

**Emerging Models of Intercultural  
Education in Irish Primary Schools: A  
Critical Case Study Analysis**

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**June 2013**

## Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy degree is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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## Abstract

Taking account of the complex and fluid relationship that exists between social structures and human agency, this dissertation critically explores how intercultural education is conceptualised and practised by teachers and principals in three Irish primary schools. Adopting a whole school approach, it critically explores the models of intercultural education emerging in the schools and examines the extent to which selected variables (leadership, ethos, culture, curriculum, pedagogy, relations) support and determine these models. It also draws on the voice of students to illuminate aspects of teachers' practice.

A review of the literature indicates that while a small number of Irish studies (Bryan, 2008, 2009a, 2009b) have provided critical theoretical insights into intercultural education as conceptualised and practised at second level, no previously published Irish research has provided critical analysis of a whole school approach to intercultural education at primary level.

Adopting a qualitative case study methodology grounded in critical ethnography, this study explores the whole school environments of three Irish primary schools. It employs the methods of semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, observations and document analysis. The study's empirical findings are integrated with concepts drawn from critical and poststructural social theories, including the theories of critical multiculturalism, transformative leadership theory, discourse theory and cultural reproduction theory.

Findings indicate a predominance of weaker models of intercultural education underpinned by liberal ideology. However, elements of critical multicultural education underpinned by more radical ideologies are also evident. Analysis suggests that the three interrelated variables of power relations, patronage and ethos and school leadership are the most important factors in determining the models of intercultural education emerging in the three schools. Findings also indicate that a more traditional curricular approach may be preferable to the weak additive curricular approaches which appear to be endemic in many Irish primary schools. The data suggest that while well intentioned, teachers' endeavours to include intercultural content in their lesson plans can sometimes do more to undermine than support migrant students' sense of belonging and feelings of inclusion and non-migrant students' understandings of the "developing" world.

Critical analysis of the three case study schools and the *Intercultural Education Guidelines* (IEGs) (NCCA, 2005) suggests that a re-conceptualisation of intercultural education is necessary in the Irish context if intercultural education is to realise its transformative potential. In this context, a justice and rights informed framework of critical intercultural education which foregrounds the principles of democracy, critical consciousness and equity is presented. It is argued that this framework has the capacity to transform inequitable school power relations, organisational structures, policies and practices.

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## List of Acronyms

<b>ARE</b>	Antiracism Education
<b>BOM</b>	Board of Management
<b>CM</b>	Critical Multiculturalism
<b>CME</b>	Critical Multicultural Education
<b>CP</b>	Critical Pedagogy
<b>CPD</b>	Continuous Professional Development
<b>CRT</b>	Critical Race Theory
<b>CSO</b>	Central Statistics Office
<b>DEIS</b>	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in School
<b>DES</b>	Department of Education and Skills
<b>EAL</b>	English as an Additional Language (support teacher)
<b>FG</b>	Focus Group
<b>HSCL</b>	Home School Community Liaison (co-ordinator)
<b>ICE</b>	Intercultural Education
<b>IEGs</b>	Intercultural Education Guidelines
<b>IHRC</b>	Irish Human Rights Commission
<b>LS</b>	Learning Support (teacher)
<b>NCCRI</b>	National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism
<b>NCCA</b>	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
<b>NPAR</b>	National Action Plan Against Racism
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>PA</b>	Parents Association
<b>RTÉ</b>	Raidió Teilifís Éireann (Radio Television Ireland)
<b>SALT</b>	Stop Ask Listen Talk

<b>SENT</b>	Special Educational Needs Team
<b>SNA</b>	Special Needs Assistant
<b>SPHE</b>	Social, Personal and Health Education
<b>TD</b>	Teachta Dála (Member of Parliament)
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

## Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my supervisors Dr. Fionnuala Waldron and Dr. Audrey Bryan. I am extremely grateful to them for their encouragement, support and guidance over the past four years. My thesis has benefitted greatly from their constructive feedback, critical insights and discerning pragmatism. I would also like to thank my internal and external examiners Dr. Jones Irwin (St. Patrick's College) and Prof. Hugh Starkey (Institute of Education, University of London).

I am greatly indebted to my research participants. I would like to thank the principals, teachers and students of my three case study schools for granting me the opportunity to conduct my research and for giving so generously of their time. I also wish to acknowledge the support of each school's Board of Management.

I would like to thank all of my friends for their support and encouragement especially during the last 12 months. I want to particularly thank my friends Fiona, Bernie and Marie for their valuable insights and constructive feedback.

This thesis would not have been possible without the financial and academic support of St. Patrick's College. I would like to thank the College for awarding me the inaugural Michael Jordan Fellowship in Education and for all the wonderful teaching and researching opportunities which the College afforded to me over the past four years. I greatly enjoyed my time in St. Pat's and wish to particularly acknowledge the support of my wonderful colleagues and friends in B132.

I wish to acknowledge the support of the Board of Management of Rathgar National School who kindly granted me a career break to undertake my PhD. I also wish to acknowledge the support of my colleagues in Rathgar National School and my fantastic class whose kind and cheerful support made combining work and study much more bearable during the final four months of my PhD.

Finally, I would like to thank my family - my parents, Eddie and Mary Hilda and my siblings Sarah and Brian - for their unequivocal and unstinting support over the last four years. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my wonderful parents who have always emphasised the importance of education without ever placing any academic pressure on their children. I would never have had the confidence to apply to undertake a PhD degree without Sarah's encouragement. Thank you for being such a fantastic sister Sarah - I would not and could not have done it without you!



# Chapter One: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

Irish society has been greatly enriched by the rapid social change which Ireland has experienced over the last two decades. This increased ethnic and cultural diversification – a product of unprecedented migration during the Celtic Tiger era of economic expansion (mid-1990s to mid-2000s) and an enlargement of the European Union in 2004 - has presented the State, and in particular the education system, with a number of opportunities and challenges. In an education context, the State's response to this diversity and to an accompanying increase in societal racism has been the promotion of an intercultural education approach. This dissertation critically explores and problematises this approach, interrogates its theoretical underpinnings and unpacks its implications for school communities. Taking account of the complex and fluid relationship that exists between social structures and human agency, it critically explores how intercultural education is conceptualised and practised by teachers and principals in three Irish primary schools and highlights key tensions, nuances, contradictions and *fault lines*.<sup>1</sup> Adopting a whole school approach, it critically explores the models of intercultural education emerging in the schools and examines the extent to which selected variables (leadership, ethos, culture, curriculum, pedagogy, relations) support and determine these models. Advancing a qualitative case study methodology grounded in critical ethnography, the study's empirical findings are integrated with concepts drawn from critical and poststructural social theories.

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<sup>1</sup> In this dissertation, agency is not conceptualised as a possession rather it is conceptualised as something which can be exercised or enacted. Drawing on Smith (1987), Rusch (2004) describes fault lines as "points of rupture between socially organised practices and daily lived experience" (p.18). Fault lines will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

The current chapter introduces the research study, provides a contextual overview and justification for the study and presents my research aims and research questions. It commences with a brief overview of intercultural education in the Irish context followed by a critical assessment of the internal politics of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). This is followed by an exploration of the conceptual and terminological ambiguity which pervades the field of multicultural education. An overview of my philosophical assumptions and theoretical orientations is then provided to give the reader an understanding of my positioning in relation to the study. The chapter concludes with a delineation of the thesis plan, briefly outlining the structure and content of each chapter.

## **1.2 Intercultural Education in Ireland as a Policy Response to Cultural Diversity**

Interculturalism as a policy response to cultural diversity was first advocated in *The Report of The Task Force on The Travelling Community* (1995) and first officially endorsed by the Irish Government in the *Guidelines on Traveller Education in Primary Schools* (2002). Following thirty years of an amalgam of segregationism and assimilationism, this report marked the beginning of a slow but significant policy shift towards a more human rights and equality oriented policy of integrationism (Gannon, 2004).<sup>2</sup> Six years after the publication of the Task Force's report, the Irish

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<sup>2</sup> Segregation is "where the choice of separation is not voluntary but imposed" (MacLachlan & O'Connell, 2000, p.319). Traveller students were segregated from settled students and placed in special classes. Assimilationism is a process by which ethnic minorities "are expected to adopt the language, culture, religion and values of the dominant group in the State by surrendering their own language, culture and religious values" (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2009 p.180). Integrationism can be defined as "the ability to participate to the extent that a person needs and wishes in all the major components of society, without having to relinquish his or her own cultural identity" (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 1999, p.9 as cited in Fanning, 2002, p.187).

Government committed to producing and implementing a *National Action Plan Against Racism* (NPAR) at an United Nations World Conference Against Racism in Durban in 2001. Published four years later, NPAR's objectives were to be achieved in part by "mainstreaming an intercultural approach into policy-making processes and into all relevant policy areas" (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2005, p.28).<sup>3</sup> *Intercultural Education Guidelines* (IEGs) (2005) for primary and second level schools were developed by the NCCA and published later that year. Copies of the IEGs were disseminated to every teacher in the country. The IEGs conceptualise intercultural education as

. . . education which respects, celebrates and recognises the normality of diversity in all areas of human life. It sensitises the learner to the idea that humans have naturally developed a range of different ways of life, customs and worldviews, and that this breadth of human life enriches all of us. It is education, which promotes equality and human rights, challenges unfair discrimination, and promotes the values upon which equality is built (NCCA, 2005, P.3).

By the end of 2005, interculturalism had become one of the Government's "key responses to the changing shape of Irish society and to the existence of racism and discriminatory attitudes in Ireland" (NCCA, 2005, p.17). Given the significant impact of macro education structures, such as the NCCA, on micro school processes, the following section briefly explores the impact of dominant educational discourses

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<sup>3</sup> NPAR's other objectives include: "effective protection and redress against racism, economic inclusion and equality of opportunity, accommodating diversity in service provision, recognition and awareness of diversity and full participation in Irish society" (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2005, p.43).

and the internal politics of the NCCA on national curricular education policy development, particularly as it relates to intercultural education.

### **1.3 The Role of the NCCA in Policy Development: “The Power to Give or Withhold Attention”<sup>4</sup>**

Curricular policy development in the Irish context is characterised by a consensualist social partnership approach led by the NCCA (Lynch, Grummell & Devine, 2012; Gleeson, 2004). Established in 1987, the NCCA is responsible for advising the Minister for Education and Skills on issues pertaining to curriculum and assessment. It is comprised of a council of representatives drawn from the trade union movement, the Department of Education and Skills (DES), school management bodies, and representatives from parent associations, industry and business. Given its composition and remit, the NCCA has the capacity to exercise significant power and influence within the education sector and its actions have important implications for schools. In this regard, it is important to critically assess its internal politics. Sugrue and Gleeson (2004) argue that the partnership model which the NCCA embodies privileges sectoral interests over more open-ended discourse focused on meaningful educational reform. Indeed, the current NCCA is comprised of 25 members, nine of whom are drawn from the trade union movement, making it the most powerful bloc on the Council. This power bloc gives the unions the capacity to exercise more power than any other group. Moreover, a closer examination of the Council reveals the absence of any group which represents the interests of students (Granville, 2004; Gleeson, 2004). Similarly, the Minister for

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<sup>4</sup> Said (1993) as cited in Sugrue and Gleeson (2004, p.269).

Education and Skills determines the Council's composition and therefore has the capacity to indirectly control the Council and its actions. It could therefore be argued that this partnership approach reproduces existing power relations and in doing so maintains the status quo. Sugrue and Gleeson (2004) argue that it is merely "used to legitimate [the] interests and policies of key stakeholders" (p.279).

The NCCA operates within a "community of practice" which is characterised by "subject-centred syllabus revision at curriculum level, and by institutional power-plays at policy level" (Granville, 2004, p.94). Operating within a culture of consensualism, compromise, pragmatism and conformity, Granville (2004) argues that parameters of the community of practice framework restrict consideration of substantive policy reform. In an effort to maintain positive interpersonal relationships, any action which could challenge the status quo in any meaningful way is avoided (Sugrue & Gleeson, 2004). Rather the NCCA adopts a minimalist approach to reform, focusing on slogans and "quick fix" solutions rather than substantive structural change (Gleeson, 2004). Sugrue and Gleeson (2004) argue that

Efforts to bring about substantial and significant change may be sacrificed at the altar of pragmatism in an effort to allow partners or stakeholders to attach their preferred "meaning" to the latest initiatives; cordial relations are maintained and there is frequent minimal "buy-in" that is designed to conform and appease rather than generate a collective and shared commitment that is systematic and sustained" (p.287).

The IEGs (2005) were constructed within this culture by the NCCA, with the assistance of a steering committee, again dominated by teacher unions, school management representatives and the Church. Of the organisations listed as being

members of the steering committee, these three groups had ten representative bodies out of twenty, while ethnic minority groups had two: Pavee Point and the African Women's Network. Noticeably absent were groups which represent the views of students, and bodies concerned with equality, social justice and human rights such as the Equality Authority, the Irish Human Rights Commission and with one exception - any academic working in the field of education or social justice. This undoubtedly influenced the nature and scope of the IEGs. The NCCA and the IEGs issue will be discussed in more detail in chapter seven.

#### **1.4 Multicultural Education: A Lack of Conceptual Clarity?**

Like most academic concepts, multicultural education is a contested term with myriad and often ambiguous definitions (Eldering, 1996; Leeman & Reid, 2006; Bennett, 2001; Ogbu, 1992; Le Roux, 2001; May, 1994; Goldberg, 1994; Gibson, 1984; Berman & Paradies, 2008; Hoffman, 1996; Gundara & Portera, 2008; Grant, 2006). The literature suggests that much of the conceptual confusion arises from educationalists' multiple and diverse interpretations of multicultural education (May, 1994; Parker-Jenkins, 1995; Le Roux, 2001; Goldberg, 1994). Goldberg (1994) maintains that "no sooner had multicultural demands and aspirations begun to be articulated than they were imparted multiple and conflicting interpretations, meanings and implications" (p.7). Conceptual ambiguity also stems from the fact that there are many "popular but regressive practices wrongly framed as multicultural education" (Gorksi, 2006, p.164). Practical demonstrations vary from the inclusion of curricular content on the lifestyles of ethnic minority groups to more critical approaches which expose and challenge structural and institutional inequalities.

Despite the breadth of theoretical justifications and practical manifestations evident in the literature however, if the conceptualisations of multicultural education promulgated by its leading theorists, such as Banks, (1993, 2004, 2007); May and Sleeter, (2010); Sleeter and Bernal, (2004); Ladson-Billings, (2004); Sleeter & Grant, (1994); Nieto, (2004a, 2004b); and May, (1994, 1999) are analysed, an immediate consensus is evident. In this regard, Sleeter (1996) insists that “one must distinguish between an approach as formulated by [multicultural education’s] main theorists, and superficial applications of it that one often finds in schools as well as the literature” (as cited in Gorski, 2006, p.8).

