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The challenge of multiculturalism for citizenship education in Irish post-primary schools

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Introduction

This paper presents the first report of a qualitative investigation involving teacher education students, teachers and pupils in Irish post-primary education. Schools in Ireland have become increasingly multicultural during the past decade with the arrival of immigrant families and refugees from many parts of the world, and the Department of Education and Science has made some provision for this ongoing change in the school population at the level of central planning. However, few studies have looked at these developments with regard to what happens in classrooms and the effect on pupils and teachers, or the implications for teacher education and curriculum development at school level. The first part of this paper discusses an analysis of the changing school population and multiculturalism in Ireland, and the implications of this for citizenship education; the second part reports on an initial investigation on the perceptions of student teachers concerning aspects of multiculturalism and citizenship education.

In the past, citizenship education in the Republic of Ireland had a narrow focus on local community and national issues; society was treated as a homogenous unit and consequently multicultural issues did not feature in citizenship education. European Union membership from 1973 onwards, followed by increasing numbers of applicants for asylum and legal status from very diverse backgrounds during the 1990s, highlighted the major challenges faced by those involved in citizenship education. This was reflected in the Civic, Social and Political Programme introduced into the second level curriculum in 1997 and in the Revised Primary Curriculum introduced into the first level in 1999. The presence of many diverse groups in society meant that new views, ideas and approaches had to be developed within new educational programmes.

Irish legislative framework for educational provision

The Education Act (1998) set out the following objectives: to promote equality of access to and participation in education and to promote the means whereby students may benefit from education, and to promote best practice in teaching methods with regard to the diverse needs of students and the development of the skills and competencies of teachers. The Minister for Education and Science has to ensure provision of support services and a level and quality of education appropriate to meet the needs and abilities of each person resident in the state, including individuals with disabilities or other special educational needs

The Equal Status Act (2000) prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, skin colour, nationality or ethnic origin. Under this legislation, educational establishments must not discriminate in relation to the admission or the terms and conditions of admission to any course, facility or benefit. However, this legislation also protects the right of schools with an ethos of providing education in an environment which promotes certain religious values. Such schools may admit persons of a particular religious denomination in preference to others, and may refuse to admit students who are not of a particular denomination if this is considered essential to maintaining the ethos of the school.

Primary education (first level) in the Republic of Ireland caters for pupils between the ages of four to twelve years and includes primary schools, special schools and non-aided private

primary schools serving almost 500,000 children. The majority of these 3200 schools are managed and controlled by the Roman Catholic Church, and have the right to refuse admission to those who do not support the particular religious ethos of the schools. Post-primary or second level education comprising secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools caters for students of twelve to eighteen years. There are just under 370,000 students in this sector, attending a total of 768 publicly aided schools; 445 of these schools are privately owned secondary schools conducted by religious communities. These schools educate sixty per cent of post-primary students (DES, 1998). As is the case in the primary system, these schools are legally entitled to refuse admission to pupils whose religious beliefs do not support the particular ethos of those schools.

While this is the current legal situation, government education policy is to support diversity within education. This was most recently articulated in the White Paper on Adult Education *Learning for Life*, July 2000, which stresses 'the need to frame educational policy and practice in the context of serving a diverse population as opposed to a uniform one, and the development of curricula, materials, training and in-service, modes of assessment and delivery methods which accept such diversity as the norm'. This has major implications for combating racism and encouraging the participation of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers in education. Importantly, it is also a recognition that many minority groups such as travellers, people with disabilities, and older adults, have distinct needs and cultural patterns which must be respected and reflected in any proposed educational provision.

Provision at primary level for refugee children in the Republic of Ireland

In May 1994 the Department of Education and Science established the Refugee Support Service to provide support at primary level to children of Programme and Convention refugees (INTO 1998). In *The Challenge of Diversity* the Irish National Teachers' Organisation reports a study of provision within the primary sector for refugee children and an initiative for dealing with diversity in education which was undertaken in the Dublin area. This involved five primary teachers, employed on a temporary basis in a support service managed by a divisional inspector of the Department of Education and Science. They teach English to the children in order to facilitate their access to the curriculum. These teachers also provide support to class teachers, preparing resources, materials, and maintaining contact with refugee families. Figures provided by the Service Co-ordinator showed that by the end of 1997 there was a total of 202 children including 200 Programme refugee children (Bosnian and Vietnamese) and two Convention refugee children (Somalian) attending 71 primary schools in the Dublin area. According to the INTO report the pupils supported by the Service range in age from five years to 17 years, with pupils in the eight to twelve year age range getting most support (INTO, 1998).

