority pupils as it develops intercultural experiences and appreciation.

Significance of findings

This study contributes to existing knowledge of influences on the structure of the education system, by enhancing understanding of its long-standing interest in maintaining and promoting the Irish identity. While it is desirable to foster strong national identity, care is needed to ensure it does not become exclusionary towards minority groups in society. Additionally, by drawing connections between Ireland's language education models and the value placed on home-languages, the findings suggest the two most chosen language education models do not fully support schools' in incorporating children's heritage languages. The desire to promote the Irish identity and the prevailing language models in use, identify two inhibitors for the education system's progress in developing its intercultural and multilingual policies.

Recommendations

Ireland should accelerate from its monolingual perspective to a more intercultural and inclusive mind-set. To achieve this, greater emphasis needs to be placed on providing all teachers with thorough and in-depth training on diversity, interculturalism, and language developments. This would provide teachers with the skills to support immigrant children's education. First, successful implementation of this would enhance the valuing of diversity and heritage languages (Cummins, 2011). Second, it would

encourage teachers to critically reflect on their conception of diversity (Rezai Rashti & Martino, 2010). Finally, it would enhance their cultural awareness and understanding of barriers immigrants may face (IDEC, 2015). This education should be provided during initial teacher education (ITE) and throughout all teachers' careers. This can be promoted through sustained funding of initiatives such as the Development & Intercultural Education programme which encourages inclusive practices within ITE. While this is the State's responsibility, it is also teachers' professional responsibility to supplement their own education through continuing professional development as required to meet their students' needs.

Incentives or requirements could be introduced, encouraging teachers to learn additional languages, specifically those most spoken by immigrants in Ireland. Supports for this should include specialised education or relaxation of barriers preventing the hiring of teachers who speak foreign languages. Moreover, financial rewards and professional recognition could be introduced to encourage this language development.

Further research is required to identify feasible methods to support immigrants' heritage languages through the new Primary Language Curriculum. Presently, there is limited inclusion of immigrant's heritage languages within educational policy, requiring greater attention from the Irish education system (DES, 2005). The education system should move from its monolingual and quasi-bilingual models towards internationally recommended plurilingual and intercultural approaches, through use of the new Primary Language-Curriculum (DES, 2017b). These approaches work towards creating a more inclusive society and education system, counteracting monolingual views and deficit perspectives of immigrant children.

CONCLUSION

This article highlights experiences immigrants may have in the education system, including facing deficit perspectives from teachers, fellow-students, schools, and society. Additionally, it shows the importance of teacher-pupil relationships and encouraging positive social and intercultural interactions with their peers. Finally, it emphasises the ability of schools to positively contribute to pupils' sense of identity. The main findings are summarised as follows:

Historical nationalist ideologies and contemporary monolingual perspectives remain influential. This has hindered the pace at which the education system has adopted more inclusive, intercultural, and multilingual policies, because of continued emphasis on creating a homogenous identity. This has frequently resulted in schools choosing language education models for ideological or traditional

reasons. As a result, Ireland has been somewhat slow to respond to the rapid change in demographics since the Celtic Tiger era. Consequently, Ireland's current policies and approaches towards multilingualism are still evolving to meet their full potential in supporting immigrant children in the Irish education system.

Greater emphasis needs to be placed on introducing and developing plurilingual approaches within the classroom. Intercultural education and plurilingualism emphasise a more nuanced understanding of Irish identity and encourage intercultural interactions and acceptance. The language approach chosen should be designed in response to pupils' specific needs. One of the article's more significant findings is that the language education models most used in Ireland i.e., immersion and quasi-bilingual models, often undervalue children's heritage languages. For instance, immersion education approaches children's home-languages as a hindrance to their learning, while the limited availability of personnel who can speak multiple languages inhibits teaching immigrants through their home-languages. A solution to this is emerging through Ireland's Languages Connect Strategy, which aims to improve the language ability of all students in Ireland, as well as providing upskilling programmes for secondary-school teachers (DES, 2017). Additionally, the new Primary Language Curriculum encourages transferring skills between languages (Cummins & Ó Duibhir, 2012).

Schools have significant ability to influence perceptions towards immigrants' heritage languages. Immigrant children may face deficit perspectives towards their academic abilities and heritage languages (Skinner & O'Toole, 2018). Considering this, the research indicates the significant influence schools can have in tackling these perspectives and fostering immigrant's sense of belonging and identity (PISA, 2013). Finally, the study and shows the importance of teacher-pupil relationships and encouraging positive social and intercultural interactions with their peers.

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"It's all about what happens on the ground": interpretations of intercultural education in Ireland.

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KEYWORDS: Intercultural education, Post-Primary Education, Intercultural Education Strategy,

INTRODUCTION

Ireland has historically been 'a country of emigration' (McGinnity and Kingston, 2017: 255). Since before the turn of the century, however, it has experienced considerable demographic change, driven by increased levels of immigration (ibid). Due to such changes, diversity has become 'a central question of contemporary societies' (Antonsich, 2015: 1). In response, the Irish government has adopted a policy of interculturalism.

Though the Irish government has promoted intercultural education, this is a contested term with multiple definitions. Both nationally and internationally, academics have criticised state-led approaches to intercultural education. This research was inspired by many of these critiques. However, it noted that in the Irish context, these often focused on macro-level processes, such as policy formation, and the way these influence classroom practice. As a dissertation, this research aimed to explore the conceptions of intercultural education held by teachers and school leaders and the way they implement these understandings. This article will discuss the following questions which formed part of this research:

- How do teachers and school leaders view intercultural education?
- Does intercultural policy influence the beliefs of teachers and school leaders?

This research was carried out in two schools in Ireland. These will be referred to as School A and School B.

CONTEXT

The most recent iteration of the Irish government's approach to intercultural education is presented in the *Intercultural Education Strategy*¹ (*IES*) (DES, 2010). The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), a body which influenced the *IES*, states that Ireland has rejected multiculturalism where "different cultures live side by side without much interaction" (NCCA 2018: i) in favour of interculturalism where "people of different cultures...engage with each other and learn from each other" (NCCA, 2018: i-ii).

The *IES* instructs schools to "welcome diversity and appreciate the opportunities it affords" (ibid: 59) and to "promote intercultural education so that it becomes the norm" (ibid: 52). A number of actions are suggested to support this, such as requiring education providers to have specific rules on racism and stereotyping in their behaviour policies; making modules on intercultural education part of all Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes; and providing professional development courses on intercultural education for existing teachers (ibid: 59-60).

Though the *IES*' focus on equality and inclusion (the words are used 42 and 28 times in the Strategy respectively) is laudable, the Irish approach to interculturalism has been subject to criticism. Bryan argues that intercultural education is an ineffectual add-on and that some teachers' attitudes are inimical to its proper practice (Bryan, 2010). Further, she argues that Irish intercultural policy "masks relationships of power in society" and prevents social justice (Bryan, 2009: 298) by focusing on tokenistic celebrations of diversity whilst keeping a serious discussion of white privilege and societal power structures out of the classroom. As such, it not only fails to address social justice but also "brilliantly disguises, power relations between majoritised and minoritised groups" (Bryan, 2010: 254). This form of interculturalism, which focuses on the celebration of diversity rather than on social justice, is very close to what Fanning called 'weak multiculturalism' (Fanning, 2012: 223). For Bryan, "macro processes operating at the level of Irish state policy" (ibid) "constrain" (Bryan and Bracken, 2011: 120), "frame" (Bryan, 2010: 262) and inform (Bryan, 2009: 300) school level approaches to diversity, inequality and racism.

¹ The quoted document (*Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School* (NCCA, 2018)) is one of the policy documents which informed the *IES* (DES, 2010: 23-4).

Bryan's critique of Irish policy mirrors much international criticism of common approaches to intercultural education. Current intercultural education practices have been criticised as being an "add on" in the USA (Sleeter, 2017: 158), UK (Bhopal and Rhamie, 2014: 309) and Australia (Mills and Ballantyne, 2010: 447). Further, Gorski argues that:

any framework for intercultural education that does not have as its central and overriding premise a commitment to the establishment and maintenance of an equitable and just world can be seen as a tool, however well-intentioned, of an educational colonization in which inequity and injustice are reproduced under the guise of interculturalism (Gorski, 2008, 517)

This criticism is reminiscent of Critical Race Theory, which argues that liberal approaches to social justice offer "no mechanism" (Ladson-Billings, 1998: 12) to overcome the systematic white privilege inherent in society. Concerns about intercultural education do not only reside in the area of policy. There is a wealth of international literature suggesting that teachers hold negative and/or limited attitudes towards intercultural education. Though it is difficult to summarise this research, some of the main themes arising from it are:

- Teachers may be hostile towards the goals of intercultural education (Sleeter, 2017; Solomona, Portelli, Daniel and Campbell, 2006) and see attempts to address injustice as an attack on their whiteness (Picower, 2009: 205)
- Teachers may have "simplistic views of diversity that highlights the celebratory rather than the critical or transformatory approaches" to intercultural education (Schoorman and Bogotch, 2010: 1042).

This research shares the concerns Bryan has raised about the type of intercultural education promulgated by the *IES* and believes that a more transformative approach is necessary to tackle inequality in society. Though Bryan's work suggests intercultural policies affect classroom practice, this research wanted to explore the extent to which policy influenced teachers' beliefs about intercultural education. Further, the existing literature often focuses on pre-service teachers, and this leaves a gap in the literature both nationally and internationally. This research aimed to explore the way teachers and school leaders shape the way intercultural education is understood, which in turn would affect the way national intercultural education policy was implemented.

METHODOLOGY

As the study aimed to investigate the conceptualisations of intercultural education held by teachers and school leaders, a mixed methods research design was employed, consisting of a questionnaire (with teachers) and two in-depth semi-structured interviews (with school leaders). The questionnaire had both a qualitative and quantitative element. The quantitative element of the questionnaire was based upon Pohan and Aguilar's (2001: 178-80) personal and professional beliefs about diversity scales, which aim to measure teachers' beliefs about diversity in both a "personal sense" and "within a professional, educational context" (ibid: 161). Though the data from the scale will be touched on briefly, the main questions of interest to this article were two open-ended questions which asked respondents to describe what they felt intercultural education meant and how they implemented it in their lessons. Participants were not given examples of what intercultural pedagogy involves in the hope of gaining a sense of their understandings of what this might look like. As well as collecting demographic data from the participants, there were also two questions that asked respondents to rate their knowledge of intercultural policy and their comfort teaching interculturally, using a Likert scale.