### **1.5 Multicultural or Intercultural Education: A Lack of Consensus on Apposite Terminology?**

The lack of conceptual clarity pertaining to the meaning of multicultural education is compounded by the fact that multicultural education can also be known as “intercultural education”, “multiethnic education”, “multilingual education”, “cross-cultural education”, “immigrant education”, “bilingual education”, “community education” and “minority education” (Eldering, 1996; Le Roux, 2001; Gundara & Portera; 2008). Many researchers assert that these labels broadly refer to the same thing (Hill, 2007; Fiedler, Gill, O’Neill & Pérez Piñán, 2008; Eldering, 1996; Le Roux, 2001).<sup>5</sup> In the European context, the term intercultural education was adopted in the early 1980s. Coulby (2006) asserts that the shift in nomenclature from multicultural to intercultural education was “accepted at the time unquestioningly and apparently without hesitation” (p.246). He maintains that this

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<sup>5</sup> The meaning of each term varies depending on the way in which each is conceptualised. Moreover, conceptualisations vary within countries and between countries depending on individual scholars and the official position taken by Government policy-makers.

lexical modification seemed to offer a new beginning and the opportunity to devise an alternative theory of intercultural education distinct from existing conceptualisations in the United States and United Kingdom (p.246). However, Fiedler et al. (2008) suggest that there is “no consensus across Europe about the distinction between intercultural and multicultural education” (2008, p.16). In Ireland and throughout the rest of Europe (with the exceptions of the United Kingdom and Finland) the term intercultural education is employed in policy and official discourse. The term multicultural education is used in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Asia and the United Kingdom among others. Moreover, the term intercultural education is used by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the Council of Europe, whereas multicultural education is used by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Leeman, 2003). While some literature suggests that intercultural education is similar to critical multicultural education in that both are a synthesis of multicultural education and antiracist education, I contend that both multicultural and intercultural education can be both *weak* and *critical* and as such have the same meaning in practice. This issue will be discussed in detail in chapter two.

In this dissertation, I argue that the NCCA’s IEGs promote a form of weak multiculturalism. Moreover, I argue that a more critical conceptualisation of intercultural education is necessary if intercultural education is to achieve its transformative potential. Nieto (2004a) provides a useful delineation of critical multicultural education conceptualising it as “a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students” which “challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination. . . and affirms . . . pluralism” (p.346). It



“permeates the schools’ curriculum and instructional strategies, as well as the interactions among teachers, students, and families, and the very way that schools conceptualise the nature of teaching and learning” (p.346). It foregrounds critical pedagogy “as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action (praxis) as the basis for social change. . . ” (p.346). Critical multiculturalism seeks to assist students in developing critical consciousness. It is argued that this consciousness will enable them to resist the effects of structural and societal inequality and in doing so it will transform the unjust status quo.

#### **1.6 Setting the Context: Why is this Study Important?**

Intercultural education seeks to promote human rights, democracy, equality and social justice. It has the capacity to foster a respect for diversity and difference, critical thinking skills, multiple perspectives, empathy and a sense of civic responsibility. It also has the capacity to provide students with opportunities to enact agency. Intercultural education therefore has the capacity to facilitate the development of action oriented, cosmopolitan, democratic citizens. More critical versions of intercultural education, informed by critical social theories promote more radical conceptualisations. Such interpretations emphasise the political nature of social structures and argue that students have the capacity to become justice-oriented transformative citizens who are sociopolitically conscious and action oriented. In this conceptualisation of intercultural education, students are encouraged to deconstruct and critique the status quo and to collectively work towards its transformation in the name of creating a more just, inclusive society. The promotion

of an intercultural approach is therefore critical to the effective functioning of modern democracies.

Schools play a key role in this regard – having the capacity to foster the development of active, informed, critical democratic citizens (Banks, 2007, 2011). In this context, research into the operationalisation of intercultural education in primary schools is extremely important. As interculturalism is a relatively new concept in the Irish context, having been first officially endorsed for Travellers in 2002 and for all students in 2005, the existing research base is extremely limited. While Devine (2011), Smyth, Darmody, McGinnity, & Byrne (2009) and McGorman and Sugrue (2007) have examined primary schools' responses to cultural diversity, these studies did not explore the interplay of variables within whole school environments. Similarly, while Bryan (2008, 2009a, 2009b) has specifically examined the practice of intercultural education, her research focuses on second level rather than primary level schools.

### ***1.6.1 Tackling Prejudice and Racism***

Central to critical multiculturalism is naming and actively challenging racism and other forms of injustice, not simply recognising and celebrating differences and reducing prejudice (Berlak and Moyenda, 2001, p.92).

Both Irish and comparative European studies document the existence and pervasiveness of racism in Irish society (Fanning, Killoran, Ní Bhroin & McEvoy, 2011; MacGréil, 2011; Russell, Quinn, King & McGinnity, 2008; NCCRI, 2008; Fingal County Council, 2008; McGinnity, O'Connell, Quinn & Williams, 2006; Know Racism/Millward Brown IMS, 2004; Amnesty International, 2001; O'Keeffe

& O'Connor, 2001; Casey & O'Connell, 2000; European Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2007; Eurobarometer, 2000).<sup>6</sup> Research completed by the Government funded 'Know Racism Campaign' in 2004 which examined attitudes towards minority groups indicated that just under one fifth of respondents had witnessed incidents of racist abuse (Know Racism/Millward Brown IMS, 2004). In the same vein, a large-scale national study exploring immigrants' experiences of racism and discrimination in Ireland found that 35% of respondents had experienced racism or harassment on the street or in public places (McGinnity et al., 2006).<sup>7</sup> Thirty-two percent of work permit holders indicated that they had been the victims of insults or harassment at work while 21% reported discrimination in access to employment. The highest level of racism was experienced by Black South and Central Africans with 53% having experienced harassment on the street or in public places. These findings are reflected in the most recent research into racism in Ireland conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2009), which indicates that Ireland had the third highest increase in racist crimes in the European Union in 2007. The report documents the increase in racist crimes in Ireland from the year 2000 when there were 72 reports of racist incidents until 2007 when there were 224 reports and suggests a sharp increase in racially motivated discriminatory behaviour.

In the same vein, research suggests that Travellers – Ireland's largest indigenous ethnic minority group – are similarly marginalised and denigrated (Mac Gréil, 1996, 2011; Curry, 2000; Tormey & Gleeson, 2012). Mac Gréil's (2011) most recent study into prejudice and tolerance in Ireland found that just under one fifth of

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<sup>6</sup> Gaïne (2000) defines a racist society as one in which "there is a pattern of social relations, discursive practices and structures, which have specific outcomes operating against less powerful groups defined 'racially'" (p.66).

<sup>7</sup> The study's participants included non-EU work permit holders and asylum seekers.

respondents would deny Irish citizenship to Travellers and just under four fifths would be reluctant to purchase a house next door to a Traveller (as cited in Carbery, 2010). Similarly, research conducted in 2004 found that 21% of respondents believed that Travellers should not have the same rights as the settled community and 72% believed that members of the settled community did not want Travellers living in their local communities (Millward Brown IMS, 2004).

All of the aforementioned studies were conducted during the Celtic Tiger era, a period of unprecedented economic growth and relative prosperity for many people. Anecdotal evidence suggests that attitudes towards migrant groups have hardened since the economic downturn in 2008 and incidents of reported racism have increased (Fanning et al., 2011; Healy, 2010). Despite this, successive Governments have continued to decrease financial support for antiracism and related initiatives and reduce the status of institutions which address social justice issues and racism. Recent years have seen the conclusion of the Government's Know Racism campaign (2008), the abolition of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) (Budget, 2008), the abolition of a stand-alone Junior Ministry for Integration (Government Re-shuffle, March, 2010) and the merging of the Equality Authority and the Human Rights' Commission (Budget, 2011). In its most recent statement to the Human Rights Council (March 2012) following the Council Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Ireland's human rights record, the Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC) (2012) states that:

One of the key concerns of the IHRC is the degradation of the human rights, equality and anti-racism protection infrastructure in Ireland over the past four

years. These cuts have undermined human rights promotion, monitoring and access to redress for people in Ireland. Statutory bodies working in this area including the IHRC and Equality Authority were among the first to be cut at the very start of the economic crisis. There has been no reversal of these cuts (p.2).

Moreover, the IHRC cite Ireland's "need to combat Racial Discrimination" as one of a number of key areas which require "serious, sustained and quantifiable efforts" (pp.2-3). This, combined with a major retrenchment in Government commitment to and support for antiracism and related institutions and programmes places huge pressure on the educational system, which historically has been assigned the task of ameliorating insidious social problems such as racism.

While the current Government's Programme for Government *Government for National Recovery 2011-2016* references the need for schools to tackle homophobic bullying, it makes no mention of racism. Given the pervasiveness of racism in Irish society and the key role played by intercultural education in addressing it, research into whether and/or how schools are addressing this issue through intercultural education is critically important.

### ***1.6.2 Promoting Social Justice, Human Rights and Equality***

Intercultural education plays a key role in promoting democratic imperatives such as social justice, human rights and equality. The most important role of teachers is to facilitate the development of critically engaged, active and reflective

democratic citizens (Baltodano, 2012). The current study explores the extent to which these values are promoted and how they are promoted in the three case study schools. An emphasis on these key areas has never been more important as the competitive individualism and market focus of neo-liberalism continues to undermine fundamental democratic principles and the very notion of education as a human right (Lynch et al., 2012). While the framing of education in economic terms is not a new departure, for example OECD reports have influenced education policy and rhetoric in Ireland since the 1960s (Galvin, 2009), the influence of market principles and market justifications for official decisions taken have become more salient since the collapse of the Irish economy in 2008. Market language and economic ideology have become internalised and normalised in Irish society and pervade every recently published policy document, including the current Government's programme for government - "Government for National Recovery 2011-2016" (2011). The rhetoric of "competitiveness", "economic recovery", "the knowledge economy", "performance indicators", "accountability", "entrepreneurialism" is pervasive. In the same vein, this neo-liberal ideology has profound epistemological implications. Referring to the pervasiveness of "New Managerialism" – a neo-liberal management strategy modelled on a business paradigm – in the Irish educational context, Lynch et al. (2012) contend that it has serious implications for "...what is taught (and not taught). . . [and] who is taught" (pp.13-14). It therefore has serious implications for schools, particularly school curricula. The impact of this discourse is evident in recent Government policy which seeks to further elevate the status of mathematics and science in order to cater for economic and market needs. Science is to be made a compulsory subject for junior cycle students in secondary schools by 2014 with standardised testing in science to

be introduced for second year students by 2016 (DES, 2012). In the same vein, a revised bonus points system for mathematics was introduced by the current Government in 2012 (Government of Ireland, 2011). The “Project Maths” scheme means that senior cycle students who select and pass higher-level mathematics in their Leaving Certificate examination will gain an additional 25 college application points (Flynn, 2012). Similarly, the recently published national strategy *Literacy and Numeracy For Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy Among Children and Young People, 2011 – 2020* (DES, 2011a) suggests that the inclusion of “a broader range of issues, topics and subjects in the curriculum runs the risk that the time available in school for the acquisition and consolidation of critical core skills may be eroded” (p.44). A narrowing of the school curriculum works against the exploration of issues related to equity, human rights and social justice. Indeed, it could be argued that as market rationality increases its scholastic foothold, the issues of democracy and social justice slide further down the educational agenda. Marquand (2003) contends that “money talks; and the louder it talks, the harder it becomes to hear un-moned voices” (as cited in Fielding, 2004, p.198). In this context, research which explores whether and/or how schools are promoting the fundamental democratic principles of equity, social justice and human rights is critically important.

The recent publication of *The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector: Report of the Forum's Advisory Group* (April, 2012) offers the possibility of a new found emphasis on democratic citizenship. In addition to recommending the very significant measure of divesting religious school patronage,

the report argues for an “ethics course appropriate to life in a democratic society” (DES, 2012, p.88). The advisory committee to the Forum state that:

Learning about ethics is important for all but developing modes of ethical behaviour is of central importance to human development. The teaching of ethics includes the formation in and the promotion of a personal commitment to the dignity and freedom of all human beings, the importance of human rights, the place of justice within society, and the service of the common good. These are all essential to education in citizenship and the proper functioning of democracy (DES, 2012, p.vi).

Recent research indicates that the issues of citizenship and democracy which are provided for under the “Me and the Wider World” strand of the Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum are neglected by Irish primary teachers in favour of content which falls under the strands of “Myself” and “Myself and Others” (NCCA, 2008; DES, 2009). In the same vein, while the State promotes a policy of interculturalism, it is operationalised through nonstatutory guidelines rather than statutory legislation. Moreover, when the IEGs were launched in 2005, no in-service training was provided for teachers and anecdotal evidence suggests that as a result many schools took little action to engage with the concept of intercultural education or to implement the IEGs’ recommendations. Intercultural education and democratic citizenship have therefore been greatly neglected to date. If current understandings of intercultural education in the Irish context are re-conceptualised with a more critical bent, they have the capacity to greatly inform a new ethics programme grounded in the principles of democracy, human rights, social justice and social



action. In this regard, the current study seeks to promote a more critical interpretation of intercultural education and to identify informed practice from the case study schools and from the literature.

### **1.7 Theoretical Orientations and Philosophical Assumptions**

Every inquiry is a seeking. . . Every seeking gets guided beforehand by what is sought (Heidegger, 1962 as cited in Keane, 2009, p.86).

As may be already evident, it is my contention that intercultural education must be critically conceived and practised if it is to realise its transformative potential. This particular view is informed by the literature but also by my theoretical orientations and philosophical assumptions. These will now be explored. While this study primarily seeks to increase understanding of how intercultural education is conceptualised and practised by teachers and principals in the three case study schools, it does so through a critical social theory lens, most particularly, the lens of critical multiculturalism. In this regard, it is similar to critical ethnography, which combines interpretivism (emphasises human agency, local knowledge and increased understanding) and critical theory (emphasises structures and power relations) (Anderson, 1989; May, 1994).<sup>8</sup> The selection of this theoretical lens is reflective of my view that “a dialectical relationship” exists between social structures and human agency (Anderson, 1989, p. 249) - a view which also underpins critical multicultural theory. In this view, the three case study schools are conceptualised as social and cultural institutions which reflect and are constrained by wider sociocultural processes. However, unlike the over determinism of pure critical

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<sup>8</sup> Critical ethnography “refers to studies which use a basically anthropological, qualitative participant observer methodology but which rely for their theoretical formulation on a body of theory deriving from critical sociology and philosophy” (Masemann, 1982 as cited in May, 1994, p.51).

theory, the study's primary participants - the teachers and principals of the schools - are viewed as active agents who although constrained, have relative autonomy and thus have the capacity to mediate and mitigate systemic constraints and to effect change (May, 1994; Anderson, 1989).

Drawing on critical theory, the selection of this theoretical perspective reflects my contention that educational research should serve as a form of social critique (Usher, 1996; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Kincheloe & McLaren 2005; Creswell, 2007). It should analyse asymmetric power relations at macro and micro levels and problematise and critique the hegemonic taken-for-granted assumptions, ideologies, structures and practices that perpetuate the unjust status quo (Usher, 1996; O'Donoghue, 2007; MacPherson, Brooker, & Ainsworth, 2000; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Kincheloe & McLaren 2005; Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) asserts that critical researchers seek to advance "an action agenda for reform" (p.21). In this regard, in addition to engaging in social critique, working alongside the teachers in the case study schools, I seek to advance an alternative model of intercultural education which has the capacity to transform current internal school structures and processes.

However, in drawing on a critical theory approach, I am also mindful that locating my research within this paradigm may result in my analysis being skewed, of being "caught in a negative binding to the targets of critique" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, p.167) or "intolerant of theoretical anomalies" (Weber, 2003, p.vi). To address this potential bind, I have made my theoretical orientations, conceptual framework and framework for analysis explicit. Moreover, throughout the research process, I endeavoured to think in a dialectic way, to be reflexive about my interpretations and to use multiple interpretive theories (Koch & Harrington, 1998;

Weber, 2003; Cunliffe, 2003; 2006; Barry, Britten, Barber, Bradley, & Stevenson, 1999; Finlay, 2002a, 2002b). I also constructed analytic memos, engaged in member checking with the data participants and triangulated the data gathered using multiple data methods (observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis).