Refugee children are taught on a withdrawal basis as part of this service. Religion and Irish are curricular areas that children are most commonly withdrawn from, as they are normally exempt from these subjects due to linguistic and religious differences (INTO, 1999, p. 13). The report states that every effort is made to ensure that children do not miss subjects in which they can participate fully, such as art, music and physical education. The support team does not have a central resource base or library to support

the service and this creates its own difficulties. Regrettably, the support service for refugee children does not continue at post-primary level although the transition from primary school to second level is a major and often stressful event for any child (INTO, 1998).

Provision at post-primary level for refugee children

A different arrangement operates for English language support for refugee children in post-primary schools. In order to provide for these children, extra teaching hours are requested by individual schools from the Department of Education and Science (Refugee Agency, 1998). When the hours are granted, existing teachers within the school provide extra tuition. Typically, three to five additional hours per student per week are allocated. The teachers may or may not be qualified in teaching English as a second language and they already carry diverse teaching commitments within their schools. To help pupils develop other language classes have been established. Mother-tongue and cultural classes are provided by the Refugee Agency for Bosnian and Vietnamese children based in Dublin. Classes for Bosnian children began in December 1995 and are organised on the basis of the academic year. These classes are held in a school in Dublin on Saturday mornings and they are delivered by a Bosnian national. The Department of Education and Science funds the classes with a grant which is administered by the Refugee Agency (Irish Refugee Agency, 1998).

Non-education support for asylum seekers and economic migrants

There are many children who do not receive any support because their status is that of an asylum seeker. Their families come from countries which include China, Angola, Somalia, Sudan, Cuba, Zaire, India, Romania and the former USSR. Some children of asylum seekers currently receive support provided by the Irish Refugee Council, a voluntary non-government representative body. The Council does not provide an official educational support service for refugee children but, within the context of its overall aims, it tries to provide an outreach teacher support service for children of asylum seekers. This is a crisis-management response to schools that are finding it difficult to cope with the numbers of these children applying for places in schools. The Council's support service is limited to the Dublin area and Ennis (County Clare) as these are the two locations where the Council is based (INTO, 1998).

In January 1998 the Irish Refugee Council had seven voluntary teachers supporting 54 children in five primary schools in Dublin. During the same year there were approximately 200 asylum seekers in Ennis where a teacher was provided by the Irish Refugee Council to support up to fifteen children in one primary school. The INTO also reported that at that time there were small numbers of asylum seeker families in Galway, Cork and Limerick who received no support. The voluntary teachers provided by the Irish Refugee Council tended to be either retired or newly qualified, usually without any experience in teaching English as a foreign language.

Context of multicultural education

One can conclude that educational provision for ethnic minorities is in its very initial stages in the Republic of Ireland. As these groups become more visible in the formal school sector, the real challenges of providing educational interventions dealing with issues of multiculturalism and citizenship will become apparent. It is in this context that

the views of pre-service teachers on multicultural issues must be researched and included in debate about future directions of citizenship education.

Methodology

The investigation reported in this paper involved an examination of student teachers' perceptions of issues involved in citizenship education with particular reference to multiculturalism and related themes. Triangulation was decided on as a framework methodology for the study, which involved an investigation of student teachers' perceptions, planned observations of pupils during informal school activities, and a questionnaire for classroom teachers containing a number of open-ended loosely focused questions. The central focus of these measures was multiculturalism in schools and related issues. It was envisaged that the findings of the study and the questions raised would serve as a useful basis for further investigation. It was also hoped to utilise the CiCe conference discussions at Brugge to provide a comparative multicultural background to further inform the continuing investigation.

The student sample comprised ninety-three students undertaking the one-year postgraduate Higher Diploma in Education programme at University College Dublin. Eighteen of these students had elected to undertake a teaching methodology course in the subject Civic Social and Political Education (CSPE) and to teach the CSPE course as part of their teaching practice placement in post-primary schools during the year. The remaining seventy five student were taking methodology courses in arts and humanities subjects and teaching these subjects as part of their teaching practice.