Individual interviews were conducted with two post-primary school leaders, the Principal of School A and the Deputy Principal of School B. A semi-structured interview approach facilitated the treatment of the school leader interviewees as insightful collaborators (Marvasti and Freie, 2017: 625), which was important given their experience working in diverse schools. The semi-structured interview approach also allowed the interviewees to talk at length, in their own style, about the research topic (Bryman, 2012: 470). Both data collection instruments were piloted, resulting in some small changes to the order of the items in the interview schedule. No changes were made to the questionnaire. With the aim of maximising the response rate, all staff in both schools were invited to complete the questionnaire. 22 teachers (16 from School A, 6 from School B) responded to the survey, representing roughly a third of the target population.

For the interviews, purposive sampling was used. This is where particular individuals are invited to participate in the study. This was seen as appropriate because the school leaders selected were "knowledgeable people" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011: 156-157) regarding intercultural education in their schools. The two interviews were roughly 30 minutes in duration. Interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission, and transcribed verbatim. Qualitative data from the questionnaire and the interviews were analysed using some grounded theory coding techniques (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There were three main findings of relevance to this article. These were:

1. Teachers who participated in this study were relatively open to diversity.
2. Most of these teachers spoke about intercultural education in terms of celebrating and recognising cultures. Some teachers conflated intercultural education with teaching a diverse student body.
3. The school leaders interviewed suggested that national intercultural policies have little effect on the way intercultural education is carried out in their schools.

The first of these will not be discussed in detail here. Despite this, it is important to note that from quantitative data gathered using Pohan and Aguilar's scale, teachers showed high levels of openness and acceptance in the majority of subcategories. The participants were, however, less open in professional than personal contexts, which could suggest some reluctance towards intercultural teaching practices.

In the qualitative data gathered, both teachers and school leaders mainly expressed views supporting the kind of 'weak multiculturalism' (Fanning, 2012: 223) found in the *IES*. When discussing the meaning of intercultural education, teachers highlighted the importance of respecting and acknowledging the importance of different cultures.

For me, it means that in an educational setting... all different types of diversity and cultures are recognised and respected by all. (Questionnaire respondent 6, School A)

For some, this was closely connected to beliefs about equality and integration:

To me, it's teaching to the diverse audience that present from a vast array of cultures and beliefs in today's Irish classrooms, in an environment of equality. (Questionnaire respondent 1, School A).

It means acknowledging and integrating different cultures in the classroom (Questionnaire respondent 4, School A)

Respect, recognition, acknowledgement and equality were identified as important parts of intercultural education and, therefore, some teachers saw their role as helping students to understand 'other' cultures.

The school leaders' understandings of intercultural education centred on celebrating and recognising difference with the aim of increasing students' mutual understanding. This was clear from

the way they described what intercultural education is (“I suppose that all cultures are celebrated” (School A Principal)) and the intercultural activities they described. Describing their school’s annual International Day, School B Deputy Principal said:

... it’s a really fantastic day here in school... On that day we also have our awards day for the year because we think that that fits in really well, do you know, it’s a celebration of culture, diversity, food, clothing and then to end the day on a celebration of everything that went well throughout the year. (School B Deputy Principal)

Further, the School B Deputy Principal reported that students loved representing where they came from, suggesting they appreciated this interpretation of intercultural education.

There were, however, some elements of transformative interculturalism in the school leaders’ comments. This was particularly present in comments made by the School B Deputy Principal about the way certain groups interests (particularly the Travelling community) are not promoted by the education system. School B has also completed the Yellow Flag Program which is indicative of a transformative approach to intercultural education. Despite this, celebration and recognition were still dominant ways in which they talked about intercultural education.

Though most teachers’ views on intercultural education focused on celebration and recognition, some teachers lacked a basic understanding of intercultural education. A number of teachers’ questionnaire responses described intercultural education as “*teaching students from many cultures*” (Questionnaire respondent 11, School A), or similar.

These findings echo studies that suggest that where teachers are responsive to intercultural education, they adopt a celebratory rather than a transformative approach (Schoorman and Bogotch, 2010: 1042). This suggests that teachers’ understandings of intercultural education are limited at best. They are unlikely to appreciate, and thus grapple with, the structural dimensions of inequality. In this context, Gorski (2008: 515) has argued that while teachers may have “*good intentions*” towards diversity, these “*are not enough*” to make significant improvements in society.

In focusing on recognition and celebration the participants’ views did echo the kind of intercultural education found in the *IES*. It appears, however, that their views on intercultural education *aligned* with educational policy rather than being *influenced* by it. Table 1 presents responses to questions about teachers’ familiarity with intercultural education policies and confidence delivering intercultural education.

	Mean	Std. Deviation
I have had the opportunity to become familiar with intercultural education policies that affect my work.	2.68	1.211
I feel confident delivering intercultural education as part of my lessons.	3.36	.953

Table 4.3: Table Showing the Means and Standard Deviations Related to Participants' Familiarity and Confidence Regarding Intercultural Education

This suggests the teacher respondents felt slightly unfamiliar with policies related to intercultural education. There was a large, positive correlation between the two questions ($r(20) = .60, p < .01$), suggesting that as familiarity with intercultural policy rose, so did confidence delivering intercultural content in lessons. Despite this, respondents reported greater confidence in delivering intercultural education than they did familiarity with relevant policy. This suggests some teachers may deliver intercultural education based on their own perceptions of the concept rather than based on government policy.

Both school leaders reported that they believed government policies had relatively “little impact” (School A Principal) on the way intercultural education was delivered in their schools. When asked about policy, neither mentioned documents that specifically focus on intercultural education (such as the *IES* or the NCCA’s guidelines on intercultural education (NCCA, 2006)) although both referenced other policies that affected their work, such as admissions policies. The School B Deputy Principal felt that intercultural education practice was very much driven by schools at local level:

... it's all about what happens on the ground ... for example, nobody told us to get involved in the Yellow Flag, nobody told us to have an International Day, nobody told us to take on restorative practice. That's all self-directed, self-directed by the school, by management, by teachers, erm, so I would say it's more driven at local level rather than at national level. It's grand having policy documents but again unless there's somebody constantly pushing that ... I think it's down to school level ultimately (School B Deputy Principal).

For this school leader then, school staff, and specifically, having “somebody ... pushing that” (ibid) and acting as a champion of interculturalism, were key in determining the direction and extent of intercultural education practice on the ground. School B engaged in significant intercultural work, some of which is described in the quotation above. The Deputy Principal felt all of this was self-

directed. Based on this school leader's view, national policies themselves do little to ensure that schools prioritise intercultural education. Whilst they may promote intercultural education, they are insufficient to ensure intercultural practices are enacted.

Given the lack of influence of intercultural policy, this raises the question of where ideas about intercultural education come from. Mueller and O'Connor (2007: 842-3) suggest that student teachers start their programmes with "pre-instructional frames of reference" in relation to diversity and intercultural education, that is, relatively stable opinions and beliefs formed in advance that they bring to their ITE programme and change little as a result of their studies. Though there is not sufficient data in this research to support this claim, one of the school leaders, School B Deputy Principal, spoke at length about the factors that influenced their commitment to interculturalism. They spoke passionately about disliking injustice and racism, which, it was suggested, largely stemmed from their upbringing:

... the household that I grew up in would have been very open - embrace everybody, nobody is different ... 'cause I even remember [a] situation when I was in school and I never liked to see difference or people being treated differently for something like the amount of money you had or the clothes. And I really remember that, I remember that in primary school... I definitely think your schooling, your background, how your parents talk about difference, how your parents talk about poverty or people being rich or poor, I think all of that has a huge influence, erm, on your way of thinking (School B Deputy Principal).

This 'open' upbringing was complemented by experiences at university, where School B Deputy Principal reported enjoying living with a diverse range of people. This understanding of diversity was further enhanced by working in a diverse school. Further, this Deputy Principal recognised that "some cultures find our education system limiting" due to its monocultural nature that some minority groups "might not feel included sometimes because their interests may not be included within the educational sphere". This suggests some elements of a transformative approach (Schoorman and Bogotch, 2010: 1042) to intercultural education in their thinking. For this particular school leader, therefore, their world view, shaped by their personal and professional experiences, seemed to be the driving factor behind a deep commitment to intercultural education.

CONCLUSION

Prior to the publication of the *IES* research suggested Irish teachers felt inadequately trained to teach intercultural (Devine, 2005: 65; Keogh and Whyte, 2002: 51). This research suggests that despite the introduction of the *Strategy*, some teachers still do not understand the concept of intercultural

education. Further, where intercultural education is happening this appears to be at the behest of individual schools and/or teachers. This is indicative of a general laissez-faire approach to integration in Ireland (Boucher, 2010: 1). The *IES*, which sets a number of goals for schools but provides little information on how these were to be monitored or measured, reflects this laissez-faire trend. This researcher would therefore welcome a review of current intercultural education policies with a focus on ensuring their relevance to the classroom. Without proper benchmarking (Watt, 2006: 156), intercultural education is unlikely to become anything more than an add on.

Ideally, a review of intercultural education policy would move intercultural policies in a more transformative direction, with a focus on addressing injustice and white privilege. Though the two leaders in this research largely conceptualised intercultural education in terms of celebration and recognition, activities of this kind could be important first steps in the development of high-quality intercultural education. Perhaps these celebratory starting points are necessary for more transformative conceptualisations and actions to subsequently come about, and this study did identify some elements transformative thinking in the interview with the School B Deputy Principal. This was evident in their discussion of the Yellow Flag Programme and the way schooling may not adequately cater for Traveller students. The majority of their responses, however, still focused on celebration and recognition.

This research does have significant limitations including a small sample. It also did not adequately address the extent to which school leaders can actually influence intercultural activity in their schools. Finally, given teachers' relative lack of familiarity with intercultural education, participants may have been able to give more informed responses if they had been presented with some examples of intercultural teaching. These could, for example, have focused around the approaches and methodologies found in the NCCA's *Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School*. These focus on discussion, active learning, exploring multiple perspectives and promoting critical thinking in relation to diversity (NCCA, 2006: 80-87).

Despite these limitations, this research did gather some interesting data about school leaders' interpretations of intercultural education. School leaders have an important role to play in the way intercultural education is practised. Despite this, there is little research on school leaders and their responses to intercultural education. This research has highlighted how one school leader's personal worldview influenced their practice of intercultural education. This may provide an impetus for more research with these actors in the enactment of intercultural education.

