

Submission to the Department of Education and Science including Recommendations for an Intercultural Education Strategy

We the undersigned, at Lóchrann, Centre for Intercultural Education, Coláiste Mhuire, Marino Institute of Education, welcome the opportunity to make a written submission with our views on intercultural education in order to assist with the preparation of an intercultural education strategy for the future. While we recognise that economic circumstances have changed since this invitation was issued, we believe that the following suggestions are of critical importance particularly at a time of fiscal uncertainty, when vulnerable groups can become increasingly marginalised and when underlying social tensions are more likely to emerge or become exacerbated. The following contributions are offered in the spirit of constructive debate about the complex issues involved, particularly at this time of global and national economic challenge and insecurity.

1. Intercultural Education - Proposed Principles

1.1 Mainstreaming

The proposed actions include a description of integration as a “dynamic two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents in Ireland.” The question might then be asked as to what specific changes one might realistically expect schools and educational policy makers to implement in order to accommodate students coming from ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic heritages? Such examples may include:

- Providing support for schools in designing and implementing whole-school policies on intercultural education, which include specific procedures for addressing bullying and racist incidents. With the economic downturn there is likely to be a corresponding rise in unemployment, a situation that could well lead to tension arising between ethnic and/or cultural groups, including towards or from the host community. Teachers need support and training in the particular skills necessary to address such conflicts if they arise in the school setting.
- Providing guidance on establishing positive relationships with parents / guardians of students from minority ethnic, cultural or linguistic communities and incorporating these factors more deeply into the school’s curriculum. Aspects of good practice in

Dublin 7 and Dublin 8 could be used as exemplars for wider dissemination (for example, Lantern initiative in Dublin 8; Dublin 7 School Cluster)

- Providing professional development for mainstream classroom teachers to ensure they have the requisite knowledge, skills and values required to assist English language learners and to ensure that these students' cultural heritages are recognised and integrated into the curriculum.
- Analysing the long-term implications for reducing the numbers of language support teachers to take consideration of likely impacts on socio-economic development of the country.
- Ensuring that teacher education colleges provide core courses at pre-service, addressing diversity, language teaching and learning and inclusion.

Thus, providing specific exemplification of how the host community can make constructive changes in order to accommodate minority groups will strengthen capacity for the realisation of a successful intercultural education strategy.

1.2 Knowledge of English (and Irish) for all residents

Language and culture are inextricably linked. Over-emphasising the former to the neglect of the latter may reduce the 'integration' agenda to a set of skills or competencies which can be assessed via checklists. It removes any examination of societal power structures as well as any requirement on the majority culture to examine perceptions, beliefs and stereotypes. It also places all responsibility on incoming groups to adapt to the new environment rather than engaging both dominant and other cultural groups in a productive dialogue regarding how best to advance the educational attainment of all learners. Our suggested strategy for addressing the interconnectedness of language and culture is to ensure that education focusing on cultural awareness is a key component of all language courses for teachers and school staff. For example, the Coláiste Mhuire / INTO courses on Teaching English as an Additional Language contain modules specifically focusing on whole-school and whole-class issues. This is based on the premise, supported by research, that children from minority linguistic communities make academic progress in schools where their cultures are valued. The Department for Education and Skills in the U.K., in their Primary National Strategy for EAL (2006¹), note that "if a group or groups of children feel that they do not belong or have a

¹ Department for Education and Skills (2006) Primary National Strategy for Teaching English as an Additional Language. London: DfES.

share in the school's culture, this impacts significantly on their attainment and ultimately, their life chances.”

We are also cognisant of the advice offered by the NCCA in the ‘Guidelines on Intercultural Education’², which stress the necessity for maintenance and strengthening of the child’s home language. This is also in keeping with the findings of the Languages Education Policy Profile developed in collaboration between the DES and the Council of Europe (2008)³ which calls for the recognition of plurilingual heritages of all students. There are implications for on-going professional development and pre-service preparation of teachers to take cognisance of these issues.