The Multicultural Education Perception Scale, which was designed and piloted as the preliminary instrument for this study, required students to indicate their views on forty-nine statements relating to five main areas: cultural values; tolerance values; national identity values; language values; and religious values. Students were also requested to comment on any or all of the statements presented.

Results 1: students' perspectives on aspects of multicultural education

The objective of the initial analysis was twofold. Firstly, it was hoped to ascertain student teachers' perspectives on issues of multiculturalism generally and to establish if areas of consensus or comparative agreement existed between students electing to study and teach CSPE and students teaching arts and humanities subjects. Secondly, it was hoped to identify those areas on which these two groups of student teachers had differing perspectives and to establish where possible the reasons for or the basis of such differences.

A comparison of similar perspectives between the two groups of students sampled is presented in Table 1. The statements and the percentage agreement in each case are presented in descending order in terms of the extent of agreement in each case.

Table 1 Perspectives of student teachers on aspects of multicultural education and related matters: comparison of similar trends between students teaching CSPE and students teaching arts and humanities subjects

| Statement | Student teachers in the following subject areas | <i>n</i> | Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
|---|---|----------|-------|---------|----------|
| 1 Third world issues should not be neglected in the classroom | Civic, social and personal education | 18 | 94% | 6% | 0% |
| | Arts and humanities Subjects | 75 | 90% | 4% | 6% |
| | Total | | 92% | 5% | 3% |
| 2 Environmental issues are critical for all pupils in schools and should be dealt with in the curriculum | Civic, social and Personal education | 18 | 83% | 16% | 0% |
| | Arts and humanities Subjects | 75 | 87% | 11% | 3% |
| | Total | 93 | 85% | 14% | 2% |
| 3 Foreigners should not be allowed to become citizens if they settle permanently in a country | Civic, social and Personal education | 18 | 7% | 12% | 81% |
| | Arts and humanities Subjects | 75 | 6% | 12% | 82% |
| | Total | 93 | 7% | 12% | 82% |
| 4 Single parent families are a cause of problems in school | Civic, social and personal education | 18 | 11% | 11% | 78% |
| | Arts and humanities Subjects | 75 | 11% | 12% | 77% |
| | Total | 93 | 11% | 12% | 78% |
| 5 Respect for the individual is more important than all other considerations | Civic, social and personal education | 18 | 72% | 22% | 6% |
| | Arts and humanities Subjects | 75 | 76% | 20% | 4% |
| | Total | 93 | 74% | 21% | 5% |

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|--|--------------------------------------|----|-----|-----|-----|
| 6 Attempts to ensure gender balance should not form part of government policy | Civic, social and personal education | 18 | 72% | 22% | 6% |
| | Arts and humanities Subjects | 75 | 76% | 20% | 4% |
| | Total | 93 | 74% | 21% | 5% |
| 7 All forms of religious ceremony should be prohibited in schools | Civic, social and personal education | 18 | 6% | 35% | 69% |
| | Arts and humanities Subjects | 75 | 7% | 32% | 70% |
| | Total | 93 | 7% | 34% | 70% |
| 8 Some races are more artistic than others | Civic, social and personal education | 18 | 22% | 28% | 50% |
| | Arts and humanities Subjects | 75 | 24% | 24% | 52% |
| | Total | 93 | 23% | 26% | 51% |

This table reveals an almost unanimous perspective on issues concerning multiculturalism which relate to citizenship education. Both groups are very strongly of the opinion that third world issues should not be neglected in the classroom. An almost equally level of high agreement was expressed between the groups with over eighty percent agreeing that environmental issues are essential for all pupils in schools and should be dealt with in the curriculum. Respondents' comments in these areas reflected concern with global issues and trans-national corporations; third world debt and global warming were given specific mentions.

The high level of agreement with the next three statements indicates a respect and acceptance for all individuals including foreigners: over seventy percent of both groups consider that respect for the individual is more important than all other considerations. Students perspectives on the sixth statement concerning gender balance in teaching must be viewed with caution - female respondents' comments indicated that their ratings were primarily dictated by their employment prospects.

The degree of tolerance in relation to religious ceremony is quite similar between the two groups. A small percentage of both groups agreed that all forms of religious ceremony should be banned. These respondents gave as their reason that some cults are harmful and it would be difficult to ban these without banning all religions. Responses to the eight statements in this table are similar for both groups. Again, students agree with the statement suggested that different races are gifted in different ways.