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The effect of 'The Colour of Home' on teaching and learning about diversity in the Primary School

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This dissertation has been inspired by my specialism in Geography in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick under the supervision of Dr. Anne M. Dolan. My experience in school was very positive and perhaps this has guided me towards my current career path in primary education. Diversity wasn't something that was distinguishable among my friends and me. In the eyes of a twelve-year-old, we were all the same. This is not the case in all classrooms, however. Being from Portlaoise, I quickly grew accustomed to the ever-growing diversity in our society. I found that when I began to work in rural primary schools the student population was very rarely reflective of this growing diversity. I wanted to create a piece of work that might guide student teachers and qualified teachers towards a more effective means of incorporating intercultural education into the curriculum.

KEYWORDS: Diversity, Primary Education, Resources, The Colour of Home

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to investigate the effect of 'The Colour of Home' (Hoffman 2002) on teaching and learning about diversity in the primary school classroom. Throughout this research a series of questions will be through both empirical investigation and external sources and publications.

Embedded throughout this article it is hoped to achieve the reasons for which 'The Colour of Home' provides a positive and/ or negative stimulus for teaching about diversity among teachers and student teachers alike. Consequently, this research will endeavour to ascertain the extent to which this picture book meets the appropriate learning objectives in teaching about diversity in Geography. This research was conducted through personal reflection alongside interviews and surveys. It is also

aimed to identify additional effective strategies or methodologies in teaching about diversity that may supplement this picture book or substitute its use. Given the extensive research surrounding the employment of picture books in the classroom, and teaching about diversity, the article aims to clarify the best practices for optimal teaching and learning of diversity with and without 'The Colour of Home.' The purpose in writing this article is to set out a more effective means of teaching intercultural education throughout the curriculum.

CONTEXT

The context of this research derives from a personal motivation, albeit remaining within the theme of education. Diversity did not feature in my primary school setting. Hence, my fascination with this picture book was established at a later stage in my education, namely in Mary Immaculate College as an undergraduate student. While this is suggestive of the universal and accessible nature of picture books, given the timeframe from which my fascination with picture books peaked, it suggests a powerful resonance within 'The Colour of Home.' What is ordinarily perceived as a stimulus within an early years or primary school setting had suddenly gripped the interests of a twenty-year-old undergraduate student. 'The Colour of Home' explores the world of a refugee boy named Hassan who travels from Somalia to England where he encounters cultural barriers and challenges. The discussion that followed from our reading disclosed the value of this picture book in discussing intercultural issues that are faced in many classrooms today. If this impact could be experienced among third level undergraduates, its effectiveness could be magnified in the primary school setting. This book is not simply tickled with whispers of diversity; it whole heartedly explores the harrowing brutalities in the modern world, and it remains relevant to primary school children. My genuine curiosity in this area has broadened my desire to gauge the effectiveness of 'The Colour of Home' and explore the most effective means of teaching about diversity for optimal learning in the primary school setting. Given my pre-established interest in Geography and the sociological disrupt faced in modern times, I sought to explore a research topic that was relevant to education, and which was simply linked to a sociological theme. The trying times faced by the African American citizens of the USA in relation to issues of racial equality set the backdrop for my research proposal and hence I decided to explore diversity through 'The Colour of Home' in the primary school classroom.

My reason for writing this article also stems from my experience of teaching in the classroom. My own sentiments towards teaching about diversity greatly affected my ability to teach this topic prior to researching this area. I found that I was uncomfortable discussing diversity as I didn't want to 'step on anyone's toes.' I was worried that I might say the wrong thing or perhaps that I wouldn't do justice

to the theme of diversity. I can specifically recall teaching a lesson based on diversity whereby I asked the children to draw a picture of themselves that would reflect everything about them: hair colour, skin colour, eye colour, interests and much more. One little girl drew a picture of herself but did not acknowledge that she did not have white skin. I was uncertain as to whether I should approach this little girl about the picture or if I should ignore it. Given my lack of training in this area I chose to ignore the situation that had occurred. I was so unsure if I had done the right thing, so I approached my peers about the situation, and they too were unsure. Given my feelings towards this I realised that our training in intercultural education is lacking. While we had learned of the discrimination and inequality within our education system, we had not learned how to tackle these problems as teachers. I was unsure whether discussing this area of education could be considered 'taboo' and I felt extremely uncomfortable in the classroom as a result. Having researched more about this topic I have come to understand that these uncomfortable conversations must be had. This research has helped me to shape my understanding of intercultural education and how best to teach it. My hope is that it can help other teachers too.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed interviews and surveys as a source of data collection, alongside my own personal reflective journal. Adopting these collection instruments saw me interviewing six participants and surveying ten other participants. It is important to note that I interviewed the author of this book, Mary Hoffman, to fully encompass the aims of this picture book in relation to intercultural education. Hoffman's interview served as a 'landmark' feature in this article. I felt that interviews were more conducive as they allowed for the natural flow of the discussion to give a deeper understanding of that which was being examined (Krauss 2005).

Both purposive and convenience sampling were employed. This particular research topic requires a specific knowledge that is relevant to the research title. Given the specificities of this study, purposive sampling was required to review the research question (Ames et al. 2019). Such sampling was combined with convenience sampling in identifying student teachers that employed the use of 'The Colour of Home' on their final school placements about the teaching of diversity. The sample was identified via two coinciding means whereby they were chosen from the same field of work as myself while they simultaneously had a deep and genuine knowledge of the research title in order to give their informed opinions on this research.

In order to meet ethical approval, I declared my intentions to the Ethics Committee where approval was granted. Consent is vital in any research study so as to inform the participants that they are, in fact, participants of a research study (BERA 2018). The data received was stored on a computer file that was secured by password in a secure location and maintains the anonymity of the participants involved (BERA 2018). I felt it best to explore “multiple perceptions on a single reality” within this study which thereby saw me using a peer-debriefing system to check against any errors or biases to ensure research reliability (Golafshani 2003, p.603). Qualitative Content Analysis was employed in this research topic. Themes and categories flowed from the data received.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION AND INTEGRATION OF DIVERSITY

While the purpose of this book, ‘The Colour of Home’, is not expressly concerned with teaching about diversity, it was noted by participants as being a useful resource for approaching intercultural education in the classroom. Survey findings found that all respondents would recommend ‘The Colour of Home’ in teaching about diversity. Participant One notes that ‘The Colour of Home’ *“provides an excellent stimulus for discussion and provides a base for using and integrating the topic of diversity into a number of subject areas.”* Quast and Bazemore-Bertrand (2019) also note the importance of discussion when coming to terms with uncomfortable or challenging themes within the area of diversity or in intercultural education in order to develop a thorough understanding. This resonates with Participant three’s response as they explain that *“it is also a picture book that can be easily integrated with other curricular areas e.g., geography.”* The Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland 1999) highlights the underpinning importance of curricular integration as a key principle of learning. The Primary Curriculum explains that integration of *learning “gives children’s learning a broader and richer perspective, emphasises the interconnectedness of knowledge and ideas and reinforces the learning process”* (Government of Ireland 1999 p. 16). This suggests that ‘The Colour of Home’ presents opportunities for broader and richer perspectives surrounding diversity.

DEVELOPING LINKS

Participant two equally values ‘The Colour of Home’ as a tool for teaching about diversity. They explain that *“the children were very invested in the story and could make meaningful links between their life and the life of the characters.”* Developing links is suggestive that the children in this classroom experience diversity in their own lives. Lynch and Baker (2005) express the vitality of learning through

experience in order to develop fruitful understanding and tolerance among teachers and students alike.

TOLERANCE, EMPATHY, AND A NEW PERSPECTIVE

In an interview with (Hope 2016), Hoffman explains that the purpose for writing her book 'The Colour of Home' is to foster tolerance towards everyone living in our country. Her aim is to develop empathy and dispel negative attitudes towards other people and simultaneously make the reader aware of stereotypes in the society to which refugees flee (Hope 2016). These objectives will serve as a good comparison into the effect of this book on teaching and learning about diversity and whether teachers feel they can meet such objectives. When I asked Hoffman what she would like the reader to take from her book she simply desired a *"broadening of their imagination."* She also referred to empathy as she explains that *"no-one who can imagine themselves into the shoes of an asylum-seeker or rough sleeper...could ever be heartless or mean to them."* The tone of this statement suggests that she wants her reader to imagine themselves in Hassan's situation and she encourages an empathetic viewpoint towards him.

Participant two noted that *"['The Colour of Home'] allows the children to physically see into another person's world to develop empathy."* This calls to mind the idea of Bishop (1990) who notes that picture books provide a window or mirror into another person's world. This is so important given the growing need for culturally responsive teaching. Lynch and Baker (2005) suggest that the only way to learn about diversity is to experience it in the classroom. Baker et. al (2004) explain that, for children, education is life; thus, implying that learning about diversity through Hassan's story is an experience for the children that will help to prepare them for active citizenship (Dolan 2014). Participant ten acknowledges that the student's in their class learn about *"diversity from another perspective"* while Participant nine notes that *"it allowed them to explore life from a different perspective."* Participant three noted that the story developed empathy among the students while simultaneously developing tolerance amongst them:

The positives that arose from this lesson were that the pupils empathised with the character when they saw what had happened and how different life was in England compared to Somalia. They understood how difficult Hassan found it to adjust to life in England because it was so different to what he was used to. The pupils also saw the positive impact that kindness and understanding had on Hassan's experience of school

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY AND ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

Most of the participants acknowledged that they would use other picture books to coincide with 'The Colour of Home' as it would open up more discussion in the classroom and provide more experience with diversity from other perspectives. This again reflects Bishop's (1990) idea of picture books as windows into another world. Interestingly, Participant seven noted the idea of taking a whole-school approach to *"celebrate difference among all of the children and staff."* This participant noted that the children should *"share some of their traditional food and cultural traditions such as dance and literature."* This celebration of difference, rather than ignorance of difference, is an important issue noted by Lynch and Baker (2005). Participant three noted that they would *"integrate the picture book with areas such as SPHE and Art, as some pupils may be best able to express themselves through pictures, just as Hassan did in the story."* This integration technique is a positive strategy in teaching about diversity and was mentioned by several other participants. Participant two notes that they would use *"visuals and songs"* to teach diversity. This finding is particularly effective as music is noted as a learning strategy that emphasizes conceptual understanding (Morgan et. al 2015). Both participant six and eight noted *"project-based work"* as a strategy that might enhance the teaching and learning of diversity in the classroom. This strategy would allow the children to take what they have learned and develop their understanding.