Many researchers highlight the necessity of linking theory and methods (O'Donoghue, 2007; May, 1994). Critical theory is frequently criticised for failing to provide this methodological link (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Drawing on Kinchloe and McLaren (2000), Murillo (2004) contends that critical ethnography can provide a methodological framework for critical theory, describing critical ethnography as “critical theory in action” (as cited in Madison, 2012, p.13). The qualitative methods associated with critical ethnography therefore facilitate the operationalisation of critical theory. Murillo (2004) describes these methods as “direct observation. . . ., open-ended interviewing, and textual analysis of human products” (as cited in Madison, 2012, p. 14). Reflecting this, the current study draws on the methods of observation, semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis. These methods are also reflective of and compatible with the qualitative case study approach which this study advances (Creswell, 2007).

A critical ethnographic case study methodology which links interpretivism and critical theory facilitates an increased understanding of how intercultural education is conceptualised and practised by teachers and principals in the three case study schools, but also facilitates an exploration of power relations and how teachers' and principals' actions are constrained and enabled by wider social and educational structures. In the words of Anderson (1989), it seeks to provide “social explanations

sensitive to complex relationship between human agency and social structure” (p.251). It also reflects Angus’ (1986) contention that,

Investigations of schooling. . . should attempt to specifically illuminate the process and mechanisms by which the macro-forces of the society-wide education system are both produced and mediated, through the everyday lived experience and perceptions of human agents, at the level of specific institutions. Such mediation, given the essential human agency of school participants, will never be simple, enabling the automatic reproduction of prior arrangements, but will instead allow for moments of contradiction which will signal new social or institutional forces, or the beginning of new organisational forms (as cited in May 1994, pp.51-52).

This theoretical perspective is also reflected in my ontological and epistemological assumptions. Reflecting an interpretivist paradigm, I adhere to a theory of social constructivism. I understand that knowledge is negotiated between the researcher and participant in a particular social setting. However, reflecting a critical theory paradigm, I view participants’ (and my own) perceptions of reality to be value-laden reconstructions shaped by discourses which are influenced by wider social structures and ideological processes (Kincheloe & McLaren 2005; May, 1994; Anderson, 1989). Therefore, our perceptions of reality and of “common sense” knowledge are influenced by discourses which serve to privilege some at the expense of others (Kincheloe & McLaren 2005; May, 1994; Anderson, 1989; Usher, 1996). Language in this context constructs rather than reflects the world. In the words of Anderson (1989) our “conscious models exist to perpetuate, as much as to explain, social phenomena” (p.253). Anderson (1989) contends that this also applies to the constructs used by the researcher during data analysis. In this regard, Alvesson and

Sköldberg (2009) caution that even those working within a critical theory paradigm can fall into the trap of unconsciously reinforcing the existing social order through their research. They state that “researchers are themselves prisoners of their own society and its taken-for-granted concepts, thus helping to reproduce the status quo” (p.161). As suggested by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009), I engaged in reflexivity and actively sought to avoid this occurrence as much as possible.

## **1.8 Research Aims**

In completing this dissertation, I aim to:

- Provide a detailed and critical account of how intercultural education is conceptualised and practised by teachers and principals in three Irish primary schools.
- Explore the complex and fluid relationship that exists between social structures and teacher and principal agency.
- Present a comprehensive and critical analysis of the intercultural policy and practice of three Irish primary schools.
- Adopt a whole school approach and explore the interplay of selected variables in mediating the model of ICE emerging in the three schools.
- Inform theoretical and practical knowledge pertaining to intercultural education
- Advance a framework that may assist schools in promoting a justice and rights informed framework of critical intercultural education which foregrounds democracy, critical consciousness and equity.

- Advance a framework that facilitates the promotion of greater educational equity, encourages students' sociopolitical consciousness, and, increases students' opportunities to exercise agency and to further develop their capacities as critical democratic cosmopolitan citizens committed to taking collective action to bring about a more just society.
- Advance a framework that encourages schools to reflect upon their role as institutions which promote educational equity, nurture students' critical capacities, facilitate students' participation rights and foster democratic cosmopolitan citizenship skills.

I therefore seek to provide a detailed, nuanced and critical account of intercultural education as operationalised and practised by teachers and principals in three Irish primary schools with a view to identifying informed practice, critiquing inequitable and undemocratic processes and practices and providing a comprehensive and practical guide which will assist real schools in constructing a transformative democratic rights-centred critical multicultural approach.

## **1.9 Overview of Thesis and Conclusion**

While this chapter has sought to provide a contextual background for the study and to outline the research questions, chapter two provides a critical review of the academic literature pertaining to intercultural education and related fields. Chapter three delineates the methodological framework including methods employed and provides a rationale for all decisions taken. It also outlines the study's conceptual framework and provides a detailed account of the social theories which comprise the study's theoretical framework. It explicates data analysis and data

validation procedures followed by an examination of the ethical considerations which informed the study and an exploration of data validation procedures. The study's three case study schools are presented separately in chapters four, five and six. Each chapter commences with a contextual overview of each school followed by a holistic delineation, interrogation and analysis of policy and practice through various critical theoretical lenses. Chapter seven presents a synthesis of the study's most significant findings and advances a human rights and social justice framework of critical intercultural education which foregrounds democracy, critical consciousness and equity. Chapter eight provides an overview of the study, considers its significance, its theoretical and practical implications for schools and the academy and makes suggestions for future research.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

Drawing on normative, empirical and critical literatures, this integrative literature review critically explores interculturalism as a policy response to culturally diversity.<sup>9</sup> It seeks to operationalise and problematise the discourse and practice of intercultural education in general and, more specifically, in the Irish context. In doing so, it critically interrogates the ideology and logic of multiculturalism and explores the extent to which models of weak multiculturalism challenge or indeed reinforce the status quo and associated hegemonic systems of power and privilege, including racism. It draws on scholarship from critical pedagogy, antiracist education, critical multicultural theory, critical race theory and transformative leadership theory and advances a model of critical multiculturalism which seeks to address the deficiencies of weaker approaches. It operationalises and problematises this ostensibly radical and transformative approach and explores its implications for schools, particularly its implications for school leadership and the pedagogic and organisational structures of the school. While a small number of studies (Bryan, 2008, 2009a, 2009b) have provided critical theoretical insights into intercultural education as conceptualised and practised in the Irish context at second level, no previously published Irish research has provided a comprehensive critical whole school approach to intercultural education at primary level.

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<sup>9</sup> I contend that despite a small number of minor theoretical differences both multiculturalism and interculturalism have the same meaning in practice. For that reason, similar to Bryan (2008), these terms will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis to highlight the lack of divergence between them.



## **2.2 Intercultural Education in Ireland as a Policy Response to Cultural Diversity and Racism**

The Irish Government committed to producing and implementing a *National Action Plan Against Racism* (NPAR) at an United Nations World Conference Against Racism in Durban in 2001. At the time of the NPAR's publication in 2005, the NCCA was in the process of devising *Intercultural Education Guidelines* (IEGs) for primary and second level schools. The NPAR references the NCCA's work and states that the NCCA was "examin[ing] ways in which the existing curriculum [could] be mediated and adapted to reflect the emergence of an expanding multicultural society" (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2005, p.110). This discourse of mediation and adaption suggests an additive curricular approach premised upon what Bryan and Bracken (2011b) term "add-diversity-and-stir logic" (p.16). The deficiencies inherent in merely supplementing existing curricula with a cultural dimension will be critically explored in section 2.5.

The NCCA's (2005) conceptualisation of intercultural education in the IEGs pivots around two central ideas: Intercultural education as education which "respects, celebrates and recognises the normality of diversity. . . . sensitises the learner to the ideas that humans have naturally developed a range of different ways of life, customs and worldviews . . . ." and ". . . . education which promotes equality and human rights, challenges unfair discrimination and promotes the values upon which equality is built" (p.3). McGorman and Sugrue (2007) raise concerns about the adequacy of intercultural education in the Irish context in tackling racism and recommend that antiracism be given "particular attention" (p.90). Indeed, a number of Irish studies have highlighted the salience of racism in the lives of ethnic minority students (Devine, 2011; Bryan, 2012; Bryan & Bracken, 2011b; Smyth et al., 2009; Devine,

Kenny & MacNeela, 2008; Devine & Kelly 2006; Connolly & Keenan, 2002; O’Keeffe & O’Connor, 2001), with Smyth et al. (2009) concluding that students experience “a degree of racist bullying of which principals [and teachers] may be unaware” (p.96). In terms of responding to the intensification of racism in contemporary Irish society, the IEGs state that intercultural education “helps to prevent racism” (p.21). Although not expressly stated, this notion appears to be premised on the belief that racism will be prevented or eradicated by helping children to “recognise and challenge discrimination” (p.30) and by helping them to develop “positive emotional responses to diversity and an empathy with those discriminated against” (p.21). While the aforementioned values and actions are important ancillary features of a comprehensive approach to antiracism, such a restrictive approach treats the minor symptoms of the illness without acknowledging its most pernicious symptoms or full complexity - namely the structural dimensions of racism. While the IEGs acknowledge the existence of institutional racism, they do so with relation to the existence of institutional racism within individual schools, with no concomitant acknowledgement of its intersection with broader social structures (Kitching, 2010a). In this regard, rather than being conceptualised as a system of power and privilege designed to protect the advantaged position of the dominant group, it is predominantly relegated to the realm of individual teachers’ prejudicial attitudes and dispositions within individual schools (Kitching, 2010a; Sleeter & Bernal, 2004; Bryan, 2012). Intercultural education in the Irish context therefore appears to fall into the same traps as benevolent or weak forms of multicultural education in other jurisdictions. Reflecting on multicultural discourse in the USA, Alcoff (1996) states that “race, racism and racial hierarchies are relatively ignored” (as cited in McLaren & Torres, 1999, pp.44-45). She contends that “Explorations of

culture and ethnicity can all too easily avoid any account of White supremacy and focus instead on the recognition of difference, flattening out differences in a way that makes them appear equal” (as cited in McLaren & Torres, 1999, pp.44-45). Research suggests that a similarly narrow theorisation of racism is evident in Irish teacher discourse and in educational resources including school textbooks and policy documents (Devine, 2011; Bryan, 2012). Indeed Bryan (2012) argues that intercultural education as practised in second level Irish schools is more likely to reproduce than undermine racism. Reflecting international research, racism is frequently relegated to the realm of the individual within teacher discourse with incidents downplayed or denied and clashes of personality, cultural misunderstandings and lack of knowledge of cultural difference cited as causal factors (Devine, 2005; Smyth et al., 2009; Aveling, 2007; Raby, 2004; Ryan, 2003; Gaine, 1995; Anderson, 1990; Taylor; 1998; Young & Laible, 2000). The IEGs do little to tackle these misconceptions nor do they provide a comprehensive approach to tackling racism. Figueroa (1999) suggests that an antiracism approach necessitates,

The promotion of educational equality and quality, especially for ethnic minorities; but equally to the deconstructing and reconstructing of racist and ethnicist frames of reference, perceptions, stereotypes, prejudice, and patterns of relations and actions, especially of the majority. It must likewise focus on institutional and structural racism and the conditions that support as well as those that might help to overcome such racism (pp.286-287).

As a means of tackling racism, the ineffectiveness of celebratory approaches associated with weaker models of intercultural education is well documented in the literature (May, 1994, 1999; May & Sleeter, 2010; Nieto, 2004a, 2004b; Troyna,

1987; Troyna & Hatcher, 1992; Bryan, 2009b; Bryan & Bracken, 2011b; Figueroa, 1995). While cautioning against focusing solely on celebratory events, the IEGs nonetheless recommend “celebrating special events in the calendars of a diversity of cultures” (NCCA, 2005, p.30). Existing Irish research highlights the prevalence of celebratory events and activities in many Irish primary and post-primary schools (Devine, 2011, Bryan, 2009b, Bryan & Bracken, 2011a, 2011b). Drawing inferences from Bryan and Bracken’s (2011a) work on development activism, it is likely that the “do-ability” and “fun” elements of intercultural days may account for their popularity in schools. However, reflecting international research, Bryan (2008, 2009b) notes the often superficial, trivial and tokenistic nature of many of these events and their capacity to misrepresent minority groups’ cultures and cultural identities and reinforce negative stereotypes. Despite schools’ best intentions, therefore, contrary to their inclusive aims, events such as intercultural days can further exclude and further marginalise ethnic minority students. It could also be argued that they merely distract attention from the mainstreaming of more critical interrogative approaches to intercultural education which have the capacity to challenge systemic racism and to facilitate the development of reflective critically conscious citizens committed to equity and social justice (Lynn & Jennings, 2009).

In terms of the broader intercultural discourse evident in written documents such as the NPAR and the IEGs, Bryan (2008, 2009a, 2010) contends that contrary to its “egalitarian and anti-racist aims”, the discourse of interculturalism is more likely to reproduce than challenge racism and racial inequality (pp.47-48). Drawing on the work of Ghassan Hage (1998), Bryan (2010) argues that the very notion of “respecting”, “appreciating”, “valuing”, and “celebrating” minority cultures creates a divisive binary which presents the dominant Irish group as the “the valuer or

celebrator of difference” while simultaneously constructing minority groups “in terms of how they benefit or enrich the host culture” (2010, p.255). In doing so and contrary to the aims of interculturalism, the discourse of interculturalism actually has the effect of covertly reinforcing existing asymmetric power relations.

Despite claiming to have learned from the mistakes of other countries particularly with regard to the role of antiracism (NCCA, 2005), Bryan (2008) argues that the particular approach foregrounded by the NCCA is a form of weak intercultural education which fails to challenge racism and White privilege. In doing so, the IEGs are complicit in the reproduction of unequal power relations which work to privilege the habitus of dominant groups while simultaneously de-legitimising the habitus of non-dominant groups (Bryan, 2008).

### **2.3 Liberal Multicultural Education Equals “Weak” Multicultural Education?**

While the origins of multicultural education may vary across national borders, the key aims in all jurisdictions are broadly similar, namely, the eradication of racism and the promotion of pluralism, equality, human rights and social justice (Figueroa, 1999).<sup>10</sup> Reflecting these aims, Parekh (2006) provides a very useful conceptualisation of multicultural education, describing it as “an education in freedom, both in the sense of freedom *from* ethnocentric prejudices and biases and freedom *to* explore and learn from other cultures and perspectives” (p.230). Highlighting the importance of intercultural dialogue, critical reflection and multiple perspectives, Parekh (2006) maintains that multicultural education “challenges the

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<sup>10</sup> For example, the Civil Rights Movement was a catalyst in the US context, while intercultural education emerged in Ireland following policy debates on the inclusion of ethnic minority groups.

falsehoods of Eurocentric history, brings out its complexity and plural narratives...” and helps students to accept “the diversity of values, beliefs, ways of life and views of the world as an integral part of the human condition” (pp.226-230). Despite its liberatory aims however, scholars from all jurisdictions identify the prevalence of apolitical liberal interpretations of multicultural education, diversely labelled weak, benevolent or soft forms of multicultural education which critics contend do little to effectively address and promote multicultural education’s key aims (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Jenks, Lee, & Kanpol, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2004; May & Sleeter, 2010; Sleeter & Bernal, 2004, Bryan, 2008; May, 1994, 1999; Troyna, 1987).