In general it seems that student teachers' perspectives on the problems of the third world and the environment are indicative of shared concern for individuals not only in their own country and in the EU but throughout the world. Students are strongly convinced also that

respect for the individual is paramount; they are accepting of foreigners and do not view single parent families as problematic in the school.

Results 2: students' perspectives on aspects of multicultural education

A comparison of dissimilar trends between the perspectives of the two groups of students sampled is presented in Table 2. The statements and the percentage agreement in each case are presented in descending order in terms of the extent of disagreement in each case.

Table 2 Perspectives of student teachers on aspects of multicultural education and related matters: dissimilar trends between students teaching CSPE and students teaching arts and humanities subjects.

| Statement | Student teachers in the following subject areas | Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
|--|---|-------|---------|----------|
| 1 A good citizen today must embrace world citizenship | Civic, social and personal education | 33% | 50% | 17% |
| | Arts and humanities Subjects | 63% | 25% | 12% |
| | Total | 48% | 38% | 14% |
| 2 All problems can be dealt with if there is openness and good will in society | Civic, social and personal education | 33% | 29% | 38% |
| | Arts and humanities Subjects | 60% | 22% | 18% |
| | Total | 46% | 26% | 28% |
| 3 Pupils coming from outside the country should adopt the customs of the host country in school | Civic, social and personal education | 50% | 22% | 28% |
| | Arts and humanities Subjects | 29% | 35% | 33% |
| | Total | 40% | 29% | 30% |
| 4 Ideally a police force should reflect the ethnic balance of society | Civic, social and personal education | 59% | 29% | 12% |
| | Arts and humanities Subjects | 40% | 32% | 28% |
| | Total | 50% | 31% | 20% |

| | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| 5 Too many foreigners cause problems in a community | Civic, social and personal education | 24% | 12% | 65% |
| | Arts and humanities | 7% | 23% | 70% |
| | Subjects | | | |
| | Total | 15% | 16% | 68% |
| 6 The beliefs and customs of some religions are inimical to democratic values | Civic, social and personal education | 38% | 44% | 18% |
| | Arts and humanities | | | |
| | Subjects | 54% | 35% | 11% |
| | Total | 46% | 40% | 15% |
| 7 Learning through example is most important in developing democratic values | Civic, social and personal education | 71% | 29% | 0% |
| | Arts and humanities | | | |
| | Subjects | 60% | 32% | 8% |
| | Total | 65% | 31% | 4% |
| 8 Pupils who come from abroad dilute the national identity of local pupils | Civic, social and personal education | 12% | 6% | 82% |
| | Arts and humanities | 4% | 6% | 90% |
| | Subjects | | | |
| | Total | 8% | 6% | 86% |

This table reveals varied perspectives on issues concerning multiculturalism and citizenship education. The most pronounced differences occur in relation to the first three statements in the table. Student teachers involved in Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) are not as ready to agree that a good citizen should embrace world citizenship, or that all problems can be dealt with if there is openness and good will in society, as their classmates teaching other subject areas. The CSPE students are also much more likely to agree that pupils coming from outside the country should adopt the customs of the host country in school; that too many foreigners cause problems in a country; and that pupils who come from abroad dilute the national identity of local pupils than their fellow student teachers.

An initial interpretation of these differences between the two groups seems to indicate that student teachers opting to teach CSPE as less open to and less accepting of foreigners and non-national concerns than their peers. However, while this may be true in certain instances, the comments of these students indicate that the views expressed were indicative of their assessment of societal attitudes. Further, they indicated that it was because of the widespread currency of these views that citizenship education and the

development of more open and tolerant attitudes to multiculturalism in schools are necessary. The aspiration for a greater acceptance of diversity is evident in the SPHE student teachers' views on the desirability of having the ethnic balance in society reflected in the police force.

The CSPE students seem somewhat more concerned than their fellow students that the beliefs and customs of some religions are inimical to democratic values. They also believe more strongly than their peers that learning by example is most important in developing democratic values. One student commented that 'the teacher sets an example that has far reaching effects, they must watch never to make even flippant comments that take the dignity from a human being'. A number of the students involved in teaching CSPE commented on the need for greater tolerance in society. Their comments were characterised by such statements as 'foreigners do not cause the problems, lack of tolerance does'.

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