This picture book has been found to develop empathy in students as they gain an insight into Hassan's perspective. Discussion provokes feelings of empathy among the children and aims to broaden their imagination. Findings suggest that these objectives have been successfully achieved from Junior Infants to sixth class. This picture book gives a new experience to the children from the perspective of a refugee. This new perspective allows for the development of empathy. Findings also suggest that student teachers and teachers alike struggle with their confidence in teaching diversity in the classroom

CONCLUSION

From the findings of this research, it has been concluded that 'The Colour of Home' provides an overall positive stimulus for teaching and learning about diversity in the classroom. The findings point to opportunities for great discussion following the reading of this book. Discussion is noted by Quast and Bazemore-Bertrand (2019) as being vital in the understanding of different themes, including diversity. McIntosh (1989) notes that positive representation of white people in media and literature is a taken-for-granted privilege. She highlighted the lack of representation of diverse cultures, ethnicities and races and the crying need for discussion towards active citizenship. This lack of representation,

particularly in education, is noted by Lynch and Baker (2005) who recommend a formal education about diversity in school. In an interview with Hope (2016), Hoffman notes that the development of tolerance and empathy are the key objectives of writing this book. The participants of this study confirmed that such tolerance and empathy was fostered among the students in their own classrooms. Hope (2016, p.311) also notes that the children in the classroom developed a “powerful empathy” towards diversity. In developing empathy and tolerance, the students are preparing for active citizenship in a globalized society (Dolan 2014).

Many strategies have been noted by the participants of this research as a means of supplementing the use of ‘The Colour of Home.’ Many suggested the use of other picture books and pieces of literature as a method of supplementation. This would help with the issue of representation among minoritized groups as it gives greater potential to increase the experience of diversity, in an equitable way, in the classroom. Other participants encouraged the celebration of diversity in the classroom by hosting an intercultural event whereby the children can share their cultural traditions. The use of integration has been noted as being an excellent methodology in teaching about diversity; this is very much in keeping with the aforementioned statement in the curriculum (Government of Ireland 1999). Music has been confirmed as an informal education that fosters the child’s conceptual knowledge (Morgan et. al 2015). Finally, games arose as an effective strategy among the participants. From the findings of this research study, it is evident that ‘The Colour of Home’ has a positive effect on teaching and learning about diversity in the primary school classroom.

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Representations of Diversity in Classroom Resources: “Windows and Mirrors” or Cracked Glass?

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I am a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT), recently graduated from Marino Institute of Education. My specific interest in intercultural education arose two years ago while studying the module as part of the Bachelor of Education course. My lecturer made reference to a quote from Carol Buehner (n.d.): “in years to come, children may not remember everything they learned in your classroom, but they will remember how they felt”. This quote really resonated with me, and I became inspired to develop my own knowledge, skills, and confidence in order to effectively implement inclusive practice in my future teaching career. Following my teaching experience in two Community National Schools, my passion for diversity and inclusion increased further. My dissertation focussed on the representations of migration-related diversity in classroom resources, which has helped me in becoming competent and confident in teaching the increasing number of students from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds now in Irish classrooms and provided me with a huge insight into the implications of teaching in these multicultural settings.

KEYWORDS: Primary Education, Diversity, Representation, Immigration, Classroom Resources

INTRODUCTION

The past two decades has seen major changes to Irish society. This is partly due to annual increases in inward migration (Forghani-Arani et al., 2019). Since schools in contemporary Ireland are a “microcosm of society” (Moloney & O’Toole, 2018, p. 55), classrooms have also become increasingly diverse, with children from a range of nationalities and ethnicities now present. This article uses documentary analysis to examine the representations of migration-related diversity in the resources used in Irish primary school classrooms. In particular, the researcher examines textbooks, children’s

literature, images and toys to establish whether all children can see accurate representations of their lives and the lives of others within classroom resources.

Immigrant students can be faced with a multitude of potential challenges that can result in marginalisation both in the classroom and society (Wilson, 2014). One way to acknowledge and recognise minority ethnic students is to include representations of them in the resources used in classrooms. Bishop (1990, p. iii) uses the metaphor “windows and mirrors” to describe how children can learn about themselves and others in literature. For the purpose of this article, this metaphor is extended to describe all resources. Resources should serve as ‘windows’, offering glimpses into other people’s lives, as well as highlighting the difficult circumstances that others from around the world may endure. These windows should also act as ‘mirrors’, allowing individuals to see reflections of their own lives and experiences in the resources used in their classroom. Given the pivotal role that resources play in creating an inclusive classroom environment (Bishop, 1990), this research aims to examine if textbooks, books, images and toys exhibit balanced and varied depictions of various cultures and nationalities, which ensure all students can find their “mirrors” and learn about minority groups. This article highlights the key finding of a broader dissertation which examined this topic.

CONTEXT

Although Ireland has never been a mono-cultural society, the country’s ethnic profile has changed dramatically over the past 30 years. Several studies have claimed that this is predominantly due to the significant increase in inward migration in recent years, with immigrants originating from a range of national, social, and ethnic backgrounds (McDaid, 2011; McGinnity & Kingston, 2017; Melia & Kerrigan, 2018; Parker-Jenkins & Masterson, 2013). The number of people who immigrated to Ireland in the year leading up to the 2016 Census increased from 53,267 in 2011, to 82,346. Just over 28,100 were Irish, while 54,203 were non- Irish (CSO, 2017). Additionally, the report shows that there were 535,475 immigrants from 200 different countries resident in Ireland in 2016, accounting for 11.6 per cent of the total population (Melia & Kerrigan, 2018). Furthermore, in the past 15 years, immigrants of non-European background have entered Ireland in larger and more visible numbers (Melia & Kerrigan, 2018). Of the 11.6 per cent of immigrants in Ireland in 2016, 4.5 per cent were from countries outside of the EU (Central Statistic Office, 2017). Although Pinson (2014) claims that the number of people from racial and ethnic minorities living in Ireland is still relatively low when compared to other EU countries, Ryan (2015) argues that the change in Irish society is significant, nevertheless.

In the context of the population change discussed above, it is agreed that the ethnic and racial profile of many Irish schools has been significantly altered over the past number of years, as classrooms are now more diverse than ever before (Darmody et al., 2011; Devine, 2011; Ryan, 2015). In 2016, there was a total of 546, 916 pupils aged between 5 and 12 years enrolled in primary schools across Ireland (CSO, 2017). Table 1 shows the nationalities of these students.

Irish	498,793
Polish	13,032
Lithuanian	3,635
United Kingdom	3,785
Latvian	2,200
Romanian	2,406
Other European	5,978
Nigerian	1,213
Other African	728
Indian	954
Other Asian	2,721
American	1,121
Brazilian	294
Other nationalities	1,018
Not stated	9,038

Table 1: Nationalities of children enrolled in primary schools across Ireland in 2016 (CSO, 2017)

Table 1 demonstrates that European continentals account for almost half of ‘non-Irish national’ students in schools, with Polish, U.K and Lithuanian nationals comprising the largest groups. However, the CSO (2017) maintain that the number of immigrant children in Irish primary schools is continuously rising. The statistics presented thus far support Ryan’s (2015, p.32) argument that our classrooms reflect “general societal tendencies towards more heterogeneity”. Aforementioned research states that resources should serve as “windows and mirrors” (Bishop, 1990, p. iii). Minority children often seek their “mirrors” in classroom resources, and when their reflections are negatively portrayed or in some cases, omitted, they may learn a “powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society in which they live” (Bishop, 1990, p. ix). This argument is in line with Haddad (2006), who claims that diverse resources are important for the self-esteem, well-being, and overall school experience of

minority students. Moreover, the need for accurate classroom resources is crucial in educating children, especially those from dominant social groups who always find their “mirrors”, about the diversity found in contemporary Irish society (Bryan & Bracken, 2011a). Findings from several studies suggest that the visual and verbal messages children absorb from classroom resources have a profound influence on their attitudes towards the world and others (Derman- Sparks, 2013; IDEA, 2013; O'Toole et al., 2020). Therefore, if classroom resources present unbalanced representations of minority groups, students may develop a distorted world view, whilst potentially harbouring racist attitudes towards minority groups (Moloney & O'Toole, 2018). In the context stated above, it is evident that research into the representations of diversity in classroom resources is imperative.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using documentary analysis. According to Bailey (as cited in Ahmed, 2010, p.2), documentary research refers to the “qualitative analysis of documents that contains information about the phenomenon we wish to study”. Researchers are required to collect, interpret and analyse empirical data in order to elicit meaning, gain broader understandings and draw accurate conclusions about the evidence presented (Briggs & Coleman, 2007). The literature reveals the advantages and disadvantages of documentary research. Since documentary research requires data selection instead of data collection, it is less-time consuming and more cost-efficient than other research methods (Bowen, 2009). Thus, documentary research is a favourable option for undergraduate degree programs.

However, Ahmed (2010) and Bowen (2009) warn of the potential bias in documentary research, as researchers may purposefully remove information in order to align with their own social, economic and political beliefs. It is vital that researchers are aware of this selective bias, as Ahmed (2010, p.9) asserts that “uncritical readings of texts can reproduce and reinforce marginalization of groups”. In order to ensure the credibility of this research, the author examined a range of sources such as journal articles, books and government documents, and analysed them through the quality control criteria formulated by Scott (1990). This criterion includes “authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning” (Scott, 1990, p.6).

Most of the documentary analysis consisted of literature from Ireland, however a certain amount of international literature was also analysed. This literature was specific to migration-related diversity and classroom resources. The author acknowledges that there were a number of limitations, including word count; the author could have discussed a myriad of findings, however, the restrictive word count meant that only one key finding is discussed in this article. Moreover, although the

researcher recognises that there is a wide range of classroom resources, only textbooks, children's literature, images and toys were examined. Documentary research was deemed the most appropriate methodology; however, this limits the data that can be used to solely secondary sources. Furthermore, since primary research has been excluded, no ethical issues will arise.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A strong theme that emerged in the literature was the importance of providing diverse resources in all classrooms, and particularly in those with a high number of immigrant students (IDEA, 2013; Kavanagh, 2013). All children require classroom resources that value diversity, incorporate multiple perspectives, challenge stereotypes and most importantly, reflect each culture in the classroom (Moloney & O'Toole, 2018).

