

Background

The Lóchrann Centre for Intercultural Education was established in 2007 to provide academic leadership and strategic focus to the work of a group of staff members committed to the field of intercultural education. Lóchrann, meaning 'guiding light' connotes a commitment by Coláiste Mhuire, Marino Institute of Education to providing equal opportunities for all students in Ireland, based on principles of equality, social justice and respect for diversity.

Definition

The field of Intercultural Education has received a new focus with the increasing diversity of Irish society. According to the Census in 2006 there are 420,000 persons from diverse cultural backgrounds now residing in Ireland. At the launch of the report from the Economic Social and Research Institute (ESRI), 'Adapting to Diversity: Irish Schools and Newcomer Students' in June 2009, the Minister of State with Responsibility for Integration, John Curran TD, stated that despite the current economic situation, there is no indication that migrant families are leaving Ireland in any significant numbers. In fact, evidence from the post-primary database indicates a rise in students from ethnic minority backgrounds in post-primary schools.

Intercultural Education aims to enhance the conditions for equality of opportunity, understanding and respect throughout the education system. The focus of intercultural education is on the interaction between majority and minority cultures to ensure that diversity is acknowledged and appreciated. Intercultural education also includes programmes to address racism experienced by members of the Travelling Community, refugees and asylum seekers, black and minority ethnic people, as well as racism that can be experienced by minority religious groups.

Policy Context

The development of consensus around a national programme of work in Intercultural Education finds roots in commitments made by An Taoiseach at the UN World Conference against Racism in 2001. The subsequent 'National Action Plan Against Racism' published by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in 2005 recommended a broad range of steps in the education sector. These were further detailed in the 2005 guidelines 'Intercultural Education in the Primary School' issued by The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

A small number of area-specific research and implementation projects have been carried out by policy makers and practitioners in the primary and post-primary sector which

have identified much-needed responses including: curriculum development, teacher education, school management support, education policy development, pupil awareness programmes and community development.

Centre Structure

With the active encouragement of Dr Anne O'Gara, MIE President, a core group of faculty (including Barbara O'Toole, Sean Bracken, Dr Anne Ryan and Aiveen Mullally) have been engaged in the development of the Lóchrann Centre for Intercultural Education. The work builds on Marino's experience in the education sector for over 100 years and leverages connections with 2,000 graduates who are active as teachers, mostly in the primary sector.

Work of the Centre for Intercultural Education

The main services offered by the Centre for Intercultural Education include:

- Courses for students of the B.Ed., Higher Diploma in Education and preparatory work for course offerings at the postgraduate level
- Teacher education courses (pre-service and in-service) on Teaching English as an Additional Language
- Providing professional advice and assistance for the 'Education Inclusion Initiative': a research-based project to identify resource implications for engaging with diversity in 17 schools in Dublin 8 and Portlaoise
- The provision of resource materials and strategies for Intercultural Education
- Conducting research focusing on intercultural experiences within schools and the wider educational community



Ongoing Needs and Opportunities

The Lóchrann Centre for Intercultural Education has a significant leadership role to play in order to prepare students for active participation in and contribution to a just and diverse society in Ireland. This will be achieved through the provision of effective policy, professional development and curriculum responses to the culturally and ethnically diverse population in schools. Leadership opportunities include the following areas:

Research and Policy Input

Considerable input is required in order to inform legislation, policy makers, and education providers on the most appropriate frameworks for the promotion of respect for all students in the school. This work also extends to working with Trustees to help them identify aspects of school policy where a positive change will have beneficial consequences.

• Professional Development

Robust and informed professional development opportunities are required immediately for teachers and schools leaders to help them engage positively with the challenges of diversity. The needs of teachers and school leaders are considerable as is evidenced by the update of short courses and support initiatives to date. Indeed, the ESRI Report, 'Adapting to Diversity: Irish Schools and Newcomer Students' (June 2009) points to a significant need for more pre-service and continuing professional development in the areas of language support, diversity and interculturalism. Lóchrann aims to meet some of those needs.

• Resources and Curriculum Development

Significant input is required to support effective teaching and learning strategies for the diverse classroom. This begins with helping schools come to appreciate the full cultural, ethnic and linguistic identities of their own pupils. It also includes the development of new curricula to support key subject areas including religious education.

Ongoing Work Programme

The MIE Strategic Plan includes a commitment to expand the work of The Lóchrann Centre for Intercultural Education through its work in leadership, awareness raising and research. Priority projects for the Centre include the following:

• Postgraduate Diploma in Intercultural Education

Launch and promote the Postgraduate Diploma in Intercultural Education – a four-module specially designed programme accredited by Trinity College. Modules include: school diversity and inclusion; English as an additional language; religious diversity and intercultural education; and a practice-based research project. The Centre's priority is the provision of the course to teachers regardless of their ability to pay the postgraduates fees.

• Increasing Teacher Diversity

The Centre aims to lead projects to help diversify the primary teacher population in Ireland. This will be done through establishing a project focusing on the teaching of Gaeilge, taking place at summer schools located on the campus at Coláiste Mhuire, Marino Institute of Education. The purpose would be to support young people in achieving the required Leaving Certificate grade in Gaeilge, which is a pre-requisite for teacher education.

Lóchrann also aims to create courses designed to bridge the gap for refugees and migrant workers so that they can qualify as primary teachers.

• Education Inclusive Initiative

The Centre will aim to build on the successful project in Dublin 8 and Portlaoise and establish similar projects throughout the country.

• Courses and Networking

The Centre will provide FETAC-accredited short courses and seminars as well as promoting networking activities and communications in the field of Intercultural Education.

• English as an Additional Language

There will be ongoing provision of training and accreditation on English as an Additional Language (EAL) programmes. These courses will promote linguistic diversity and ground this within intercultural and multicultural education and support for literacy, writing and the use of ICT.

Further information on the Lóchrann Centre for Intercultural Education is available on www.mie.ie or Tel. 01 853 5126