Liberal models of multicultural education are underpinned by ideologies of human sameness, social structure neutrality, meritocracy, objectivity and colour blindness (McClaren, 1994; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Jenks et al., 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). Maintaining that everyone has the opportunity to compete equally for resources and “successful” outcomes, liberal multiculturalists attribute the current social order to a dearth of social and educational opportunities for certain social groups (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Jenks et al., 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2004). Adopting an apolitical decontextualised approach, liberal multiculturalists foreground positive interpersonal relationships and the promotion of, recognition of, respect for and celebration of cultural diversity (May & Sleeter, 2010; Jenks et al., 2001). Ignoring the role of social and political contexts and power relations in the formation of culture, liberal multiculturalists conceptualise culture as “an artefact of the past” (Sleeter & May, 2010, p.10) - something that can be learned about and understood by exploring the cuisine, customs and festivals of ethnic and cultural groups in exotic locales (Sleeter & May,

2010; Nieto, 2004a, 2004b; Hoffman, 1996; Turner, 1993).<sup>11</sup> Such conceptualisations ignore cultural groups' social and cultural histories and essentialise cultural groups, presenting them as being internally homogeneous, uniform and static rather than dynamic and fluid (Lentin, 2005; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2009). Racism - understood to be a by-product of individual ignorance, interpersonal prejudice and a lack of understanding of cultural differences – is postulated to be overcome by interacting with and learning about the lifestyles of other cultures (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004; Bryan, 2012; Parker-Jenkins, 1995; Haran & Tormey, 2002; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2009). Sleeter and Bernal (2004) contend that in liberal forms of multicultural education “power is often displaced by more comfortable concepts such as tolerance” (p.242). In schools, this form of multiculturalism manifests itself as contributions or additive curricular approaches (Banks, 2007) where the existing curriculum is merely supplemented with an ethnic or cultural dimension.

While there is nothing inherently wrong with learning about other cultures (provided that it does not reify and essentialise cultural groups), such an approach is limiting as it fails to problematise structural inequities and power relationships between dominant and subordinate groups (Troyna, 1987). Sleeter and Bernal (2004) state that, “For Whites, this idea (learning about other cultures) can fit within the taken-for-grantedness of White dominance, the assumed normality and superiority of European and Euro-American cultures, and the idea that society is already structured fairly” (p.250). The hegemony and (White) privilege of the

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<sup>11</sup> In this thesis culture is understood to be “everything that a society or group creates, accomplishes or elaborates, and especially to patterns of meaning-constitution that are not simply ephemeral. At its core are the interrelated cognitive, normative and linguistic systems, the “world-view”, including centrally the society's or group's image of itself in the world (in relation to the other)...Culture is constantly being created and recreated through social interaction, but it is also stabilised and sedimented in structures, habits, rituals, language, images and artefacts” (Figueroa, 1999, p.284).

dominant cultural group (White-middle-class) is therefore preserved under an apolitical veneer of cultural diversity and equal opportunities (May & Sleeter, 2010; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Jenks et al., 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2004). Such an approach has little impact on the life chances of ethnic minority students. As Bullivant argues, “selections for the curriculum that encourage children from ethnic backgrounds to learn about their cultural heritage, languages, histories, customs and other aspects of their life-styles have little bearing on their equality of educational opportunity and life chances” (1986 as cited in May, 1994, p.38). In addition to neglecting educational equity, additive approaches neglect the issue of representation (whose interests are reflected in the curriculum?); neglect to trouble the legitimacy of hegemonic knowledge and taken-for-granted universalised “truths” (whose knowledge is privileged? To what extent do curricular representations reinforce existing asymmetric power relations?); and neglect to incorporate the multiple perspectives of minority groups into the curriculum in a meaningful way (Bryan, 2008, 2009a; Bryan & Bracken, 2011b; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Nieto, 2004a, 2004b; McCarthy, 1993). Most significantly, additive approaches give the illusion of egalitarian action while simultaneously foreclosing consideration of more radical alternatives which could tackle systemic discrimination and the discourses and ideologies which produce and perpetuate social inequality (Bryan, 2008, 2009a). In this regard, such approaches can be viewed as tools which support the hegemony of dominant cultural groups (Gorski, 2008).

The prevalence of this form of multicultural education can be attributed to the ease with which teachers can incorporate multicultural content into the existing curriculum (May & Sleeter, 2010). May and Sleeter (2010) contend that, “the less



substantively a set of practices challenges power relations, the more likely they are to be taken up in schools” (p.4).

At the level of broader educational policy, the pervasiveness of weak intercultural education can arguably be attributed to its capacity to simultaneously appear both transformative (from minority perspectives) and “ideologically safe” (from dominant perspectives) (Jay, 2003, p.6). In the Irish context, Bryan (2008) argues that the provision of intercultural education appeases minority groups with the idea that something is being done (inclusion of a multicultural dimension into the existing curriculum) and in so doing distracts attention from the need to consider genuine transformative alternatives. Bryan (2008) states that “the implementation of intercultural education in schools fulfils a political function of providing an educational palliative to minorities while preempting resistance, and muting consideration of alternative policy responses that would yield genuine egalitarian outcomes and effects for racialised minorities in Ireland” (p.49). Bryan (2008) further argues that by placing the responsibility of eradicating racism solely at the door of education providers, it eases State policy-makers’ consciences while at the same time providing a “ready scapegoat” if the problem of racism continues (p.49). Equally, the strength and transformative potential of multicultural theory may account for its longevity and prevalence. However, the deviations which occur during the transfer of multicultural theory into practice are problematic and form the basis of much of the criticism levelled at multicultural education. In this regard, May (1994) states that critical multicultural education has “a seemingly terminal inability to translate its emancipatory intentions into actual practice” (p.36).

Practical manifestations of weak versions of multicultural education diverge substantially from the principles and aims of multicultural education as it was

initially conceptualised. Criticisms abound from scholars across the education spectrum, most specifically from those working in the areas of antiracist education (ARE) (Gillborn, 2004; Carrim & Soudien, 1999; Troyna, 1987, 1993; Figueroa, 1995; Hatcher, 1987), critical pedagogy (CP) (McClaren, 1994; Giroux, 1994) and critical race theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso; 2009; Lynn & Jennings, 2009; Gillborn, 2008, 2009; Milner, 2008), but also those working in the field of multicultural education itself (Banks, 1993, 2004, 2007; May & Sleeter, 2010; Sleeter & Bernal, 2004; Sleeter & Grant, 1994; Nieto, 2004a, 2004b; May, 1994, 1999). While the theories of critical pedagogy, antiracism and critical race theory have their own limitations, they have influenced and continue to influence multicultural education in important ways and have contributed to a recentring of multicultural education's original aims of tackling racism and promoting equality, human rights and social justice.

#### **2.4 Antiracist Education (ARE), Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Pedagogy (CP)**

In contrast to weaker versions of multicultural education, racism rather than culture is foregrounded by proponents of antiracist education (ARE) and critical race theory (CRT) (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). These theorists conceptualise racism as a system of power and privilege which operates to maintain the advantaged status of dominant White social groups (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004; Bryan, 2012). Citing Dei (1996), Sleeter and Bernal (2004) define ARE as, "an action oriented strategy for institutional, systemic change to address racism" (p.249). Drawing on the historical and geopolitical roots of racism and racist ideology, proponents of ARE seek to

expose the normativity of Whiteness and unmask the racialised nature of so-called racially neutral school structures including the curriculum, assessment procedures, streaming and ability grouping (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). They also seek to expose the racialised nature of differential achievement patterns.

According to critical race theory (CRT), a body of radical legal scholarship, racism is an endemic, ingrained, pervasive and permanent feature of society, normalised to the point that it goes unnoticed (Bell, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2009; Solorzano, 1997; Vaught & Castagno, 2008; Milner, 2008).<sup>12</sup> In an education context, in common with ARE, racism is understood to be embedded in education structures, institutions, policies and practices (Lynn & Jennings, 2009; Lopez, 2003; Solorzano, 1998). Proponents of CRT work to actively expose racism's structural existence, to de-cloak its various guises and to expose the almost universally accepted hegemonic ideologies of merit, social structure neutrality, objectivity and colour blindness (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004; Lopez, 2003). It explores the experiences of ethnic minority students and seeks to highlight the education system's failure to meet their academic needs (Lynn & Jennings, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT also promotes the methodology of counterstorytelling which gives voice to marginalised groups and enables them to challenge hegemonic narratives and universalised "truths" (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). In this regard, it proposes a liberatory critical race pedagogy which draws on the knowledge and liberatory teaching methodologies of ethnic minority teachers and students (Solorzano, 1997; Lynn, 1997). While some theorists maintain that CRT explores the intersectionality of "race" and racism with other axes of domination such as classism and sexism (Lynn, 1999; Solorzano, 1997; Solorzano & Yosso, 2009), May

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<sup>12</sup> While CRT initially emerged in the US, it has more recently been employed in the British context by anti-racist scholars such as David Gillborn (2008, 2009).

and Sleeter (2010) contend that most CRT theorists foreground “race” and racism. In this regard, Solorzano and Yosso (2009) argue that CRT “advances a strategy to foreground and account for the role of race and racism in education” (p.132). They define CRT in education as a “framework or set of basic insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom” (p.132).

While CRT and ARE are primarily concerned with power relations, “race” and ethnicity, critical pedagogy (CP) is primarily concerned with power relations and social class (May & Sleeter, 2010). CP draws on scholarship from the Frankfurt School of critical theory and the seminal work of the South American radical scholar, Paulo Freire (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). Giroux (1992) contends that critical pedagogy requires an exploration of, “how pedagogy functions as a cultural practice to *produce* rather than merely *transmit* knowledge within the asymmetrical relations of power that structure teacher-student relations” (p.98). Theoretical concepts synonymous with CP, including voice, dialogue, power and social class act as useful tools in exploring power relations, the knowledge construction process, identity construction, differentiated achievement patterns etc. Similar to CRT, CP foregrounds the notions of liberation and social transformation, arguing that the marginalised can be liberated and the social order transformed if individuals and groups develop critical consciousness (consciousness of the status quo and the oppressive structures which maintain it) and are empowered (fostered through dialogue) to take collective action (Taylor & Robinson, 2009).

Critics suggest that multicultural education (MCE) focuses too much on individual agency and attitudinal change, CRT and ARE focus too much on social

structures, particularly racism (May & Sleeter, 2010; Sleeter & Bernal, 2004), and CP focuses too much on social class, according insufficient attention to “race” and racism (May & Sleeter, 2010). It is argued that all three theories, but critical pedagogy in particular, place excessive responsibility on teachers who are constructed as active “liberated pedagogists” whose job it is to “empower” passive “as-yet-unliberated” students (Lather, 1992 as cited in Johnston, 1999, p.559). In isolation, each theory has inadequacies. However, collectively, they provide a wider repertoire of theoretical principles and conceptual tools which have the capacity to greatly inform and enhance critical multicultural theory (May & Sleeter, 2010; Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). With regard to CP’s, ARE’s and CRT’s criticisms of multicultural education, May and Sleeter (2010) contend that, “while the various critiques of multicultural education are instructive and offer important conceptual ground to guide praxis, no single critique simultaneously takes up the range of concerns that multiculturalism seeks to address” (pp.9-10). However, a strength of all three theories is their insistence on theoretical clarity, a characteristic frequently lacking in theorisations of MCE which often focus on practice at the expense of nuanced and multilayered theorising (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004).

## **2.5 Critical Multiculturalism (CM) – A Radical and Transformative Alternative?**

While there are many versions of critical multiculturalism (CM), May and Sleeter (2010) provide a very useful conceptualisation which draws on the aforementioned theories of ARE, CP and CRT. They assert that “rather than prioritising culture, critical multiculturalism gives priority to structural analysis of

unequal power relationships, analysing the role of institutional inequities, including but not necessarily limited to racism” (p.10). Pedagogically, they contend that CM requires “a dialogical process in which the teacher, acting as a partner with students, helps them to examine the world *critically and politically* [italics added], using a problem-posing process that begins with their own experience and historical location” (p.9). The influence of ARE and CRT on CM theory is evident in the first quotation from May and Sleeter, while the salience of CP is apparent in the second. In the same vein, the influence of all three theories is evident in Wright’s (2004) conceptualisation of CM. He asserts that CM involves, “assisting students to examine and challenge the status quo, the dominant constructions of reality, and the power relations that produce inequalities” (Wright, 2004 as cited in Fitzpatrick, 2010, p.184). As outlined in chapter one, Nieto (2004a) provides a similar conceptualisation emphasising the importance of foregrounding a praxis-oriented critical pedagogical approach as the basis for social change (p.346). Such interpretations emphasise the political nature of social structures and suggests that students have the capacity to become justice-oriented transformative citizens who are sociopolitically conscious and action oriented. In these conceptualisations of intercultural education, students are encouraged to deconstruct and critique the status quo and to collectively work towards its transformation in the name of creating a more just, inclusive society. Reflecting these multidimensional interpretations, Banks (2007) describes multicultural education as an idea, an educational reform movement and a process which seeks to challenge the structural and institutional inequities which lead to different outcomes for students based on social positioning. In tandem with the aforementioned critical interpretations of multicultural education, Banks’ (2007) “Transformation Approach” and “Social Action Approach” which are

levels three and four on his widely cited typology of multicultural education emphasise knowledge deconstruction, socio-political consciousness and social action.

Critical multiculturalism provides the tools to theorise about the relationship between school structures and practices and the wider economic, social and political structures within which they are embedded (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). May and Sleeter (2010) contend that CM offers the most effective framework as unlike ARE and CRT which foreground “race” and “racism” and CP which foregrounds social class, CM allows for a more multifaceted, nuanced analysis as it explores the intersectionality of all forms of oppression. CM also manages to remedy the structure-agency binary, combining a focus on challenging systemic inequity with a belief in the capacity of teachers to effect change.

Critical multicultural theory has important implications for school leaders, most specifically in the domains of critical consciousness, students’ academic achievement, democratic practice and activism. In this regard, schools seeking to promote a policy of critical multiculturalism require transformative leaders committed to equity, democracy, social justice and activism.

## **2.6 Transformative Leadership: Leadership for Equity, Democracy and Social Justice**

Transformative leaders enter and remain in education not to carry on business as usual but to work for social change and social justice (Brown, 2004a, p.96).

Drawing on theories such as CP, transformative learning theory and adult learning theory, scholars advance a justice oriented theory of transformative leadership which seeks to promote individual and societal transformation (Brown, 2004a; Shields, 2010; Weiner, 2003). According to Shields (2010) transformative leadership is, “a form of leadership grounded in an activist agenda, one that combines a rights-based theory that every individual is entitled to be treated with dignity, respect and absolute regard with a social justice theory of ethics that takes these rights to a societal level” (p.571). Transformative leaders are critically conscious, recognising the socially constructed and stratified nature of society and the oppressive structures and practices which results in differential outcomes for social groups depending on their social positioning (Brown, 2004a, 2004b; Shields, 2010; Weiner, 2003). Acknowledging power and privilege, they speak “a language of critique and possibility” and “introduce the mechanisms necessary for various groups to begin conversations around issues of emancipation and domination” (Quantz, Rogers, Dantley, 1991 as cited in Shields, 2010, p.569). Through dialogue and critical reflection, transformative leaders seek to facilitate the development of critical consciousness among all members of the school community (Brown, 2004a; Shields, 2010). Promoting individual and collective action, transformative leaders create opportunities and learning contexts where questions about how current inequitable structures and practices can be transformed in the name of creating a more just society (Brown, 2004a; Weiner, 2003). Recognising the relationship between the structures and processes of the school and wider societal structures, transformative leaders seek to critically analyse the school’s policies and practices to ensure that they facilitate equitable outcomes for all students (Brown, 2004a; Shields, 2010). In the same vein, they promote an inclusive student-centred school culture



which works to maximise students' academic achievement and social, cultural and political capital (Shields, 2010). Transformative leaders are also transformative or "public intellectuals," conceived by Giroux (2004) as being,

Capable of teaching students the language of critique and possibility as a precondition for social agency. Such as redefinition of purpose, meaning, and politics suggests that educators critically interrogate the fundamental links between knowledge and power, pedagogical practices and social consequences, and authority and civic responsibility (p.40).