TEXTBOOKS

Pingel (2010) argues that the use of textbooks increases the incorporation of multicultural themes into classroom learning, which would arguably be absent if textbooks were not used. However, there are still various shortcomings to using these resources. Both Kavanagh's (2013) and Moloney and O'Toole's (2018) study found that many textbooks used in Irish schools provide limited scope for pupils to accurately see representations of those already marginalised in society, such as. While peripheral representations of diverse groups were present in some textbooks (Kavanagh, 2013), oversimplified narratives from Eurocentric perspectives, which portray 'other' cultures as problematic and 'underdeveloped' are salient. For example, the story of 'Muna' mentioned in Moloney and O'Toole's (2018) study holds implications for children from Ethiopia.

The narrative works to further marginalize and delegitimise these students, by presenting a stereotypical view of rural Ethiopia, with no reference to urban life. After reading the story of Muna and her sister travelling "barefoot to fetch water", readers are asked to identify two differences between their lives and Muna's life (Moloney & O'Toole, 2018, p. 64). Readers are further distanced as they are not asked to draw any similarities. In this regard, textbooks are not only ineffective at overcoming stereotypes, but they impact detrimentally on the experience and self-esteem of minority children. This finding is consistent with that of Bryan and Bracken (2011a), who argue against the over-reliance of textbooks in the classroom. However, it is important to bear in mind that Kavanagh (2013) only examined a small sample of textbooks, while Moloney and O'Toole (2018) focussed specifically on early years' textbooks. Therefore, these results need to be interpreted with caution, as the findings may not be representative of all textbooks operational in primary classrooms across Ireland.

Although statistics from the CSO (2017) reveal the increase of African students in Irish schools, the literature has found that negative portrayals of African groups are still omnipresent in textbooks. Olusa and Gavigan (2020) found that the African continent continues to be stereotyped as a ‘country’ associated with hunger, poverty and disease in textbooks, while African people are depicted as passive receivers of aid, unable to speak for themselves. The story of Malawi in *Unlocking SESE 6th class* (Olusa & Gavigan, 2020) raises an important question on intent. Apart from Egypt, the *Unlocking SESE* series has not comprehensively examined any other African country, so why have publishers chosen a country that depicts a view of Africa at its most disadvantaged? These representations reduce the African continent, which consists of thousands of languages and cultures, to a desolate, poverty stricken ‘country’ in the minds of majority children (Dóchas, 2014). This finding has major implications for African students, as it is likely they will become alienated from their culture due to the superficial and one-dimensional views of Africa presented within texts.

CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

Numerous studies suggest that children’s literature is a critical component of intercultural education due to its profound influence on students’ attitudes towards themselves and others (Derman-Sparks, 2013; Leahy & Foley, 2018; Wilson, 2014). Despite calls to increase representations of diversity in books, extensive research has found that children from minority groups often have few literary “mirrors” to affirm their identity in books and novels (Dolan, 2014; Monoyiou & Symeonidou, 2016, Wilson, 2014). Similarly, the Co-operative Children’s Book Centre (CCBC) is an American research library that collects thousands of children’s books from around the world each year and analyses them for diverse characteristics, with a specific focus on racial and ethnic diversity. *Table 2* states the percentage of children’s books that included diverse characters in 2015 compared to those published in 2018.

	2015	2018
American Indians	0.9%	1.6%
Latinx	2.4 %	5.9%
Asian	3.3%	9%
African/ African American	7.6%	11.7%
Animals/ trucks etc.	12.5%	27%
White	73.3%	50%

Table 2: Percentages of children's books that depict diverse characters (CCBC, 2015, 2018)

Results from the CCBC (2015, 2018) in *Table 2* indicate that although there has been a slight improvement from 2015 to 2018, a continuous lack of racially and ethnically diverse characters is still omnipresent. However, these findings are limited and cannot be extrapolated to all Irish schools. Even though the CCBC evaluate a large sample of children's books from around the world each year, they are not necessarily representative of the books specifically found in Irish classrooms. A more comprehensive study would investigate the representations of diverse characters in children's books used in Irish education settings and include data on how this diversity reflects the actual percentages of these populations in classrooms around Ireland.

IMAGES

Studies relating to the images used in Irish primary school classrooms found that not only was there a minimal number of images depicting minority groups, but these pictures were more likely to reproduce rather than undermine stereotypes, as immigrants were often neglected or depicted in a less favourable light in school images (Bryan & Bracken, 2011a; IDEA, 2013; Gyoy, 2008). Kavanagh's (2013) analysis revealed that the images included in the display entitled 'Kolkata', found in a Catholic primary school, remained rooted in a donor mentality, as she described the "vivid images of ramshackle towns, bedraggled children, polluted environments and giving charitable aid to powerless people" that feature in the display (Kavanagh, 2013, p. 135).

The proliferation of negative imagery disempowers immigrant children, especially those from India or other parts of Asia, as they may begin to feel devalued in the classroom. Moreover, majority children may develop "inaccurate and incomplete understandings that are based upon adverse stereotypes" (Kavanagh, 2013, p. 135). Therefore, it seems that the ancient Chinese proverb, 'one picture is worth a thousand words' remains as pertinent as ever, as the bleak and stereotypical images of India leave a lasting impression that is more likely to foster deep rooted prejudices than written text (Gyoy, 2008). A more diverse display would attempt to balance the bleak depictions of poverty by including various images that depict the prosperity of India, such as its renowned manufacturing cities, its centres of technology, its cultural richness and its democracy. While it is not suggested that teachers would completely conceal images of hardship and portray a romanticised view of the world (IDEA, 2013), images used in the classroom should be consciously chosen to exhibit fairness and positively reflect the diverse groups that make up the class.

TOYS

Toys in the classroom should reflect the social realities of Ireland in order to foster a sense of self-importance in immigrant children (NCCA, 2005). However, international studies found that the production of diverse toys is only a recent phenomenon, as seen with the launch of ‘Toy like Me’ in 2018, a company that produces a range of multicultural toys, including Asian dolls and games inspired by different cultures, and Irish-owned brand ‘Lottie Dolls’ in 2012, which focuses on producing toys that represent all children, regardless of race or ethnicity (Almeida, 2017; Harkin, 2019). Although it is important to recognise progress, no matter where the starting point, there are still a myriad of problems that permeate the toy industry. International studies found that darker skin tones, wider noses, fuller lips and ethnic fashion are often not considered when making Black dolls and instead, they are produced by pouring brown plastic into the same moulds used for White dolls. It was also found that multicultural play materials are generally not available in major toy outlets worldwide (Almeida, 2017; Carroll, 2014; MacNevin & Berman, 2017). However, the presence of multicultural toys in schools around Ireland remains briefly addressed in the literature. Henceforth, the current study cannot conclusively determine the adequacy of multicultural toys found in Irish classrooms.

CONCLUSION

The specific objective of this study was to analyse how the diversity of contemporary Irish society is represented in classroom resources. It is imperative that classroom resources serve as “mirrors” which reflect the lives of all children and “windows” that reflect the true diversity of society (Bishop, 1990). However, the materials examined in this research did not provide these opportunities. Moloney and O’Toole’s (2018) and Olusa and Gavigan’s (2020) analysis of textbooks found that minority students are oftentimes omitted or represented in a manner that offends and delegitimises their heritage. While peripheral representations of diversity were evident in some books, it was found that other books work to maintain the status quo and the notion of White superiority.

Similarly, Kavanagh’s (2013) research found that the images used in primary classrooms operate from a narrow understanding of what it means to be a child in an Irish primary classroom. The findings reported in this study shed light on the detrimental impacts the lack of diverse resources has on minority students. When resources present inaccurate or unbalanced perspectives, minority children may infer that they are not valued members of the school community or society, thus impacting negatively on their self-esteem, wellbeing and overall school experience (Haddad, 2006). Moreover, the materials examined in this study also hold implications for teaching all children about diversity. Evidently, the resources neglect to encourage multicultural understanding and there is a risk

that stereotypes may become a reality for majority children (Moloney & O'Toole, 2018). Therefore, from the documentary research and examples which were analysed, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that many classroom resources do not accurately reflect the diversity found in contemporary Irish schools and society. Although it is important to recognise the progress that has been made in some industries, the overall negative representations of the diversity now present in modern Irish society can result in minority children feeling further marginalized, while majority students may develop a distorted world view.

Publishers, authors and manufacturers need to be aware of the implications of these findings when producing materials that may be used in primary classrooms. To be fully inclusive, the author recommends that any material claiming to be multicultural must lay heavy emphasis on the positive portrayal of minority groups, challenge stereotypes and explore diversity by offering multiple perspectives. However, like any industry, publishers are financially motivated, and whatever sells will continue to be produced (Bryan & Bracken, 2011a). Therefore, all people interested in change must commit to making conscious decisions when buying products, as the market must see constant demand for diverse materials before much needed change can occur. It is hoped that if improvements are made in relation to the presence of multicultural resources in Irish classrooms, schools can become places of mutual respect, where all children can thrive and feel accepted. The author fervently looks forward to a future where classroom resources offer “windows” and “mirrors” that accurately represent the lives of all children, rather than distorted reflections through cracked glass.

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Teacher awareness: a key factor when implementing anti-racism initiatives to support children seeking refuge and living in direct provision.



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Róisín Keohane is a Newly Qualified Teacher, who recently graduated from Marino Institute of Education in 2021. Discussions about race and racism and the role of education in preventing racism, led her to want to investigate the systems in place in schools to combat racism. She is passionate about catering for all students in the classroom and this stimulated her interest into the challenges that face children living in direct provision, and the way in which they can be supported. The research was thought provoking, challenging and provided Róisín with the necessary skills to have an anti-racist inclusive classroom in the future.

KEYWORDS: Primary Education, Anti-Racism, Direct Provision.

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to highlight teacher awareness as an essential element when implementing anti-racism initiatives to support children seeking refuge and living in direct provision (DP). This is achieved by examining the concepts of anti-racism education alongside the barriers that children who live in DP face, of which teachers must be aware. The motivation for choosing this topic for research was my own lack of awareness of anti-racism campaigns and programmes to use in schools, with racism being a pressing issue in today's society (Conneely, 2021). It is of paramount importance that systems are put in place to combat racism. In addition, DP is a contested topic both politically and socially in Ireland today and a challenge that faces children living in DP is the potential racism against them (Ombudsman

for Children's Office, 2020). This resulted in the combination of two themes into one research question for the overall article. Whether or not the Department of Education provides a compulsory anti-racism programme for educators, or a supportive programme highlighting the challenges facing children seeking refuge and living in DP, it is essential that teachers are familiar with topics that are sensitive for children and with approaches that contribute to an inclusive classroom.