Finally, we are concerned about the implications of reducing the level of support which is currently on offer to children who speak English as an additional language. Research indicates that students appear more likely to be placed in special education as the amount of language support is reduced (Artiles et al 2005⁴). While the reduction in language support may result in some short term monetary savings, it will have deleterious effects in the longer term. In the future, negative costs to society may be measured in additional expenditure on special education programmes and on the reduced capacity of vulnerable students to realise their fullest potentials in schools and in society.

1.3 Rights and responsibilities, high aspirations and high expectations should be the same for all students

Certainly there is a necessity for teachers maintaining high expectations; however it is challenging to identify how these high expectations are to be realised in the event that teachers do not have recourse to resources and professional development opportunities required to realise these aspirations.

² Government of Ireland, 2005 and 2006

³ Council of Europe and the Department of Education and Science (2008) Language Education Policy Profile: Ireland, Language Policy Division, Strasburg/Department of Education and Science, Dublin. Accessed 15 May 2008, <http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Linguistic/Source/Profile%20Ireland_%20final_EN.doc>.

⁴ Artiles, A., Rueda, R., Salazar, J., & Higareda, I. (2005). Within-group diversity in minority disproportionate representation: English language learners in urban school districts. *Exceptional Children*, 71, 283-300.

Furthermore, we believe that education for those who come from ethnic minority backgrounds must be seen in a holistic rather than a reductionist way, i.e. not separate from a critical examination of power relations in Irish society. While accepting that there are responsibilities on those who are immigrating or migrating to Ireland, we also need to realise that immigrants can be faced with an array of obstacles, for example, delays to asylum applications, complications around family reunification, non-recognition of previous qualifications, and so on. Research also indicates that many migrants take up employment that does not reflect their levels of education and experience, and that often these jobs are in the less well-paid and lower status sectors of employment (Favell, 2008⁵). This situation clearly holds its own difficulties and challenges.

Placing undue expectations on those who have recently arrived to acquire fluency in the host language in order to gain citizenship rights will almost certainly lead to marginalisation and disenfranchisement of those who least able to access resources, this in turn has dangerous implications for the potential ghettoisation of non EU immigrants.

1.4 Partnership and engagement through dialogue with the wider education community

The concept of mainstreaming necessitates recognition that interactions between cultural representatives take place in contexts of power. Therefore, while considering the need to promote equity in education, we should ensure that parents, care givers and communities of those who are most vulnerable, including those from cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious minority backgrounds are included in decision-making processes to the greatest extent possible. This can be achieved, for example, when parents are represented on schools' Boards of Management and when efforts are made to reflect the wider community in all appointments within the school and within the school's curriculum.

Partnership necessitates openness and trust and also acknowledges a capacity within schools to use limited resources to best advantage in meeting the needs of the local communities. Schools could be enabled to use their resources to appoint key position holders who can liaise with other cultural mediators and with the wider community,

⁵ Favell, A. (2008). The New Face of East-West Migration in Europe. In *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 34 (5).

particularly in contexts of diversity. Building a spirit of partnership, as we have witnessed in Northern Ireland, also involves mutual respect and recognition of the culture of the 'other'. Irish educational providers and policy makers need to become increasingly aware of the necessity to shift existing cultural and religious practices to ensure greater respect for and inclusion of children from diverse backgrounds.

We believe it is imperative to retain a focus on Traveller education as part of the new intercultural education strategy, and we note the absence of mention of Travellers in the briefing document for this submission. Remaining cognisant of the educational needs of this indigenous minority group will be a priority for the future, including retaining the availability of training programmes for members of the Travelling Community. This will be of particular importance if economic circumstances result in a contracting of traditional modes of employment for Travellers in coming years.

1.5 Proposed actions

Leadership must be proactive and leaders must believe that integration is a dynamic two way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents in Ireland at national and local levels.