Taking advantage of the fact that they have "one foot in the dominant structures of power and authority," (Weiner, 2003, p.91), transformative leaders are able to use their positions to advocate for the rights of marginalised students, to highlight inequity and to challenge the status quo. In this regard, Shields states that, "Transformative educational leaders must be able to work from within dominant social formations to exercise effective oppositional power, to resist courageously, and to be activists and voices for change and transformation" (Shields, 2010, p.570). While theoretical delineations of transformative leadership theory are reasonably comprehensive, although conceptually dense, there is a dearth of academic literature on its operationalisation in schools, while makes its adoption extremely challenging for school principals. Moreover, the theory of transformative leadership is very ambitious in terms of what it hopes to achieve – individual and societal transformation - and places significant responsibility on the shoulders of school leaders (while portraying other members of the school community as relatively passive) presuming that such leaders are already critically conscious and have the capacity to empower and help other members of the school community to gain critical consciousness.

## **2.7 Implications of Critical multiculturalism for Pedagogical Relations**

To implement multicultural education in a school, we must reform power relationships. . . The institutional norms, social structures, cause-belief statements, values, and goal of the school must be transformed (Banks, 2004 as cited in Gorski, 2006, p.166).

Given the centrality of tackling asymmetric power relationships in critical multicultural theory, adopting a critical multicultural approach has important implications for teacher-student power relations. Drawing on CP, CM promotes dialogue as a pedagogical strategy for tackling asymmetric teacher-student power relations. In this view, teachers act as facilitators who work in partnership with students drawing on students' prior experiences and historical locations as part of a knowledge construction process rather than acting as depositors of preselected hegemonic knowledge (May & Sleeter, 2010). Freirean pedagogy suggests that dialogue disturbs and "unsettles" power relations which in turn creates the conditions for social transformation (Taylor & Robinson, 1999). Fielding (2004) states that, "The strength of dialogue is in its mutuality. Its transformative potential lies in its reciprocity because it is in these kinds of person-centred arrangements that trust and creativity are most likely to grow" (p.308). In the same vein, the exercise of student voice and democratic participation are also facilitated through formal organisational structures such as Student Councils. However neither the dialogic process nor Student Council meetings take place in a vacuum. Rather, such processes are "framed by the realities of power" (Fielding, 2001, p.101).

Authentic democratic practice requires student involvement in decisions which have a direct impact on their school lives, namely, decisions pertaining to the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment procedures (Beane & Apple, 1999; Osler & Starkey, 2010; Wyness, 2009; Alderson, 1999; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000; Lodge, 2005; MacBeath, Myers & Demetriou, 2001). However, existing research suggests that issues discussed at Student Council meetings tend to be safe, noncontentious, comfort issues divorced from core educational priorities which impact students' life chances (Wyness, 2009; Alderson, 1999; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000; Lodge, 2005; MacBeath et al., 2001). In the same vein, there is evidence to suggest that student councillors are "used" as "sounding boards" and "data sources" for teachers (Lodge, 2005; Fielding, 2004; MacBeath et al., 2001). Such conceptualisations are a far cry from the critical multicultural conception of students as "agents of transformation" (Fielding, 2001, p.101). The degree to which the Student Council members are in control (Whitty & Wisby, 2007) and the degree to which their voice matters and shapes action (Cook-Sather, 2006) – in other words, the degree to which students are enabled to exercise genuine power - is a crucial issue for schools seeking to promote a critical multicultural approach. Schools seeking to promote a critical multicultural approach also need to be mindful of the risk of further marginalising already marginalised students. Silva (2001) maintains that it is imperative to consider "which students are representing the 'student voice' of their school" (p.98). Moreover, she questions whether the more confident students who are more likely to put themselves forward for Student Council elections can truly represent or even fully understand issues which may be of great significance to marginalised groups (Silva, 2001). Schools need to be mindful that they do not unwittingly reinscribe existing hegemonic power relations within the classroom.

In addition to genuine rather than tokenistic participation, students need to be given the opportunity to critically engage with and reflect upon the wider sociocultural, political and economic contexts of their lives. They must be given the opportunity to interrogate and deconstruct universalised mainstream knowledge and explore the inherent power relationships which it reflects (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2009; Banks, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Fielding (2004) maintains that, “there are no spaces, physical or metaphorical, where staff and students meet one another as equals, as genuine partners in the shared undertaking of making meaning of their work together” (p.309). While Freirean critical pedagogy conceptualises power as a commodity that can be possessed by an individual, group or institution (Taylor & Robinson, 2009), influenced by postmodernism, critical multiculturalism theorises power as “something that circulates” and as “a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity” (Foucault, 1979, p.26). In this regard, power can be exercised by students as well as by teachers. While teachers can create conditions and structures which facilitate students’ exercise of power, for example dialogic pedagogical strategies and Student Councils, students are equally capable of exercising power without teachers’ consent or facilitation through their own “counter-tactics” (Gallagher, 2008a, p.145). While students can operate individually, within a critical multicultural interpretation, having developed critical consciousness, their collective activism has enormous transformative potential.

## **2.8 Implication of Critical Multiculturalism for the Curriculum**

While content integration in the form of curricular add-ons is the most common manifestation of weak multicultural education; critical multicultural

education is more concerned with the politics of representation and the knowledge construction process. Interpreting the curriculum as a hegemonic tool deployed to preserve the power and privilege of the dominant group, critical multiculturalism requires a re-conceptualisation of curricula by including the multiple diverse perspectives of marginalised groups and focusing on the political nature of the knowledge construction process (Banks, 2004; Crichlow, Goodwin, Shakes & Swartz, 1990). Ladson-Billings (1998) conceptualises the curriculum as a hegemonic “master script” constructed to support and reinforce White privilege and domination. Swartz (1992) describes master scripting as a process which,

. . . silences voices and perspectives, primarily legitimizing dominant, White, upper-class, male voicings as the “standard” knowledge students need to know. All other accounts and perspectives are omitted from the master script unless they can be disempowered through misrepresentation. Thus, content that does not reflect the dominant voice must be brought under control, mastered, and then reshaped before it can become part of the master script (as cited in Ladson-Billings, 1998, p.341).

While the knowledge present in the curriculum reflects the interests, values, norms and belief systems of dominant groups, it is presented as neutral and objective, universalised as truth and accepted as such by less dominant groups (Jay, 2003). In general, curricula either completely omit the perspective of minority groups (“invisibilising knowledge”) or misrepresent and depoliticise it (“marginalising knowledge”) (King, 2004, pp.361-362). The mastering of potentially conflicting knowledge is evident in weak manifestations of multicultural education where selected safe knowledge about minority groups is included and any knowledge which could challenge existing power relations is omitted or distorted (Ladson-Billings,

1998; Crichlow et al. 1990; King, 2004). “Expanding knowledge” is also evident in weak versions of multicultural education; this involves the inclusion of an ethnic or cultural dimension to the existing curriculum, but fails to address power relations (King, 2004, p.362).

Critical multiculturalism requires the teaching of “transformative academic knowledge” (Banks, 1993, 2007) or “deciphering knowledge” (King, 2004). While Banks (1993) argues that students should be given the opportunity to explore different types of knowledge including: personal and cultural knowledge, popular knowledge, mainstream academic knowledge, school knowledge, and transformative academic knowledge; he foregrounds transformative academic knowledge, which he maintains gives students “opportunities to investigate and determine how cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and the biases within a discipline influence the ways knowledge is constructed” (p.10). In the same vein, deciphering knowledge seeks to help students to develop critical consciousness. Extending both of these concepts, Sleeter and Grant (1994) and Banks (2007), respectively, advance models including “Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructivist” and “The Social Action Approach”, both of which foreground the development of critical consciousness, student voice and social action. Both approaches therefore have the capacity to be transformative.

Textbooks are socially constructed artefacts embedded with cultural values (Waldron, 2005; Morgan, 2005). While mediated by teachers and students in the classroom environment, they still “signify – through their content *and* form – particular constructions of reality, particular ways of selecting and organising the vast universe of possible knowledge” (Apple, 1992 as cited in Morgan, 2005, p.27). In this regard, they play a critical role in mediating the curriculum and have the

capacity to exercise significant influence on “what” knowledge and “whose” knowledge is taught in schools. Reflecting the political nature of the curriculum, Grace (2008) contends that textbooks privilege and reflect the habitus and “ways of knowing” of hegemonic groups while simultaneously silencing the social and cultural histories of marginalised groups (p.142). Reflecting this, research conducted in the Irish context by Smyth et al. (2009) and Bryan and Bracken (2011a) suggests that textbooks privilege dominant group perspectives and interpretations. When an intercultural perspective is incorporated by textbook manufacturers, research suggests that it is often counterproductive (Portera, 2005; Bryan, 2012). An analysis of the intercultural content of history textbooks in the Italian context found that while intercultural themes were present in some history textbooks, representations were frequently superficial and decontextualised and frequently served to reinforce rather than to counter prejudices and stereotypes (Portera, 2005). Supporting this, in the Irish context, Bryan (2012) suggests that textbooks are more likely to reproduce than challenge racism and racist ideologies. A number of Irish reports note that textbooks continue to be a notable feature of Irish primary and second level classrooms (Waldron, Pike, Greenwood, Murphy, O’Connor, Dolan & Kerr, 2009; Smyth et al., 2009; Varley, Murphy & Veale, 2008). The pervasiveness of textbooks in Irish schools and the “selective tradition” which they embody pose a significant challenge to critical multiculturalism unless students are encouraged to engage with textbook representations in a critical manner (Apple, 2000 as cited in Bryan & Bracken, 2011a, p.46).

## **2.9 Implications of Critical Multicultural Education for Teachers**

Similar to the notion of principals as transformative leaders, Giroux (2004) advances an understanding of teachers as agents of change and transformative intellectuals. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) present a similar view describing the critical multicultural teacher as, “a scholar who spends a lifetime studying the pedagogical and its concern with the intersection of power, identity and knowledge” (p.29). Such a conceptualisation places enormous responsibility on teachers but also on the institutions which provide initial teacher education programmes. Villegas and Lucas (2002) propose a curricular model for preparing teachers who are “culturally responsive” to students’ needs. However, some argue that the discourse of “cultural responsiveness” or “cultural relevance” is problematic as it reifies and essentialises the identities of cultural groups (Schmeichel, 2012). Drawing on Fraser (2008), Schmeichel (2012) argues that,

By fixing an identity upon the students, culturally relevant discourses are another source of a potential mismatch between the student and the strategies used in the classroom through the imposition of “a single, drastically simplified group identity that denies the complexity of people’s lives, the multiplicity of their identifications and the cross pulls of their various affiliations” (p.223).

Nonetheless, Villegas and Lucas’ (2002) model provides a useful framework for conceptualising the characteristics of a critically multicultural teacher. This framework complements and reinforces existing critical multicultural conceptualisations of the role of teachers in enacting agency and facilitating change in schools. According to Villegas and Lucas (2002), culturally responsive teachers



need to view themselves as agents of change capable of challenging and transforming inequitable school structures. Pedagogically, they need to draw on students' prior knowledge and personal experience and employ a range of teaching methodologies which meet the diversity of needs in their classrooms. It is imperative that they have high expectations for students, avoid inequitable practices such as streaming and ability grouping and provide all students with access to "high status" knowledge and an "intellectually rigorous curriculum" (Villegas & Lucas p.23). They need to understand the political and socially constructed nature of knowledge and create opportunities for students to be both "knowledge producers" and "critical consumers of knowledge" (Banks, 1993, p.12). In order to promote this type of pedagogic practice, it is essential that teachers are provided with opportunities to examine their personal as well as professional belief systems. This requires developing an understanding of their own sociocultural identities and subjectivities as well as understanding the reproductive and oppressive nature of dominant ideologies and wider social structures. Equally, teachers have an important role to play in creating learning opportunities where students are facilitated in developing a critical consciousness and empowered to take social action in the name of creating a more just society.

May and Sleeter (2010) contend that teachers are "more likely to struggle with critical multiculturalism than with liberal multiculturalism" (p.12), citing a lack of concrete guidance on what critical multiculturalism looks like in practice as one of the causal factors. In this regard, critical multicultural theorists are similar to critical pedagogues who Usher and Edwards (1994) state display a "curious silence on

concrete educational practices” (as cited in Johnston, 1999, p.559).<sup>13</sup> A lack of consciousness about the role of schooling in the reproduction of social inequality and oppression, their own complicity in this process through compliant thinking and a lack of consciousness about the extent to which they themselves embrace oppressive (sexist, racist, classist) ideologies, discourses and behaviours also pose a challenge for critical multiculturalism (Banks & Banks, 1991 as cited in Codjoe, 2001). In this context, discourses are understood to be “historically constructed regimes of knowledge” (p. 90) that “position individuals in relation to one another socially, politically, and culturally, as similar to or different from; *as* ‘one of us’ or ‘as other’” (Mama, 1995, p. 98 as cited in Grace, 2008, p.132). Racism, for example, has its “roots” in discourses which position ethnic minority groups as “other” (Devine, 2005, p.51). In the Irish context, both Devine (2005) and Connolly (2002) highlight the reluctance and unwillingness of teachers to accept that racialised discourses may affect their attitudes towards minority students. As previously addressed, a further challenge is the predominance of a discourse of “weak” multicultural education in the Irish context (Bryan, 2008) which constructs intercultural education as being predominantly about learning about and celebrating “other” cultural groups (Bryan, 2009b).

Both Irish (Lyons, 2010, Bryan, 2009b) and international research (Moodley, 1999; Solomona, Portelli, Daniel & Campbell, 2005; Nieto, 2004; Fine, 1991) document teacher resistance to multicultural and antiracist education with the “discomfort” caused by discussing emotive issues around systems of oppression, as

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<sup>13</sup> According to May and Sleeter (2010), there are some “notable exceptions” with examples of critical multicultural education in practice provided by Bigelow & Peterson (2002); Gutstein & Peterson, 2005; May, 1994; Mayo, 1999; Shor, 1992, 1996; Sleeter, 1995 (p.10). More recently, May & Sleeter (2010) edited a book called “Critical Multiculturalism Theory and Praxis” which provides practical examples of a critical multicultural education in action.

cited as the likely causes of such resistance. The political nature of multicultural education and the controversial issues and along with “dangerous discourses” (Bigler & Collins, 1995 as cited in Nieto, 2004b, p.195) which are central to critical multiculturalism can also leave teachers vulnerable to being isolated by their teaching colleagues. Such challenges are not easily overcome, however, they are issues that student teachers can critically and dialogically engage with during initial teacher education programmes, provided that such opportunities are offered.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

In this literature review, I have endeavoured to critically interrogate the ideology behind various models of intercultural education and the extent to which such models challenge or indeed reinforce racism and other hegemonic systems of power and privilege. I have sought to demonstrate that intercultural education as conceptualised in the Irish context claims to be a synthesis of multicultural and antiracist education, but is, in fact, more akin to weak multicultural education as previously suggested by Bryan (2008). I have endeavoured to argue that the IEGs’ narrow and often misguided conceptualisations of intercultural education coupled with their failure to accord prominence to equity and antiracism have made them ineffective and at times counterproductive as an approach to tackling racism and other forms of oppression. I have also sought to integrate complementary literatures (CP, ARE, CRT) which, taken together, provide comprehensive conceptualisations of and approaches to critical multicultural education that have genuine transformative potential for intercultural education in the Irish context. Finally, I have sought to explore the implications of critical multicultural theory for schools

particularly their pedagogic and organisational structures and school leadership and to highlight some of the challenges posed by the implementation of such a radical approach.