This article will provide teachers and educators with information to address racism in the classroom and will highlight areas in which children seeking refuge and living in DP need support. It is important to note that even when DP is abolished, the repercussions for children who have lived there will remain present and teachers will need to continue to support their emotional needs. This article is a snapshot of a broader dissertation, which examined anti-racism education and Ireland's current use of anti-racism pedagogies, which investigated the experiences of children who are seeking refuge and living in DP in Ireland, and which explored intercultural and inclusive education initiatives used internationally with a focus on anti-racism education.

CONTEXT

This research highlights areas of the education system that are denying children their human rights. All children have the right to an education (Article 28, United Nations, 1989). Migrant and refugee children have a right to education that recognises their identity and protects them from discrimination (Article 8; Article 2, United Nations, 1989). Racism is a significant issue in today's society. In 2020, the issue of racism was highlighted on a global level by the death of George Floyd as a result of police brutality in the United States of America, which propelled many people to take part in Black Lives Matter marches all over the world, including Ireland (Gaffney, 2020). The marches held in cities around Ireland stimulated members of the Black community and other minority groups to share their experiences of racism here. The Irish Times interviewed a group of people who experienced racism in Ireland, where one man noted that a racial slur was used against him in the classroom by a classmate. He stated that the teacher told the peer to stop and took no further action. The man remarked, 'I feel my teacher wasted a rare and powerful opportunity to teach the class about racism' (Kenny, 2020). Ultimately, this asks the question how children are being protected from discrimination in Irish classrooms.

Racism is briefly mentioned by the Stay Safe programme which is used in the subject Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) (MacIntyre & Lawlor, 2016a & 2016b). An anti-bullying policy is in place in all primary schools, yet, only 40 per cent of primary school policies dealt specifically with racist bullying (Smyth et al., 2009, p. 92). This was echoed by Damien White, President of the Irish Primary Principals Network, in an Oireachtas debate, stating ‘the issue of racism comes under the scope of bullying and some other policies. There should be a stand-alone policy’ (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2021). More recently, it was reported that one school did not deal with a racist incident where two Muslim children experienced verbal abuse and were called ‘dirty faced’ by a member of staff (Michael, 2020, p. 14). At the 2012 Racism and Education Conference, it was identified that very few intercultural pedagogies were being promoted by the Department of Education and Skills (Kitching & Curtin, 2012). The authors also noted the lack of research and information on anti-racism available for teachers. This suggests that the 2005 national guidelines on ‘Intercultural Education in Primary Schools’ developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2005) are not effectively addressing racism in the primary school system.

Derman-Sparks et al. (2010), stated that anti-bias education encompasses human rights such as protecting children from all forms of physical or mental violence and participating ‘fully in cultural and artistic life’ (Article 19; Article 31, United Nations, 1989). There are four goals for effective anti-bias education, which can apply to anti-racism education (Derman-Sparks et al., 2010). The first goal requires children to develop ‘self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities’ (Derman-Sparks et al., 2010, p. 4). This can be fostered by engaging with children’s different identities and making different types of families and races visible to children, which supports the diverse classroom (Department of Education and Skills, 2010; Beneke et al., 2018). The second goal is for children to communicate their emotions and differences through the use of appropriate respectful language. This allows children to compare their similarities and differences and ultimately show ‘how to treat all people caringly and fairly’ (Derman-Sparks et al., 2010, p. 4). Goal number three involves children recognising their own stereotypes and misconceptions and understanding the reasons behind these assumptions. When children display skills to act against discrimination, the fourth goal has been reached.

In 2000, the Irish State founded DP (Faculty of Paediatrics, 2019). DP was initially set up to provide temporary accommodation for applicants seeking asylum, which is a process within the Irish immigration system (UCC Child Law Clinic, 2017). “Asylum-seeker” is a common term for a migrant who has applied for International Protection, and they are placed in DP when their applications for refugee status are being processed (UCC Child Law Clinic, 2017; Children’s Rights Alliance 2019). This

process was proposed to be 6 months long, but in recent years the average length of stay is 38 months (Faculty of Paediatrics, 2019). In 2018, it was found that 600 people had been living in DP for an excess of eight years (Faculty of Paediatrics, 2019). DP centres are managed by private contractors for the Reception and Integration Agency (Children's Rights Alliance, 2017).

100,000 asylum applications were submitted between 1992 and 2015 (Faculty of Paediatrics, 2019, p. 7). 3,673 asylum applications were first submitted in 2018, of these, 23% of them were for children (Faculty of Paediatrics, 2019, p. 7). Article 29 of the 1989 United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child describes how that the education of children must facilitate the development of respect for the child's 'cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country... [the child] may originate' (United Nations, 1989). This is being denied for children living in DP. There were 6,405 people living in DP, 'including 1,778 children' (Faculty of Paediatrics, 2019, p. 7).

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this article was documentary research. Documentary research is a method of "interpretive research that requires researchers to collect, collate and analyse empirical data in order to produce a theoretical account that either describes, interprets or explains what has occurred" (Briggs & Coleman, 2007, p. 281). This involved the examination of secondary documents such as newspaper articles, policies and regulation, reports, books and webpages (Gross, 2018). Corbin & Strauss (2008) stated that documentary analysis requires that the pre-gathered information is examined and interpreted to enhance the understanding of the topic.

There are many advantages to using documentary research. It allows researchers to access a wide variety of published documents and the author's permission does not need to be obtained (Bowen, 2009). It also allows the researcher to make comparisons between documents, (Mogalakwe, 2006). It is essential to acknowledge weaknesses that are associated with documentary research such as the level of bias, credibility and representativeness (Mogalakwe, 2006). The researcher must be familiar with these flaws to critically examine the documents to evaluate their authenticity and credibility.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There were multiple findings in the documentary research. This article focuses on the findings that are most beneficial and practical for educators and teachers to be aware of. Firstly, the barriers facing children living in DP, secondly, teachers should be aware of programmes that address the challenges facing children seeking refuge, and finally the benefits of anti-racism education.

BARRIERS AS A RESULT OF LIVING IN DP

There are many issues that children living in DP experience and in order to support children seeking refuge and living in DP, teachers need to be aware of the barriers that they face. Children living in DP are subjected to issues such as ‘racism, stigma and bullying, both where they live and in school’ (UCC Child Law Clinic, 2017, p. 7). One child recalled, “In my school, people are mean to me because I sleep with my mum” (Faculty of Paediatrics, 2019, p. 11). The children recognise the system of immigration and DP centres as unsafe and unjust (UCC Child Law Clinic, 2017). They are concerned about many issues such as ‘institutionalisation, length of stay, living conditions, inadequate supports and lack of access to further education’ (Faculty of Paediatrics, 2019, p. 11). Children also mentioned that they would like a homework club to exist in DP to assist them with their homework (UCC Child Law Clinic, 2017). Teachers must be aware of these concerns to provide support for children seeking refuge and living in DP.

Children’s social interactions are limited to inside the DP centre and inside the school. It is vital that teachers are aware of this. Children lack engagement in extra-curricular activities as a consequence of ‘funds, transport, strict mealtimes and a visiting ban to DP centres’ (Faculty of Paediatrics, 2019, p. 11). Children seeking refuge and living in DP are unable to become involved in the social interactions that derive from the school setting such as birthday parties and playdates (White, 2012). The ban on visiting DP centres limits the children’s ability to progress friendships outside of school. The strict mealtimes and the ban on visiting DP centres are as a result of the structure of DP centres which is set out by the Irish State (Faculty of Paediatrics, 2019). Children are unable to freely attend social events outside of school. Thus, teachers must address certain topics appropriately such as birthday parties, play dates and specific community-organised events. Teachers must be conscious that perhaps the social interactions for children cease at the end of the day and during the weekend, as this can affect children’s social skills.

Children frequently mentioned money concerns (Arnold, 2012; Faculty of Paediatrics, 2019; UCC Child Law Clinic, 2017). Mothers of children living in DP noted that the lack of finances prevents the children from fully engaged in both ‘social and academic school life’ (Martin et al., 2018, p. 463).

Children in DP have fears regarding lack of space and support for homework, as well as purchasing items for school such as uniforms and books (UCC Child Law Clinic, 2017). The children are conscious of the financial impact this has on their ability to go on school trips and other extra-curricular activities. Teachers must be aware of this as it prevents children from actively participating in the school's extra-curricular activities such as Book Fair and school trips.

Teachers need to be familiar with appropriate forms of communications between home and school. Formal written communication rarely received a response as a result of the parents' limited knowledge of English (Martin et al., 2018). Teachers also blamed the parents for not supporting and supervising their children (Martin et al., 2018). One teacher stated 'It is the supportive back-up that they need from home to help them. Attitudes are a big part of it and you can see the difference with the nationalities there' (Martin et al., 2018, p. 464). This comment is discriminatory and highlight this teacher's ignorance of the DP situation. There is a misconception from teachers that the staff in DP will translate and help the parents respond to the teacher's note because there is 'a good level of collegiality down there among parents' (Martin et al., 2018, p. 465). A principal remarked 'Well I think there is enough people down there [DP centre] who speak English to help each other, that is what I think happens' (Martin et al., 2018, p. 465). This further highlights the lack of teacher awareness regarding the relationship between residents and staff in DP.

A SUPPORTIVE PROGRAMME FOR CHILDREN SEEKING REFUGE

In the state of Victoria in Australia, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and the Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture (Foundation House) developed the School Support Programme (Block et al., 2014). From engaging in the workshops that used anti-racism pedagogies and initiatives, teachers felt they had a better understanding and empathised more with refugee families. There is evidence of anti-bias education in teaching resources used in the classroom as the programme promoted emotional support and multiculturalism. Teachers were unfamiliar with these materials prior to engaging with the support programme (Block et al., 2014). Block et al. (2014) also noted that from using the programme interactions with families had greatly improved.

Teachers who engaged in workshops that aimed to educate about the challenges facing refugee children in the classroom, confirmed that it gave them an enhanced understanding of the areas that needed support, such as disrupted education, change in curriculum, educational and welfare needs (Block et al., 2014). This could aid the implementation of anti-racism pedagogies and initiatives in

schools. Many of the responses from teachers were similar, stating they did not know about the lives of refugee families before attending the workshop (Block et al., 2014). These teachers also felt their teaching improved as they could use certain incidents as teaching opportunities (Kishimoto, 2018). Teachers and school staff were more aware of parental concerns after attending these workshops (Kishimoto, 2018).