- This necessitates access to appropriate leadership and intercultural education programmes and should be exemplified with reference to how schools are engaging positively with diversity.
- Awareness raising and recognition of the importance of diversity through training of providers and the provision of information on the education system to migrants.
 - The first issue reiterates the necessity for pre-service courses and for professional development opportunities for teachers in the field.
 - The second issue addresses the need for schools and the broader educational system to facilitate information sharing regarding the nature of schools and schooling in Ireland. This service should be developed in a context of sharing and respect the joint construction of an agreed cultural orientation for the school and the community which it serves; this should happen in a democratic and responsive way.

- Research to establish what progress is being made towards ensuring that students are achieving to their full potential, whether Irish or migrant. Our involvement in the OECD thematic review and in the other research projects (as outlined at the conference) will assist with this process.
 - Schools too need to become the focus of action research projects where the site becomes informed by international best practice, a familiarity among teachers with the relevant research in the field and a capacity to innovate to meet uncertain futures. Seed funding for universities and teacher education colleges to engage in this form of research needs to be provided.

Are there other aspects that you believe should be included in the Intercultural Education Strategy? If yes, please specify what these are.

- An appreciation for the fact that intercultural education embodies, at its core, democratic and deliberative processes which do not seek to assimilate cultures which are different from the host culture but which facilitate cultural interactions and cultural dialogues.
- The necessity to ensure that those from ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious minority backgrounds have an increasing capacity to become teachers. Thus, the Teaching Council should actively investigate ways in which those who are trained in other jurisdictions, particularly those outside the EU, can access additional modules of learning to facilitate their inclusion in the teaching body. This will normalise diversity and help to ensure that all students are able to draw on positive role models within teaching.
- Learn from the Youth Work Intercultural Strategy particularly those facets of the strategy targeting non-formal approaches to teaching and learning.
- Incorporate an action plan and timeline regarding how the Intercultural Education Strategy is to be implemented.

2. European Commission Green Paper “Migration & mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems”

In its Green Paper “[Migration & mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems](#)” [pdf] the European Commission sets out a number of questions for stakeholders. These questions are set out below and we would appreciate your views on them.

2.1 The policy challenge

What are the important policy challenges related to the provision of good education to children from a migrant background? In addition to those identified in this paper, are there others that should be taken into account?

- We note the overarching ‘deficit tone’ which is adopted in the in the publication which we see as a worrying development – it portrays the educational interface between migrants and the majority cultures as an almost exclusively negative experience. There is a necessity to identify what works in addition to what the challenges are. Much of the data informing this report is significantly dated and this is reflected in the tone of the document.
- The centrality of the question of identity receives scant attention in the policy document. There is a necessity to ensure that there is not too much cultural dissonance between the world of the school and the world of the home, this leads to underachievement and a feeling that the school does not belong to diverse students. Thus, the school should seek to engage parents from diverse communities to play an increasing role in the education of children.
- A policy challenge exists due to the fact that the current school curriculum was developed in 1999; the consultative process began ten years beforehand. The world in which our curriculum was developed and the one in which our teachers are involved are vastly different, this has implications for teacher education and for the content of the curriculum as well as how the curriculum should be mediated.
- There are few, if any, teachers from minority ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It is imperative that the current cohort of teachers becomes more reflective of the diversity in our wider society.

2.2 The policy response

What are the appropriate policy responses to these challenges? Are there other policies and approaches beyond those listed in this paper that should be taken into account?

Zirkel (2008⁶) and Banks (2004⁷) have identified that the implementation of core multicultural strategies enables students from minority ethnic backgrounds to participate successfully in schools. These core strategies include:

- Addressing race and racism as central to the mediation of curriculum
- Challenging the dominant ideologies particularly those associated with concepts of race, identity and culture
- Incorporating certain classroom based methodologies, including cooperative and collaborative teaching and learning, which are preferable to didactic forms of pedagogy
- Ensuring that curriculum content is more reflective of students' cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds
- Actively involving the communities which are served by schools and
- Focusing on academic achievement for lower-performing students.

Strategies for developing policies should be cognisant of the research context.

2.3 The role of the European Union

What actions could be undertaken via European Programmes to impact positively on the education of children from a migrant background?

In terms of recognizing the importance of children's linguistic and cultural heritages, the European Union should pay particular attention to the work of the Council of Europe (2007⁸).