Existing Irish research provides important insights into schools' responses to and teachers' attitudes towards cultural diversity (Devine, 2005, 2012; Bryan, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Bryan & Bracken, 2011; Smyth et al., 2009; McGorman & Sugrue, 2007). However, some of the most important studies were conducted either before or very shortly after the publication of the seminal *Intercultural Education Guidelines* (NCCA, 2005) and therefore take no account of the Guidelines' impact on schools' policies and practices (e.g. Devine, 2005; Devine & Kelly, 2006; Bryan, 2009a, 2009b; Bryan & Bracken, 2011). Moreover, existing studies while providing comprehensive and incisive critiques of intercultural education such as those of Bryan (2009a, 2009b) and Bryan and Bracken (2011) examine intercultural education at post-primary rather than primary level and involve only one school. Smyth et al.'s (2009) study provides an important insight into schools' responses to cultural diversity but its large sample size means that in-depth probing is impossible. Moreover, Smyth et al.'s study only engages in cross-case comparison and thus it is not possible to examine the interplay of variables within schools. The current study was conducted six years after the publication of the IEGs (NCCA, 2005) so schools have had time to integrate intercultural principles into their policies and practices. The sample is sufficiently small to enable me to probe each case in detail and to give a comprehensive account of how intercultural education is conceptualised and practised by teachers and principals on the ground.

Both Irish (Smyth et al., 2009) and international literature (Nieto, 2004a, Banks, 1993, 2007, 2011) indicate that intercultural education should permeate the

whole school environment. In this context, the current study explores the whole school environments of three primary schools and examines the interplay of the variables of school ethos, school culture, school leadership, pedagogy, curriculum, teacher-student relations, teacher discourses, school policies and practices. It thus provides a comprehensive account of intercultural education in these selected schools. Teachers are conceptualised as agents of change within critical multicultural theory. In this context, this research provides an important insight into the dialectical relationship that exists between teacher and principal agency and wider social structures. In presenting this and a detailed account of practice in the three case study schools, it is hoped that my study will inform theoretical and practical knowledge pertaining to effective intercultural, equitable and inclusive practices.

## Chapter Three: Conceptual Framework and Research Design

### 3.1 Introduction

Taking account of the complex and fluid relationship that exists between social and educational structures and human agency, this dissertation critically explores how intercultural education is conceptualised and practised by teachers and principals in three Irish primary schools. Adopting a whole school approach, it critically explores the models of intercultural education emerging in the schools and examines the extent to which selected variables (leadership, ethos, culture, curriculum, pedagogy & relations) support and determine these models. It also draws on the voice of students to illuminate aspects of teachers' practice. This chapter provides a detailed account of the methodological framework employed in answering these research questions.<sup>14</sup> It commences with a graphic outline of this framework, which delineates the questions, methods (semi-structured interviews, observation, document analysis & focus group interviews), participants (principals, teachers & students) and documents which form part of the study's ethnographic case study methodology. This is followed by a graphic outline of the study's conceptual framework and an exploration of the study's theoretical framework.<sup>15</sup> This study draws on the social theories of critical multiculturalism, transformative leadership theory, discourse theory and cultural reproduction theory to assist in data analysis and interpretation. Rationales for the selection the study's methodology, purposive sampling and research methods are then provided. This is followed by a detailed examination of the ethical considerations which inform the study, data

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<sup>14</sup> My research questions were themselves guided by both critical theory and interpretivist paradigms.

<sup>15</sup> According to Miles and Huberman (1994), conceptual frameworks can be presented in graphic or narrative form (as cited in Maxwell, 2005).

collection and data analysis procedures. The chapter concludes with an examination of the data validation procedures.

**Figure 1: Methodological Framework**

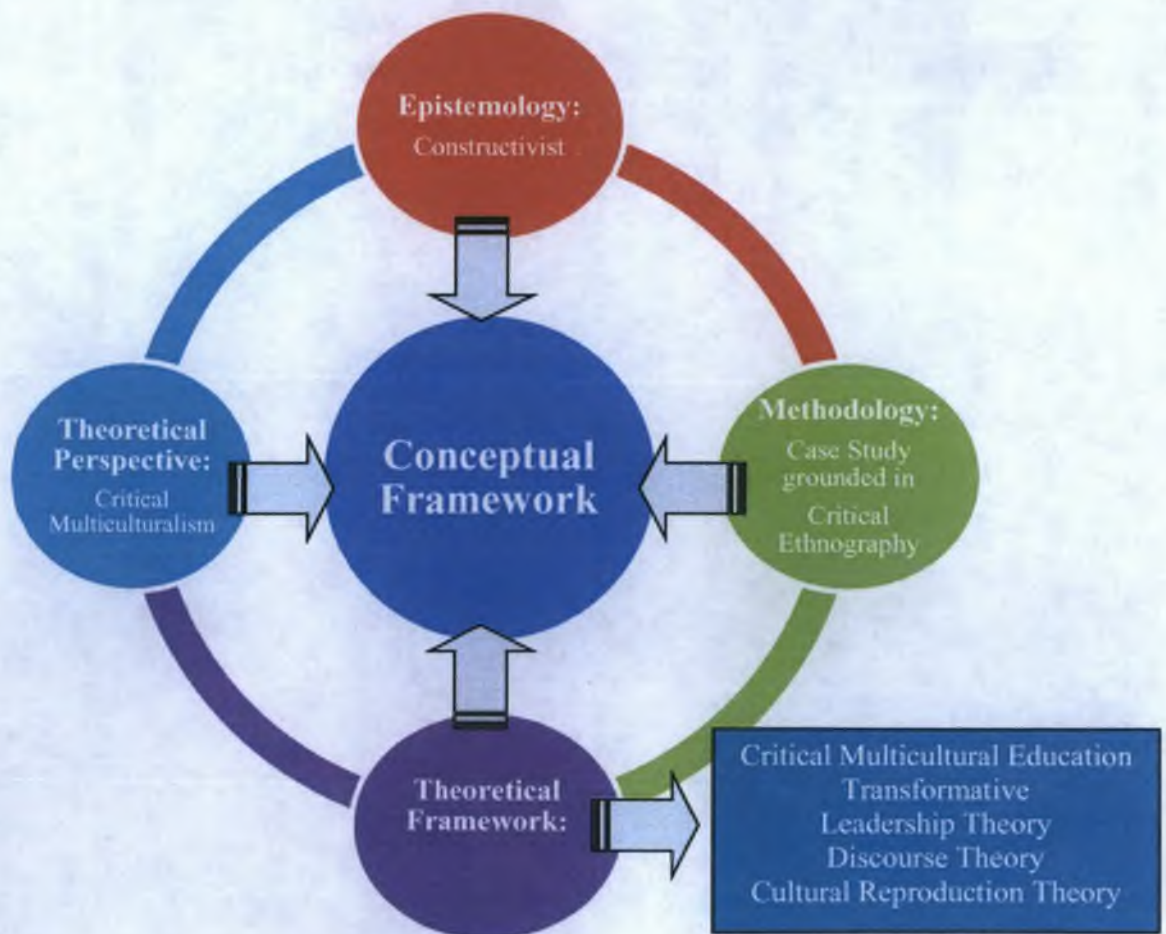


<b>Question 1</b>	<b>How is intercultural education conceptualised and practised by teachers and principals?</b>	
<b>Question 2</b>	<b>To what extent do selected variables (leadership, ethos, culture, curricula, pedagogy, attitudes and relations) determine and support emerging models of intercultural education in the schools?</b>	

### 3.2 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of a research methodology comprises “the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs your research” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 33). Influenced by my review of the literature (as set out in chapter two), my philosophical assumptions, life experience and worldview, my conceptual framework comprises four components: epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and theoretical framework. While my philosophical assumptions and theoretical perspective have already been set out in chapter one, the remainder of this chapter explores my theoretical framework and the methodological components of my research design.

**Figure 2: Conceptual Framework**





This framework informed the selection of my research methods and assisted in the refinement of my research questions and research aims (Maxwell, 2005). This research study seeks to explore how teachers and principals conceptualise and practise intercultural education and to explore the dialectical relationship that exists between wider social structures and teacher and principal capacity to enact agency. It seeks to do so by integrating the study's empirical findings with concepts drawn from critical and poststructural social theories. In this context the following section explores the study's theoretical framework.

### ***3.2.1 Theoretical Framework***

According to Maxwell (2005), theory can be conceptualised as “a set of concepts and the proposed relationship among these, a structure that is intended to represent or model something about the world” (p.42). A theoretical framework therefore offers a model of conceptual tools which can be used to analyse findings and to explore the meaning behind and relationships between the concepts under investigation (O'Donoghue, 2007; Maxwell, 2005). In this context, the following section delineates the current study's theoretical framework and explains how the conceptual tools provided by the selected critical and poststructural social theories are used to analyse and theorise the empirical findings.

### 3.2.1.1 *From Multicultural to Critical Multicultural Theory*

As set out in chapter one, from the outset this research study was informed by Nieto's (2004a) widely cited conceptualisation of multicultural education.<sup>16</sup> This conceptualisation in tandem with Banks' (2007) "Dimensions of Multicultural Education" model, Sleeter and Grant's (1994) "Five Approaches to Race, Class and Gender" and May's (1994) "Making Multicultural Education Work" informed the focus of the research methods and the first phase of data analysis (see Appendix A). Collectively, these frameworks emphasise the importance of promoting equitable, democratic and critically reflective practices throughout the whole school environment, particularly in the areas of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment procedures. May's (1994) work in particular led to a more detailed exploration of critical multicultural theory and concepts drawn from this theory were used to analyse the data following the second round of coding.

As explored in chapter two, critical multicultural theory draws on the theories of antiracism, critical pedagogy and critical race theory (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). According to Sleeter and May (2010), critical multicultural education requires a critical examination of the social structures which reproduce and reinforce structural inequities particularly but not limited to racism. Pedagogically they contend that it requires the adoption of a problem-posing approach, dialogical in nature, which draws on students' prior knowledge and personal experiences and encourages them to look at the world through critical and political interpretive lenses (p.9). The

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<sup>16</sup> Locating multicultural education within a sociopolitical context, Nieto (2004a) conceptualised it as "a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students" which "challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination. . . [and]. . . affirms . . . pluralism." Conceptualising the school as a holistic entity, she contends that multicultural education should be underpinned by the theory of critical pedagogy and should pervade all aspects of teaching and learning including the curriculum, pedagogy and interactions between all members of the school community (p.346).

theory of critical multiculturalism provides a number of useful tools for analysing teachers and principals' conceptualisations of intercultural education and how these conceptualisations are operationalised in practice. Drawing on critical multicultural theory, the following concepts are used during data analysis: equality, power, power relations, racism, voice, dialogue, democratic practice, praxis (critique, reflection & action) and privilege. These concepts are further extended by drawing on the work of other theorists, which will be explored in the following sections.

Baker, Lynch, Cantillon, and Walsh (2009) put forward three conceptualisations of equality – “basic equality”, “liberal egalitarianism” and “equality of condition” (pp. 21-43). This study draws on an equality of condition paradigm. It is therefore framed by the assumption that inequalities are created and reproduced by social structures and that in order to eliminate these inequalities, social structures need to be radically reformed. It is also influenced by the equality of condition paradigms focus on power relations - the ways in which people's choices and actions are influenced by social factors. In this regard, the equality of condition paradigm reflects the underlying principles of critical multiculturalism.<sup>17</sup> While Baker et al.'s (2009) analysis relates to how social class inequality is reproduced and resisted in schools, they contend that it is equally applicable to other marginalised and disenfranchised social groups, including ethnic minority groups. Multicultural education is an umbrella concept which encompasses various social groups and many forms of diversity including “race”, language, culture, social class, gender and disability (Sleeter & Grant, 1994). It is also a theory which explores the intersectionality of all forms of oppression (May & Sleeter, 2010). In this context,

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<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Baker et al. (2009) locate “critical interculturalism” within an equality of condition framework.

Baker et al.'s (2009) work in tandem with the work of the critical multicultural theorists provide very useful conceptual tools for analysing the practice of teachers in the case study schools. Similar to Nieto (2004a) and May (1994, 1999) in particular, Baker et al. present a number of tools which can be used to analyse equality in the three case study schools. These include: selection and admission, grouping and tracking and curriculum and assessment matters.<sup>18</sup> In this regard Baker et al. (2009) argue that schools promote certain practices through enrolment policies, ability grouping, streaming, curricula design and standardised testing which privilege middle-class and upper-class students at the expense of students from working-class backgrounds.

This study is also informed by Baker et al.'s (2009) notion of "equality of power", particularly in the areas of decision making and the exercise of power and control. Reflecting a critical multicultural approach, the concepts of exclusion, marginalisation and representation are drawn on to critically analyse policy and practice in the case study schools. The extent to which schools promote models of power relations which are more autocratic or democratic is also explored. This analysis is complemented by drawing on literature from related fields (as discussed in chapter two), including, democratic education (Beane & Apple, 1999), human rights education (Howe & Covell, 2005; Osler & Starkey, 2005, 2010) children's voice literature (Fielding, 2001; Wyness, 2009; Alderson, 1999; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000; Lodge, 2005; MacBeath et al., 2001; Whitty & Wisby, 2007; Cook-Sather, 2006; Silva, 2001), critical pedagogy (Freire, 1972, 1993), knowledge construction (Banks, 2007; Sleeter & May, 2010; Sleeter & Bernal, 2004), critical feminism

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<sup>18</sup> Sleeter and Grant (1994) maintain, however, that most academics use the term multicultural education in the context of "race" (p.33).

(Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2009; Lather, 1992) and discourse theory (Foucault, 1979, 1984).

Freirean or critical pedagogy foregrounds the notions of liberation and social transformation, arguing that they can be achieved if individuals and groups develop critical consciousness (consciousness of the status quo and the oppressive structures which maintain it) and are empowered (fostered through dialogue) to take collective action (Taylor & Robinson, 2009). Freire's concept of dialogical communication is also a very useful construct as it conceptualises individuals as knowledge creators rather than passive "knowledge consumers" (Beane & Apple, 1999, p.17). Similarly, the concept of "voice" is a particularly useful tool for exploring power relations in the case study schools and in examining the knowledge construction process. It is useful when assessing whose knowledge and whose habitus is privileged and valued within the case study schools (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). The conceptual tools of habitus and capital will be discussed in more detail in the sections hereunder.

### **3.2.1.2        *Discourses: Knowledge, Power and Agency***

According to Foucault (1974), knowledge is socially, culturally and historically constructed in discourses.<sup>19</sup> In this study, discourses are understood to be "historically constructed regimes of knowledge" (p. 90) that "position individuals in relation to one another socially, politically, and culturally, as similar to or different from; as 'one of us' or 'as other'" (Mama, 1995 as cited in Grace, 2008, p.132).

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<sup>19</sup> In this study, knowledge is conceptualised as being "the particular construction or version of a phenomenon that has received the stamp of 'truth' in our society" (Burr, 1995 as cited in Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2009, p.28).