BENEFITS OF ANTI-RACISM EDUCATION

Teachers must be familiar with anti-racism; the definition and the approaches involved in order to aid the implementation of anti-racism pedagogies and initiatives. Derman-Sparks and Brunson Philips (1997) are two leading anti-racism educators, and they defined anti-racism education as ‘the beginning of a new approach to thinking, feeling, and acting. Anti-racist consciousness and behaviour mean having the self- awareness, knowledge, and skills—as well as the confidence, patience, and persistence—to challenge, interrupt, modify, erode, and eliminate any and all manifestations of racism within one’s own spheres of influence’ (Derman-Sparks & Brunson Philips, 1997, p. 3). It creates an inclusive atmosphere where children recognise different identities and race (Derman-Sparks et al., 2010). It facilitates children learning skills to challenge both their own prejudices and those of others. Teachers need to be aware that this can be done through using specific reading materials and resources for lessons that challenge stereotypes. This encourages children to think critically about what they know as true and what has been presented to them.

It is essential that teachers are familiar with Dr. Sue’s (2016) common avoidance strategies, ‘Do Nothing, Sidetrack the Conversation, Appease the Participants, Terminate the Discussion and Become Defensive’ and refrain from engaging in these (Sue, 2016, p. 231- 234). The teacher is the facilitator of these conversations. Work must be included by authors from multicultural backgrounds such as in stories, art, and history (Kishimoto, 2018). The children practise drawing comparisons between the portrayal of members of society and the accurate factual information. This increases the children’s awareness of stereotypes and allows the children to become aware of their own biases (Kishimoto, 2018). An increased teacher awareness of the issues of concern that face the children from ranging backgrounds, in their school, also facilitates staff to create resources and programmes that address these areas of concern directly and support the children.

CONCLUSION

This article sought to explore teacher awareness as a key concept when implementing anti-racism pedagogies and initiatives to support children seeking refuge and living in DP. Teachers need to

undergo specific training in anti-racism education in order to carry out the methods identified by Derman-Sparks et al. (2010). School staff and teachers must be familiar with the areas where children seeking refuge and living in DP need support. Montano (2019) recognises the need for white students to engage in anti-racism education as they too can find race conversations difficult to navigate. Teachers must be aware that despite whether a class is predominantly ethnically homogenous or not, it is essential that children have the tools and skills to challenge discriminatory remarks and opinions.

More specifically, regarding supporting children seeking refuge and living in DP, the research identified and highlighted both the barriers and challenges these families and children face. In order to put the correct supportive measures in place for children seeking refuge and living in DP, it is vital that teachers are aware of the challenges that they and their families face. Some aspects that require support are difficult for the education system to address such as limited transport, reduced social interactions and family income. However, they are still limiting children's participation in the school community, and it is important that teachers are aware of this. It would be beneficial for teachers be aware of certain measures that must be introduced, along with an anti-racism initiative. These include a homework club, language supports, creation of specific social interactions in schools, teaching materials that address children's social and emotional needs, celebrating multiculturalism and promoting inclusion, and an increased dialogue between home and school. In order to create teacher awareness:

- Workshops should be created by the Department of Education which focus on increasing awareness about both the refugee experience and the experience of those living in DP, and teachers should be required to attend these workshops. This uncovers any stereotypes the teachers may have and alerts them to the barriers facing children as a consequence of living in DP.
- Teachers must use other methods of communication in addition to written communication. The Department of Education should consider funding interpreter services for schools with high numbers of children from DP and families who have English as an additional language.
- Anti-racism initiatives, using anti-racism pedagogies must be developed and supported by the Department of Education.
- Anti-racism education must be provided to all qualified and pre-service teachers to enhance rather than replace intercultural education. Some courses are available in Black Studies and Racism from the Institute of Anti-Racism and Black Studies (Institute of Antiracism and Black Studies, n.d.). The INTO recently also included a provision of CPD (Continuing Professional

Development) in anti-racism. Intercultural education promotes diversity which suggests that learning more about different cultures reduces racism. The issuing of national guidelines on 'Intercultural Education in Primary Schools' developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2005) suggests a progression towards an inclusive, diverse educational standpoint. However, the conference discussed by Kitching and Curtin, implies that these guidelines have not been successful as the participants were still unsure on which direction to take when it comes to anti-racism education in 2012. Therefore, more specific updated anti-racism education is required, one that encourages an anti-racist inclusive classroom.

- Research needs to be carried out to quantify the level of racism being experienced currently by children in Irish classrooms. This research could then be used to provide solid evidence to the policy-makers that anti-racism education is essential.

Teacher awareness is a key factor when implementing anti-racism initiatives to support children seeking refuge and living in DP. Without teacher awareness, teachers are unfamiliar with anti-racism education and the approaches that create an anti-racist classroom. The lack of awareness about the children seeking refuge and living in DP will result in teachers being unfamiliar with how to cater appropriately for the children's social and emotional learning. It is essential in order for all children in the classroom to be supported and receive education without discrimination.

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An investigation into why Traveller children's attendance levels are comparatively lower than that of settled children and how Irish Primary Schools are helping to overcome this challenge.

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I am a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT), after recently completing the Bachelor of Education programme in Marino Institute of Education. I decided to conduct my research on Travellers in education as it is a topic I feel strongly about. I have had much experience in many different schools and classrooms in which I've had the opportunity to work with children from the Travelling Community. From both my experience and research it is evident that not all children feel as though they belong or are valued within their school communities. It is my hope and ambition to ensure that as a teacher I can provide a safe, welcoming, diverse and caring environment for all children in my class in the future. This research has allowed me to gain an insight into the reasons behind some children's feelings of a lack of belonging, it has also helped me to understand how I can prevent this from happening for the children in my class. All children have a right to an education, as Liz Fosslie stated (n.d.): "diversity is having a seat at the table, inclusion is having a voice and belonging is having that voice be heard". It is our role as educators to ensure all children in our care feel valued throughout their education.

KEYWORDS: Primary Education, Traveller Education, Attendance, Inclusion

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to investigate the relatively low levels of attendance and attainment of children from the Travelling Community in Irish primary schools. The research was conducted using documentary analysis. It is hoped that possible reasons behind low attendance rates amongst Traveller children

will be identified and examined. The researcher also sought to investigate how schools are implementing and supporting the importance of improved attendance levels among Traveller children. The multiple programmes and interventions that the Department of Education and Skills (DES) have put in place in order to improve the educational experiences of Traveller children in DEIS schools will also be explored.

The reason and motivation for choosing this topic was because, although I had a positive experience throughout my education, feeling as though I belonged and mattered within society, following research and some school placements it is evident that not all children feel this way. It is essential that all children feel valued and respected no matter their identity or ethnicity. As a settled teacher it is my responsibility to foster this respect and ensure all children in my class and school community feel they belong and are valued by all. It is hoped that the research presented in this article will support teachers and other educators in providing an inclusive, welcoming, and safe classroom environment for all children regardless of their race, culture, or ethnic minority group. This article is a fragment of a broader dissertation which explored many factors that influence Traveller children's rates of attendance in education and also how primary schools are supporting children of the Travelling community to improve their levels of attendance.

CONTEXT

There are 30,987 Travellers currently living in Ireland, which accounts for 0.7% of the Irish population (CSO, 2018); they were "first formally recognised as an ethnic minority in Ireland in 2017" (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2017 as cited in, Hanafin, et al., 2018, p. 45). "Travellers and Roma are among the most disadvantaged and marginalised people in Ireland" (National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, 2017-2021, p. 2) and research shows that this marginalisation is particularly evident within their experiences of education.

Patrick McDonagh made a statement that "education is the biggest problem facing the Travelling Community" (Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community, 2019, November 26). According to the Central Statistics Office Ireland (CSO, 2019) 6 in 10 Traveller males have only achieved primary level education. That accounts for 57.2% of the male Traveller population. Similarly, only 13% of females from the Traveller Community achieve upper secondary level education compared to 70% of the settled population (CSO, 2019). It must be noted that there are many reasons that influence the attendance and retention rates of children from the Travelling community in school. Historic low levels of school completion, experiences of bullying in school, parents' experience of

education, and exclusion in the classroom are to name but a few of the influential factors that have an impact on Travellers' educational experiences.

The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) have stated that Travellers are fifty times more likely to leave school without a Leaving Certificate in comparison to the non-Traveller population in the country. These statistics are harrowing and are evidence that research in this area of education is warranted. Former Minister of Education, Joe McHugh (Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community, 2019, December, 3), acknowledged that there is an "enormous challenge" to overcome in respect to Travellers in education. The awareness of the problem is evident, yet why are the figures of Traveller children staying in education still so low? Martin Collins, Co-director of Pavee Point, a group that was formed to improve the rights of Travellers in Ireland and bridge the gaps between Travellers and settled people, stated that "Traveller children are falling between the cracks" with regard to the education system in Ireland (Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community, 2019, November 19). "Education is not a luxury it is an actual right that all children have in this country" (Joyce, Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community, 2019, November 12).

All children on the island of Ireland have a right to be treated equally within the education system regardless of their culture, background or ethnic group. However, statistics and research show that now, in the 21st Century, this is still not the case and many Traveller children are often discriminated against on a daily basis throughout their years of education. These findings are evidence to the fact that there is a critical need for extended research into why Traveller children's levels of attendance continue to be much lower than that of settled community children, and to examine how schools, teachers and the Department of Education can best address this difficult and continuous challenge.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for the research was documentary analysis. Documentary research consists of the use of primary and secondary texts such as books, journal articles, newspaper articles and population censuses in order to gather information on a topic. Fitzgerald (2007) describes documentary research as quantitative or qualitative "analysis which encourages readers to locate, interpret, analyse and draw conclusions about the evidence presented" (p. 279).

While Denscombe (2010) stated that there is a significant advantage with the amount of documents available and how easily they can be accessed it is important to note that some documents may be biased and therefore not accurate. It must be understood that many of the articles used as

part of research for this dissertation were written by settled people and therefore there was a greater risk of bias present. Nevertheless, the author was critical in their research and ensured that the documents they chose were free of bias by analysing the documents with authenticity, credibility and meaning (Briggs & Coleman, 2007).

It is recognised that there are limitations to this research methodology. Documentary analysis focuses on secondary sources alone (Bohnsack, 2014), meaning interviews with Travellers to ascertain their perceptions of education could not be carried out. While many readings were informative and insightful it must be noted that conducting surveys and interviews would have added a more personal element to the research from the point of view of members of the Travelling community in Ireland.