⁶ Zirkel, S. (2008) The Influence of Multicultural Education Practices on Student Outcomes and Intergroup Relations, In *Teacher College Record* 110 (6)

⁷ Banks, J. A. (2004). Multicultural education: Historical development, dimensions, and practice. In J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (2nd ed., pp. 3–29). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

⁸ Council of Europe (2007) *From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education: Guide for the Development of*

In its latest policy paper, which addresses intercultural education and linguistic diversity a strong argument is made for advancing a strong case for advancing a Europe-wide vision of plurilingualism.

In achieving this end, it will be important for the Union to support member states, while recognising the issue of subsidiarity, to identify and share good practice in approaches to teacher education for diversity and to share good practice from within cities and classrooms. It will be particularly important to illustrate the effectiveness of engaging positively with diverse communities.

2.4 Open Method of Coordination for Education and Training

How should these issues be addressed within the Open Method of Coordination for Education and Training? Do you feel that there should be an exploration of possible indicators and/or benchmarks as a means to focus policy effort more strongly on closing the gaps in educational attainment?

Indicators and benchmarks are only one mechanism if achieving a shared goal. Of equal necessity is the need to focus on the methodologies and content of how schools engage effectively with diversity. Updating of case studies would provide a useful guide for schools regarding how they interface with diversity.

2.5 The future of Directive 77/486/EEC

How can Directive 77/486/EEC, taking into account the history of its implementation and bearing in mind the changed nature of migration flows since its adoption, play a role in supporting Member States' policies on these issues? Would you recommend that it be maintained as it stands, that it should be adapted or repealed? Would you propose alternative approaches to support Member States' policies on the issues it addresses?

The fact that Member States have found the implementation of the Directive problematic is not surprising, it requests that States, under Article 3, should provide for: teaching of the mother tongue and culture of the country of origin for the children referred to in Article 1. This is a significant commitment on behalf of Member States, yet it will result, according to the research in the field, in better educational attainments for these children. If we have the

educational well-being of these children as a priority, then this needs to be realised. The challenge then becomes how best to ensure its implementation. This can be achieved through a reciprocal visiting teacher arrangement between Member States, to be developed in the first instance through a monitored Pilot Project in a select number of primary and post primary schools. The alternative is to focus only on the language and culture of the host country; this will lead to cultural alienation and to failing educational achievement rates among the students concerned.

3. Other Areas

Any other observations you might have in relation to the presentations given at the Intercultural Education Conference, in particular the research presentations given by the OECD, the ESRI and the Department of Education and Science's Inspectorate.

In order to facilitate informed development of whole school approaches and policies addressing ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious diversity, we would advise that there needs to be appropriate professional development (EAL and Intercultural Education) for

- the Inspectorate
- PCSP / SDPS
- Principal teachers

Observations in relation to the Inspectorate:

At the Intercultural Education Conference on October 1st 2008, Dr Harold Hislop, Assistant Chief Inspector at the Evaluation, Support and Research Unit of the Inspectorate, gave a useful and informative session on the process of Whole School Evaluations in primary and post-primary schools in 2008-2009, which will have a specific focus on effective strategies for EAL teaching and learning. In the light of the budgetary changes, there are several questions that now need to be addressed:

- If the evaluation highlights the merit of small group teaching, or varieties of in-class support, and if a school subsequently loses its language teacher, then how are these suggestions to be realised?
- Will the evaluation be accompanied by best practice guidelines that have to be suspended until the economy recovers?

- And how can schools and teachers justify their practice in the intervening years, knowing that more intensive intervention would enable EAL learners to make more substantial and rapid progress?

Should you require any additional information or clarification regarding the contents of this submission, please do not hesitate to contact the persons named below:

Seán Bracken sean.bracken@mie.ie

Barbara O'Toole barbara.otoole@mie.ie

Lóchrann, Centre for Intercultural Education,
Coláiste Mhuire, Marino Institute of Education,
Griffith Avenue, Dublin 9

24th October 2008