Discourses therefore reflect, reproduce and reinforce power relations (Usher, 1996; Hatch, 2002; Kincheloe & McLaren 2005). While power is conceptualised as a possession in Freirean pedagogy, Foucault (1979) conceptualises power as operating like a network of capillaries, circulating throughout society rather than as a possession of individuals or groups. Conceptualising power as relational, he argues that it is “constantly in tension, in activity” and that human beings are constantly negotiating power relations with each other (1979, p.26). Power operates through discourses with all members of the school community contributing to and reproducing them through their everyday practice and interactions (Foucault, 1979). In this regard, when taken up by groups of individuals (e.g. school principals, teachers etc.), discourses have the capacity to become very powerful as they promote and legitimise certain practices (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2009). Discourse theory is therefore very useful in examining the dominant discourses circulating in the case study schools and how these discourses influence teachers’ and principals’ practices.

Foucault’s discourse theory is often criticised for being overly deterministic (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2009). However, this criticism is possibly misguided as Foucault (1984) states, “There always remains the possibility of resistance, disobedience and oppositional groupings” (as cited in Gallagher, 2008a, p.145). He therefore acknowledges the dynamic and fluid nature of school and classroom relations and the possibility of opposition and resistance. Indeed, the notions of resistance and agency (principal, teacher and student) are central to critical multiculturalism. These concepts provide further conceptual tools to aid analysis.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> In this study, agency is understood to be “our ability to act with intent and awareness” (Robinson and Jones Diaz, p.38). Gallacher & Gallagher (2008) provide another useful definition of agency defining it as “the ability of an identifiable being to knowingly and deliberately use its willpower to achieve predetermined aims” (p.502).

In this study, these tools are used to explore teachers' and principals' resistance to certain practices promoted by wider education policies and structures and students' resistance to excessive regulation.

Teachers and principals can exercise choice regarding the discourses in which they locate themselves and have the capacity to effect change. In this regard, Hall (2004) states,

“Agency”, its possibility and practicality, brings us face to face with the political question of how we can motivate ourselves and others to work for social change and economic justice. . . Do we respond to injustice and the Machiavellian moves of politicians and business leaders with cynicism or with a belief that human beings, individually and collectively, can change for the better, if they revisit some fundamental decisions about their own priorities and values? (as cited in Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2009, p.39).

However, undoubtedly, while agency offers the possibility of effecting change, it is nonetheless mediated by structural forces. Acknowledging the dialectical relationship between structure and agency, Herndl and Licona (2007) advance the notion of “constrained agency” (p.133). They contend that it “emerges at the intersection of agentive opportunities and the regulatory power of authority” (p.133). The concept of constrained agency is particularly useful in analysing the intersection of choice and constraint in the case study schools.

### ***3.2.1.3 Cultural Reproduction Theory: The Tools of Habitus and Capital***

When applied to the social institution of the school, Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital are extremely useful analytical tools.<sup>21</sup> Bourdieu posits that certain groups' habitus (e.g. the dispositions of the middle classes) is identified by schools as cultural capital and is reinforced and legitimated; while the habitus of other groups (e.g. the dispositions of the working classes or ethnic minority groups) is not and can be de-legitimised as a result (Bourdieu, 1984; May, 1999). Therefore, the cultural capital of the working classes or ethnic minority groups, for example, is perceived to have less value than that of the middle classes in the "field" of education. The more value which is placed on the cultural capital an individual or group possesses within a particular field, the greater their capacity to exercise social power. The concepts of habitus and capital are used in this study to explore how some ethnic minority groups can be disadvantaged by not possessing the type of capital valued by some schools. They are also deployed to explore the steps taken by schools to increase students' capacity to exercise power in wider society. The concept of habitus in particular is used to explore the content and (un)representative nature of selected school textbooks. The possible impact of (non) representation is also explored.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Bourdieu (1977) defines habitus as "a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which ... functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions" (pp. 82-83). In the same vein, he describes cultural capital as "a form of knowledge, an internalized code or a cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts" (1993, p.7).

<sup>22</sup> Similar to Foucault's discourse theory, Bourdieu's theory of capital and habitus is criticised as being overly deterministic, particularly with regards to the capacity of certain groups to acquire cultural capital (May, 1999). His theory is also criticised for failing to acknowledge the dynamic nature of social relations and the capacity of individuals and groups to resist oppressive structural constraints (May, 1999).



### **3.2.1.4 *Transformative Leadership Theory***

Due to the dearth of located literature on school leadership in critical multicultural education theory, an extensive literature search was conducted to identify a leadership theory which would complement critical multicultural education theory. Transformative leadership theory emerged as being particularly appropriate as it acknowledges the dialectical relationship which exists between social structures and human agency. Drawing on theories such as critical pedagogy, transformative learning theory and adult learning theory, scholars advance a justice oriented theory of transformative leadership which seeks to promote individual and societal transformation (Brown, 2004a; Shields, 2010; Weiner, 2003). According to Quantz et al. (1991), transformative leaders speak “a language of critique and possibility” and “introduce the mechanisms necessary for various groups to begin conversations around issues of emancipation and domination” (Quantz et al., 1991 as cited in Shields, 2010, p.569). The shortcomings of transformative leadership theory have been addressed in chapter two, however, the theory does present a number of concepts and ideas which are useful for analysis, including, the notions of moral courage, dialogue, critical consciousness, critical reflection and the role of principal as advocate for the rights of marginalised students and as activist in helping to realise students’ rights.

Finally, the concept of fault lines is used to analyse the disjuncture between rhetoric and practice and theory and practice in the three case study schools. Drawing on Smith (1987), Rusch (2004) describes fault lines as “points of rupture between socially organised practices and daily lived experience” (p.18). As highlighted above this study is framed by the view that while constrained by wider

structures, human agents - in the case of this study, teachers and principals – have the capacity to exercise opposition, enact agency and effect change.

### **3.3 Case Study Methodology Grounded in Critical Ethnography**

As set out in chapter one, I contend that a critical conceptualisation of intercultural education is necessary if it is to achieve its transformative potential. Reflecting the theoretical underpinnings of critical multicultural theory, it is my view that a dialectical relationship exists between social structures and human agency (Anderson, 1989). Congruent with this theoretical perspective, a critical ethnographic approach combining interpretivism (emphasises human agency, local knowledge and increased understanding) and critical theory underpins this study (emphasises structures and power relations) (Anderson, 1989; May, 1994). My research questions also reflect a critical ethnographic approach as they seek to increase understanding of how teachers and principals conceptualise and practise intercultural education and to explore the nature of power relations within schools and the dialectical relationship that exists between social and educational structures and teachers' and principals' agentive opportunities (Herndl & Licona, 2007). Described as “the performance - of critical theory” the qualitative methods associated with critical ethnography - observation, semi-structured interviews and document analysis - facilitate the operationalisation of critical theory and the answering of my research questions (Madison, 2012, p.13). These multiple methods are also compatible with and reflective of a case study approach (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) provides a useful conceptualisation of case study defining it as,

. . . a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observation, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes (p.73).

In tandem with a critical ethnographic approach, in addition to facilitating the use of multiple qualitative methods to gain an in-depth and nuanced understanding of intercultural education in the three case study schools, a case study methodology facilitates the provision of thick contextual description of the natural settings of the case study schools (Stake, 1995; Seawright & Gerring, 2008, Robson, 2005; Yin, 2009; Punch, 2005; MacPherson et al., 2000; Denscombe, 2007). VanWynsberghe and Khan (2007) maintain that case studies can “enrich and potentially transform a reader’s understanding of a phenomenon by extending the reader’s experience” (p.4). The level of detail which a case study methodology enables facilitates an in-depth analysis of each school, exploration of the relationship between variables within schools and cross-case comparison. A case study methodology also facilitates the selection of a small sample size over a bounded time period (Stake, 1995; Robson, 2005; Yin, 2009; Punch, 2005). In the case of this research, the bounded time period was four weeks during phase one of data collection and one week during phase two.

Whether a case study methodology is appropriate or not depends largely on one’s research question(s) (Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) maintains that “the more your questions seek to explain some present circumstances (e.g., “how” or “why” some social phenomenon works), the more that the case study method will be relevant” (p.4). He adds that case study is also appropriate when research questions necessitate

wide-ranging and in-depth description of some social phenomenon. This research seeks to provide an in-depth and comprehensive account of how teachers and principals conceptualise and practise intercultural education. Moreover, it seeks to explore “how” and “why” selected variables such as school policy and practice, school leadership, ethos, relations, teacher attitudes and teacher practice support and determine models of emerging practice.

As the aim of this study is to increase understanding of how intercultural education is conceptualised and practised by teachers and principals, the focus is on particularities rather than generalities and therefore a case study methodology is most appropriate (Stake, 1995; VanWynsberghe & Khan, 2007). However, while not the aim of the study, VanWynsberghe and Khan (2007) maintain that one can generalise and make predictions if case studies are rigorously demarcated. In this regard, Denscombe (2007) elaborates that although each case is unique, it is also “a single example of a broader class of things” (p.43). As such, tentative generalisations are made in chapter seven. Moreover, as the literature suggests that intercultural education should permeate the whole school environment and as the study seeks to explore the interplay of selected variables within school environments, conceptualising the schools as cases helps to provide a more holistic understanding of intercultural education.

### **3.4 The Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted over the period of five days in a suburban five teacher primary school in December 2009. It was conducted with a view to refining the research instrument and identifying potential problems with questions, methods

and procedures (Yin, 2009; Bell, 2006). The selected school had an ethnically diverse student population and the principal was known to my teaching colleagues. Prior to the pilot study, a letter inviting participation and emphasising the voluntary nature of this participation was sent to the school principal. The letter also outlined the nature of the research, what participation involved and the confidential nature of all gathered data. The principal and two mainstream teachers consented to participate and were observed over a period of five days. Two of the school's policy documents (Admissions Policy and Behaviour Policy) were analysed as was a small number of the teachers' schemes of work (SPHE & SESE).

Interview questions were modified as a result of the pilot study and a structured "Daily Observation Sheet" was developed to be used in tandem with unstructured observations (see Appendix L). The template for assessing textbooks and teachers' schemes of work was also modified (see Appendix M).

### **3.5 Case Selection**

A small sample size of three cases was selected to facilitate a detailed and in-depth exploration of intercultural education as conceptualised and practised by the teachers and principals in the case study schools and also to facilitate cross-case comparison. The NCCA (2005) recommend that all schools should promote an intercultural approach and therefore all primary schools were eligible to be invited to participate. However, a purposive sample of three schools was selected. The selection of purposive sampling was influenced by the research questions, conceptual framework, literature review and the challenges posed by negotiating access. Cases were selected based on five criteria: school patronage, organisational structures

within the school (e.g. democratic structures), the presence of ethnic minority students in the school (Travellers and migrant students), the presence of policies pertaining to cultural diversity and personal contacts within schools.

Given the relevant variables which emerged from the literature review, the study necessitated access to the whole school environments of the three case study schools. As this study primarily seeks to explore how intercultural education is conceptualised and practised by principals and teachers, the principals and teachers from the three case study schools were the primary focus of the study and therefore they were invited to participate in the study. Four mainstream teachers from each of the schools were shadowed for four weeks and interviewed twice. School principals and two members of the support teams from each school were also interviewed twice. Policy documents, teachers' schemes of work and textbooks were analysed. While not the focus of the research, this study also sought to include the voice of students. Two focus group sessions comprising of five students from each of the case study schools were also conducted during data collection in order to illuminate aspects of teachers' practice.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations: Negotiating Access, Facilitating Voluntary Participation and Informed Consent**

Ethical approval was sought from the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of St. Patrick's College. Once attained, the ethical protocol set down by the College was carefully adhered to during all stages of the research process. A formal letter outlining the nature of the study was sent to the selected schools inviting participation (see Appendix C). The schools' principals were then telephoned, the

nature of the study was again outlined and assurances were given regarding strict adherence to the ethical protocol of the College. Principals discussed the research study with the teachers in their respective schools and indicated that participation was open to interested teachers. These teachers were given a Plain Language Statement and Informed Consent Form (see Appendices F & G). I visited all schools prior to data collection and teachers and principals were given the opportunity to discuss participation and to ask questions. The principal and six teachers from each case study school participated. As soon as consent was negotiated, the three schools were assigned pseudonyms - Rushgreen, Seven Oaks and Clarepark - in order to ensure anonymity as far as possible. The following table (see overleaf) provides a profile of the participating teachers in the three case study schools.

**Table 1: Profile of Participating Teachers**

<b>Name of School</b>	<b>Name of Teacher</b>	<b>Gender of Teacher</b>	<b>Teaching Position</b>	<b>Years of Teaching Experience</b>
<b>Rushgreen</b>	Oliver Flynn	Male	Principal	29
	Therese Ryan	Female	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	6
	Cathal Neary	Male	4 <sup>th</sup> Class	4
	Rebecca Byrne	Female	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	9
	Keith Browne	Male	Junior Infants	5
	Karen Hume	Female	English as an Additional Language support teacher (EAL)	9
	Peter Smith	Male	Home-School-Community-Liaison co-ordinator (HSCL)	7
<b>Seven Oaks</b>	Tony Lavelle	Male	Principal	31
	Rachel Jackson	Female	5 <sup>th</sup> Class	2

	Kathy Tuohy	Female	4 <sup>th</sup> Class	6
	Emma Hogan	Female	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	4
	Sandra Devlin	Female	EAL teacher	12
	Simon Mulligan	Male	HSCL co-ordinator	24
<b>Clarepark</b>	Margaret Healy	Female	Principal	28
	Anna Dowling	Female	5 <sup>th</sup> Class	10
	Niall Murphy	Male	Junior Infants	5
	Rita Clarke	Female	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	4
	Sean Goodwin	Male	3 <sup>rd</sup> Class	8
	Gillian Scott	Female	Learning Support teacher (LS)	24
	Nuala Phelan	Female	EAL	31

In recognising students as competent social actors, it was deemed essential to consult them about their interest in or willingness to participate in the focus group sessions prior to contacting their parents/guardians. Following negotiation with the school principal in each school, students between the ages of 9 and 12 were invited to participate in the study. As I did not know the students, they were invited to participate in the focus group interviews by their teachers. Teachers were spoken to in advance and asked to select a focus group that represented the school in terms of gender and ethnicity. They were also asked to select students who would feel comfortable in an interview context. In one of the schools, the students were drawn from the Student Council. The permission of parents was also sought and they were furnished with a Plain Language Statement and an Informed Consent Form (see Appendices H & I). In each school, the focus group students were met, the nature and purpose of the research explained and assurances given about voluntary nature of the research and right to withdraw at any time. Protocols were agreed with regards



to the practicalities of withdrawing consent and the use of audio recording devices. Students were furnished with Plain Language Statements and Informed Consent Forms (see Appendices J & K). Five students from each case study school participated. The following table (see overleaf) provides a profile of the participating students in the three case study schools.