While all research on this topic is relevant and important, there is a need for current research to be conducted. Much of the research gathered from readings is from several years ago and some of the information may not be relevant today. As a result of possible outdated research being explored this can impact the accuracy of the findings and information explored in this paper. This supports the author's statement above that current research on this topic is essential.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

One of the overall aims of this research was to investigate and understand reasons that influence Traveller children's attendance rates in Irish primary schools, what the influences are on their attendance levels, and how are schools and the department helping to counteract this trend of poor attendance among children of the Travelling Community.

TRAVELLER CHILDREN'S PEERS AND TEACHERS HAVE A LACK OF KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF TRAVELLER CULTURE, WHICH INEVITABLY AFFECTS TRAVELLER CHILDREN'S ATTENDANCE IN IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

Research shows that both teachers and settled students engaging with Traveller children have a lack of understanding of Traveller culture which inevitably impacts on Traveller children's attendance. Traveller children admitted to "feeling lonely" (Joyce, Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community, 2019, November 12) in school with no sense of belonging because of this lack of understanding of their culture. This lack of understanding consequently results in poor relationships for Travellers with their settled peers and teachers. Children of the Travelling community face racism, bullying and discrimination within the school environment (Bloomer, et al., 2014). There is evidence to suggest that this bullying and discrimination towards Travellers is purely as a result of their ethnicity

and cultural background (Bloomer, et al., 2014). Conneely (2020) also found evidence of such discrimination in a recent survey, when it was revealed that two out of three Travellers feel discriminated against because they are a member of the Travelling community. Fights, derogatory name-calling and being ignored in class (Bloomer, et al., 2014) are to list but a few of the forms of discrimination Travellers face. While these negative experiences affect Travellers' attendance rates it must be noted that a study by Devine, et al., (2008) showed that several non-Traveller children were noticed "sticking-up" for their ethnic minority peers amid racial bullying. This research supports the engagement with anti-bullying policies that many schools around the country have in place, it also holds a sense of hope that Traveller children may begin to have improved experiences in school if bullying is deemed unacceptable by all children.

However, Karl Kitching (as cited in Holland, 2018) made the observation that teachers too, engage in such discrimination. Kathleen Lawrence, a member of the Travelling Community spoke of her negative experience with teachers. She noted that teachers ignored her in class, had low expectations of what she could achieve and that they had little understanding of her culture (as cited in Holland, 2017). Additional research by Bhopal (2011) revealed that a number of teachers held negative opinions and attitudes towards Traveller children in their care; nevertheless, it must be noted that this study only represents a small number of teachers and therefore cannot be generalised for all educators in primary schools. The majority of teachers are "white females of upper middle class" (O'Brien, 2018) and from the settled community, which significantly adds to Traveller children's lack of belonging in school as they are not represented in the teaching profession. However, it must be noted that this trend is slowly changing and members of the Travelling community such as, Owen Ward, Temera O'Brien and Chrisdina O'Neill are evidence to such change as they are embarking on a journey to enter the education system as teachers. Nevertheless, these individuals only account for a very small percentage of the thousands of teachers in the country. Bloomer et al., (2014) still states that Traveller children are one of the most bullied groups in the school community; this bullying and lack of understanding of their culture has drastic implications on their rates of attendance (Biggart, et al., 2009).

THERE IS A LACK OF AND NEED FOR THE INCLUSION OF TRAVELLER IDENTITY AND OTHER ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN IRELAND. THIS LACK OF INCLUSION ULTIMATELY AFFECTS CHILDREN'S SENSE OF BELONGING AND IMPACTS THEIR ATTENDANCE LEVELS IN SCHOOL.

It could be argued that Travellers' beliefs and values are not represented in the curriculum. Catherine Joyce (Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community, 2019, November 12), made the

statement that it is extremely difficult for Travellers to feel any sense of belonging in school as their living experience, culture and identity are not reflected throughout the curriculum. Ainscow (2005) believed that inclusion is one of the major challenges facing schools and educational systems around the world. This is evidence to the fact that proper inclusion of all beliefs and cultures is not widely recognised in all schools and therefore there is a need for its improvement. The Department of Education and its teachers have a responsibility for such improvement in ensuring that all children in schools around the country feel a sense of worth and belonging as they journey through the education system.

Dr Katriona O'Sullivan (as cited in; O'Brien, 2018) suggests that there is a need for schools to reflect the diverse nature of Irish society. Research has shown that many teachers choose not to engage in intercultural dialogue with their class as they feel there is a lack of support, they too admit to feelings of low self-efficacy (Bryan, 2010; Bryan & Bracken, 2011; Lodge, et al., 2004). With the lack of opportunity to learn about Traveller culture and history many Traveller children do not feel as though they belong in school, they do not feel respected or valued and these are important indicators of inclusion (Miller & Katz, 2002; as cited in Hanafin, et al., 2018). As a result of this lack of knowledge and engagement with Traveller culture in the curriculum, children from the settled community often lack understanding of their Traveller peers, which as stated can lead to bullying and discrimination.

Traveller children are rarely visible in textbooks (Bhopal, 2004; Moloney & O'Toole, 2018), or in the school environment itself. It is important for all children of all cultures to see themselves both in their surroundings and in their learning (O'Sullivan, 2018; as cited in O'Brien, 2018). Bhopal (2004) believed a possible change in the curriculum to be more flexible of Travellers' interests and needs could solve the problem of exclusion. However, if the Traveller Culture and History Education Bill (2018) were to be introduced officially all children would have an understanding of Traveller identity which inevitably could break down many barriers. This Bill would benefit all children in schools, but especially, Traveller children and their families as they would feel represented in their learning in school. In 1995, Dwyer noted that teachers believed a deeper understanding of Traveller culture would benefit both them and all their students in school; however, in 2021 the level of knowledge of Traveller culture amongst educators is still inadequate. There is a significant need for this Bill to be approved in order to improve the educational experiences and sense of belonging of Traveller children in Irish primary schools.

It must be noted that the Yellow Flag programme is making significant progress in developing understandings of many cultures in Irish schools. The Yellow Flag programme was first established in

2008 by the Irish Traveller Movement in response to Travellers' experience in the education system (ITM, 2018). The aim of the programme is to help schools and teachers provide a welcoming, intercultural environment and classroom for all students in their care. Often in school "children may not see people like themselves pictured in books, or people like themselves working as teachers in their school" (ITM, 2018, p. 7). However, the Yellow Flag programme offers teachers supports in including and exploring many different cultures and beliefs through the hidden curriculum. The overall ambition of the programme is for children to "be proud of themselves, their community and culture" (ITM, 2018, p. 14). However, this programme is not implemented in all schools and therefore many schools, teachers and students still lack knowledge of what a diverse classroom and school setting entails. As the ITM (2018) expressed in the Yellow Flag Handbook "cultural diversity will not be a barrier, but rather a reason for success" (p. 9) and therefore the Yellow Flag Programme should be introduced to all schools in the country.

SCHOOL PROGRAMMES IN DEIS PRIMARY SCHOOLS ARE CRUCIAL IN SUPPORTING TRAVELLER CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES IN TACKLING POOR ATTENDANCE LEVELS.

While Traveller children continue to face discrimination throughout their journey through the education system it is to be acknowledged that the many supports in place in DEIS schools across the country have provided the opportunity for an improved educational experience for the children in their care (Weir et al., 2018). Supports such as the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) programme and the School Completion Programme (SCP) have proved to be vital in improving rates of attendance among Traveller children. Research by the ERC and the Department's inspectorate in 2011 concluded that "there is clear evidence that the DEIS Programme is having a positive effect on tackling education disadvantage" (as cited in DES, 2016, p. 4) and further research by Smyth et al., (2015) stated that the "rate of change in retention is better in DEIS schools than non-DEIS schools" (p. 6). This research suggests that the programmes and initiatives in DEIS schools have and continue to make a difference in the rates of attendance and school completion not only for Traveller children but all children experiencing educational disadvantage. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the 2016 Census stated that 4,539 Traveller children attended DEIS schools and that 3,848 Traveller children attended non-DEIS schools (Tickner, 2017). This finding poses the question for those Travellers in non-DEIS schools and whether their needs are being catered for in regard to supporting them through their education and implementing strategies to improve their attendance levels.

CONCLUSION

This research sought to identify some of the possible reasons behind poor levels of attendance in school among members of the Travelling community. Following documentary analysis, it is evident that there is a lack of a sense of belonging within education for Traveller children, which ultimately has an impact on their attendance levels in school. Members of this minority ethnic group face discrimination from both their teachers and settled peers as a result of the lack of knowledge of Traveller culture. This lack of knowledge stems from the disappointing fact that Traveller culture is not well represented throughout the curriculum or ordinary school life. While programmes such as the Yellow Flag offer support to teachers and students in promoting inclusivity for all children, the Yellow Flag programme has only been implemented in 80 schools across Ireland to date and therefore it is clear that there is a need for more promotion of this initiative within schools across the country. The Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill (2018) needs to be integrated into the primary school curriculum. The implementation of this Bill would offer a significant improvement in a sense of belonging in schools for Traveller children and their parents. It would allow them to have an opportunity to learn about their own culture, be able to share their own personal experiences and fully contribute to discussions about their learning, thus leading to possible increases in rates of attendance.

While Traveller children's attendance levels are still much lower in comparison to their settled peers it is important to acknowledge that there have been significant improvements for all children experiencing disadvantage in their education. Supports such as the SCP and HSCL are fostering such improvements however, in order to support all Traveller children in education these programmes need to be introduced and implemented in all primary schools. This would allow for positive relationships to be formed between the home and school for all Traveller families, and hopefully improve levels of attendance.

Recommendations:

The author has made the following recommendations in the hope that these suggestions can be implemented and result in improvements for members of the Travelling community in their education in the future.

- Teachers should be offered the opportunity to engage in courses that offer both understanding and methodologies of how to engage in lessons around the topic of Traveller culture. Initial teacher education courses should too have an element of learning about ethnic minority groups in Ireland.

- The Yellow Flag programme is significant in helping schools create a more inclusive environment and in providing supports and resources to teachers for lessons of interaction with different cultures. Many schools across Ireland are now more diverse in the cultures and beliefs of children in their schools and henceforth the Yellow Flag programme should be implemented in all schools.
- The Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill too needs to be passed and integrated into the primary school curriculum.

Overall, the researcher found this study to be very valuable as a future educator, because an improved understanding of Traveller education was gained, which has allowed the author to now know and understand how to ensure their future classroom will be a welcoming place for all children regardless of their cultural background. The author hopes that the recommendations stated can be implemented and will result in improvements in the education system that will support members of the Travelling community in their education in the future.

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