**Table 2: Profile of Participating Students**

Name of School	Names of Students	Gender	Age	Religion	Country of Birth	Country of Birth of Parents	Years Living in Ireland
<b>Rushgreen</b>	Alina	Female	10	Christian	Ireland	Romania	10
	Kamilia	Female	13	Catholic	Poland	Poland	7
	Stefan	Male	13	Catholic	Poland	Poland	9
	Ayo	Male	11	Christian	Nigeria	Nigeria	4
	Zofia	Female	11	Christian	Ireland	Romania	11
<b>Seven Oaks</b>	Seamus	Male	11	Catholic	Ireland	Ireland	11
	Pavel	Male	11	Catholic	Poland	Poland	7
	Mary	Female	11	Catholic	Ireland	Ireland	11
	Cephus	Male	11	Christian	Nigeria	Nigeria	1
	Roza	Female	11	Christian	Romania	Romania	2
<b>Clarepark</b>	Sheila	Female	12	Catholic	Ireland	Ireland	12
	Lisa	Female	12	Catholic	Ireland	Ireland	12
	Vera	Female	12	Orthodox Christian	Georgia	Georgia	2
	Finn	Male	12	Catholic	Ireland	Ireland	12
	Aazim	Male	11	Muslim	Ireland	Malaysian	11
	Bruno	Male	12	Catholic	Italy	Italy	1

### ***3.6.1. Informed Consent***

As guided by the ethical protocol of the college, permission to conduct the study in each case study school was sought from each school's Board of Management (BOM) and school principal (see Appendices B). As previously stated, participating teachers, principals and focus group students were provided with Plain Language Statements and Informed Consent Forms. The provision of these forms helped to overcome possible ethical concerns relating to matters of coercion, deception, encroachment on participants' privacy and exposure of participants to mental stress (Bell, 2006; Punch, 2005; Denscombe, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Robson, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). These forms did so by clearly stipulating the nature and purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation and participants' right to withdraw consent at any time, the steps taken to protect participants' privacy and the possible benefits and potential risks associated with participation. These forms also explained that interviews would be audio-recorded and observations electronically recorded on a laptop computer.

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality as far as possible, the Informed Consent Forms stated that the names of participants and schools would not appear in any documents either published or unpublished and that schools, principals, teachers and students would be assigned pseudonyms. They also stated that a key which linked the pseudonyms to the original names, all audio recordings, transcripts and field notes would be safely locked away in my office in St. Patrick's College, would be only accessible to me and would be appropriately destroyed and disposed of after four years. At all stages, my commitment was to the welfare of my participants and they were prioritised above "the advancement of knowledge" (Miller & Boulton, 2007, p.2209).

In addition to gaining the consent of teachers, principals and focus group students from the outset, given the qualitative nature of the study, a reflexive approach was adopted and consent was regularly renegotiated during the research process (Haggerty, 2004). Moreover, at all times, I endeavoured to demonstrate ethical sensitivity in all decisions taken (Miller & Boulton, 2007). I had regular informal meetings with the principals and regular informal conversations with teachers prior, during and post observations of teachers' practice. I also discussed and negotiated participation again with students prior to each of the focus group sessions. During these informal dialogues, I again reminded teachers, principals and students about the voluntary nature of participation, discussed and addressed questions pertaining to the research process and negotiated dates and times for interviews and observations. This on-going renegotiation and dialogue helped to build mutual understanding and to make informed consent more democratic (Miller & Boulton, 2007).

Given the ethnographic nature of the study and the complex and fluid nature of school environments, it was not possible to attain the consent of every individual observed during fieldwork as it was impossible to delineate who would be encountered or observed during the course of each school day. In this regard, Murphy and Dingwall (2007) note that during the research process ethnographers "will have many casual encounters with people who pass through" the research setting (p. 2230) and that "obtaining written, or even oral, informed consent from all who pass through [is] impractical. . . .[as] fully informed consent would mean that the ethnographer was so occupied in negotiating consent that she would have no time to carry out the research. . . ." (p.2229). The general student body, while providing context, was not central to the study's focus and as such its members were not

conceptualised as research participants. As they were tangential to the research questions and the risk of harm deemed negligible, their individual consent was not sought. Rather, general consent was sought from the school principal and the BOM of each school. In addition, I remained vigilant to maintain the distinction between the research participants and others throughout the research process.<sup>23</sup>

### **3.7 Data Collection and Analysis**

Data collection in the three case study schools was completed in two phases over a two year period between 2010 and 2012. Phase one involved spending four weeks in each of the case study schools observing four mainstream teachers, conducting first round semi-structured interviews with teachers and principals, conducting first round focus group sessions with students and engaging in document analysis of school policy documents, teachers' schemes of work and students' textbooks. Phase two involved spending one week in each of the case study schools member checking and conducting second round interviews with teachers and principals and second round focus group sessions with students. The time periods for both research phases were negotiated with the principals in consultation with their respective teaching staffs. A sequential overview of the research phases is provided in Appendix O. The following sections explore the methods used to gather data in more detail including the advantages and limitations of each method.

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<sup>23</sup> In addition, parents in all schools had signed school consent forms at the start of the school year covering permission for all school activities including research activities.

### **3.7.1 Research Methods**

Reflecting the study's conceptual framework, particularly its critical ethnographic case study methodology and given the focus of the research, the qualitative interpretivist methods of observation, semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis were selected.

The guiding criteria and questions posed during the semi-structured interviews, structured observations and document analysis were informed by multicultural theory, particularly the theorists, James Banks (2007); Sonia Nieto (2004a); Christine Sleeter (1994); Carl Grant (1994) and Stephen May (1994). The initial research questions were influenced by Banks' (2007) and Nieto's (2004a) contention that intercultural education should permeate the whole school environment. For this reason, Banks' (2007) "Dimensions of Multicultural Education" model was selected as it was deemed to provide a useful guiding framework for examining policy and practice in the case study schools. This model was supplemented by the work of Nieto (2004a), Sleeter and Grant (1994) and May (1994). An account of the guiding criteria is provided in Appendix A. Given the emergent and responsive nature of qualitative research, additional questions were posed and themes explored through the various methods employed during data collection.

#### **3.7.1.1 Observation**

As this qualitative study seeks to explore how intercultural education is conceptualised by teachers and how this conceptualisation is demonstrated through practice, observations of teachers' pedagogical and methodological practices was

deemed essential. Four mainstream teachers were observed in the natural setting of the classroom for four days each using structured and unstructured observation formats. Drawing on my research framework (see Appendix A), a structured observation sheet was devised prior to data collection to provide focus. Selected concepts were placed in a grid and this grid was completed as practice was observed (see Appendix L). Structured observations were complemented by unstructured observations, which were recorded electronically into an MS Word document. These observations included any incident that occurred which did not fall into categories in the structured observation sheet. It also included descriptions of the physical settings of each classroom, portraits of each teacher and my own reactions to certain incidents (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992 as cited in Creswell, 2007).

A noninterventionist approach was adopted during observations in an effort to see as far as possible “what would have happened” had I not been in the classroom (Stake, 1995, p.44). However, it is acknowledged that my presence inevitably had an impact on classroom life and my worldview, personal prejudices and value judgements inevitably had an impact on how I interpreted teachers’ actions and motivations (Yin, 2009, Robson, 2005). As Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) state “observation is not a perfect and direct window into reality” (p.16). However, in keeping with a qualitative methodology I endeavoured to overcome these shortcomings by being dialectical during data analysis.

### ***3.7.1.2 Semi-Structured Interviews***

Observations were supplemented with semi-structured interviews in order to gain a deeper insight into teachers’ and principals’ conceptualisation of intercultural

education and the reasoning behind policies and practices (Denscombe, 2007; Stake, 2009; Yin, 1995; Robson, 2005). Using a semi-structured format, principals and teachers were interviewed twice, once during phase one of data collection and once during phase two. The length of interviews varied according to the status of the participants and whether the interview was conducted during phase one or phase two of the research. In general, first round interviews with the three principals lasted for 90 minutes during phase one and 45 minutes during phase two of the research. First round interviews with the 18 participating teachers lasted for 45 minutes during phase one and 30 minutes during phase two of the research. 12 mainstream teachers were interviewed, four Learning Support/English as an Additional Language support teachers and two Home-School-Community-Liaison co-ordinators. The principals and teachers were invited to suggest interview times which would be most convenient for them. While interviews with principals and support staff took place during school time, interviews with mainstream teachers took place after school in the evenings. The themes and questions included were drawn from the framework provided in Appendix A. A list of the questions posed is provided in Appendix N. The interviews were also used to seek clarification and elaboration on observed school and teacher practice and content examined during document analysis. Second round interviews were used to clarify and probe important issues in more detail and to address inconsistencies between the data gathered using different research methods. Reflecting its qualitative underpinnings, the flexible nature of semi-structured interviews enabled me to respond to emergent issues, to alter the order of questions, modify the wording of questions, omit irrelevant questions and to provide participants with the opportunity and freedom to lead the conversation where

possible (Robson, 2005; Stake1995). Reflecting my constructivist epistemology, meaning was co-constructed and negotiated with the participating teachers.

Once completed interviews were transcribed verbatim. Soft copies were e-mailed to participants who were invited to member check to ensure that the transcripts accurately represented their views. They were also invited to suggest alternative language if necessary (Stake, 1995). During the interview process, every effort was made to avoid leading questions and to articulate questions simply and clearly (Yin, 2009, Creswell, 2007; Robson, 2005). All participants agreed the transcripts accurately reflected their interviews.

### **3.7.1.3 Document Analysis**

Observations and interviews were supplemented with analysis of the schools' policy documents (Admissions Policy, Ethos Statement, Code of Behaviour, Intercultural policy; Home School Relations Policy); teachers' schemes of work (the curricular subjects of Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) & Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)) and students' textbooks (SESE & SPHE). Document analysis took place prior to the interview process so that teachers and principals could be asked to clarify and elaborate on certain key issues. Teachers' schemes of work and students' textbooks were examined using the "Content Integration" section of the framework delineated in Appendix A. In the same vein, school policy documents were assessed to ascertain whether they promote inclusion or exclusion and equity or inequity and more generally practices compatible with the multicultural concepts outlined in Table 5 in Appendix A. The schools' policy documents and teachers' schemes of work provided a valuable



insight into the teachers' and principals' values, ideals and beliefs (Yin, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Their analysis also facilitated triangulation as alignments and deviation between policies and school practice could be observed.

#### **3.7.1.4 Focus Group Interviews**

Two focus group sessions comprising of five students from each of the three case study schools were conducted, one during phase one of data collection and one during phase two. Focus group sessions took place during school hours with students between the ages of 9 and 12 years, with Round 1 sessions lasting for approximately 60 minutes and Round 2 lasting 45 minutes. The focus groups were composed of both non-migrant Irish and ethnic minority students. Drawing on my conceptual framework and the literature and acting within the constraints of my ethical protocol, the focus group sessions explored the students' attitudes towards and experiences of intercultural education and related issues. This data was then used to illuminate aspects of teachers' practice. A list of the questions posed is provided in Appendix N. As recommended by Robson (2005), I assumed the role of moderator and sought to balance being both active and passive, posing questions to keep the students focused, but also enabling them to discuss the issues with each other without interruption. This method facilitated the collection of a diverse range of views in a relatively short time period and gave the students the opportunity to actively express themselves in their own words, while at the same time being stimulated by the contribution of other group members (Robson, 2005, p.284). The following sections outline the phases of data collection and analysis.

### **3.7.2 Phase One**

#### **3.7.2.1 Recording and Organising the Data**

Before data collection commenced, I created three electronic MS Word folders (named case 1, 2 & 3) and a number of MS Word subfolders (daily unstructured observations, daily structured observations, audio-interviews, interview transcripts, document analysis policy documents, document analysis schemes of work, document analysis textbooks). All notes were electronically recorded using a laptop. Audio-interviews were recording using an audio-recording device. Text and sound files were catalogued into their relevant folders each day. All files were clearly named and dated. Data was thus well organised and easy to access and retrieve. Hard copies of policy documents were catalogued in clearly labelled envelope folders.

As I was shadowing and observing teachers and principals in the whole school environment, many of my observations were incidental. Observations began as soon as I entered each school building. Document analysis began on day one so that the contents could inform the interview process. Interviews with teachers and principals and focus group interviews with students in all three schools took place during weeks three and four of data collection.

#### **3.7.2.2 Transcription of Interviews and Member Checking**

Following completion of the semi-structured and focus group interview process, each interview was transcribed verbatim. Copies of the interview transcripts

were sent to teachers and principals by e-mail. They were invited to examine the accuracy of what I had written and to suggest alternative language if desired (Stake, 1995). Focus group transcripts were member checked during a follow-up visit to each school. According to Punch (2005), the methods used to analyse data must be “systematic, disciplined and able to be seen (and to be seen through, as in ‘transparent’) and described” (p.195). Taking this assertion as a starting point, the following section outlines how I managed, analysed and interpreted my data.

### **3.7.2.3            *Immersion in the Data and Coding using N-Vivo 9***

Following a recommendation from a colleague and subsequent training, the data analysis software package N-Vivo 9 was used as the compartmentalised “node” structure was deemed particularly useful for storing, organising, managing and coding the large volume of gathered data. I began by creating a case book, into which I inputted and categorised the participants’ attributes (e.g. gender, school, years of teaching experience). I then imported my semi-structured and focus group interview transcripts, school policy documents, teachers’ schemes of work, data from students’ textbooks and field notes (structured and unstructured observations). I read and reread my imported data looking for obvious recurring language and themes.

As these themes emerged, I began to code the data line by line. This approach is very similar to Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) Grounded Theory approach of “open coding” (as cited in Creswell, 2007). They describe this as the process of “breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising, and categorising data” (as cited in O’Donoghue, 2007, p.61). My open nodes were therefore grounded in my raw data. The constant comparative method was used and the content of nodes

constantly reread and examined and data transferred between nodes when necessary. However, while the codes emerged from the data, the questions posed and criteria used to assess all aspects of the school environment were framed by concepts drawn from multicultural and critical multicultural theories. An overview of the nodes which emerged during open coding is provided in Appendix P.

#### **3.7.2.4 *Preliminary Analysis***

The themes which emerged during open coding necessitated further literature searches as new previously unexplored themes emerged, for example literature around human rights, distributed leadership etc. Following the completion of open coding and a critical review of the newly identified relevant literature, a series of analytic memos were constructed. As these analytic memos were further critically analysed, new themes and issues began to emerge. These new themes necessitated further literature searches and then were incorporated into the analytic memos and a list of follow-up questions for participants was constructed. Additional interpretations, insights and concept maps were logged in a number of handwritten journals. A preliminary first draft report on each of the case study schools was then completed.

#### **3.7.3 *Phase Two***

Following completion of a preliminary draft report, I returned to each case study school. Preliminary findings were shared and discussed with staff members individually. Second round interviews and second round focus group sessions were

conducted based on the preliminary findings and on new questions which emerged during the initial analysis. Following the audio-recording of interviews, they were again transcribed verbatim and sent to teachers and principals by e-mail for member checking. Focus group transcripts were member checked during a follow-up visit to each school. Reflecting a critical theory paradigm, in presenting my preliminary findings to staff members, I engaged in discussion with them which possibly prompted changes in both teacher and school practices.

### **3.7.3.1 Coding Using N-Vivo 9**

Once I had completed my first round of coding, I coded the data for a second time. This time coding was also informed by concepts from my theoretical framework. Drawing on the theories of critical multicultural education, transformative leadership theory, discourse theory and Bourdieu’s theory of cultural reproduction, a number of concepts were identified as been useful tools in critically analysing policy and practice in the case study schools and theorising about the relationship between policy and practice in the schools and wider societal structures. As set out in the theoretical framework, influenced by my initial literature review and the new literature search prompted by the themes which emerged during open coding, the following analytic framework emerged:

**Table 3: Analytic Framework/Framework for Analysis**

<b>Theory</b>	<b>Concepts/Tools</b>
<b>Critical Multicultural Theory</b>	Power Relations Equality Racism/Antiracism Knowledge Construction Process Voice & Dialogue

	Democratic Practice Praxis (Critique, Reflection & Action) Representation Privilege & Other Critical Consciousness
<b>Transformative Leadership Theory</b>	Leaders as agents of change and transformation Leaders as advocates & activists Dialogue Critical Consciousness Moral courage Human rights and social justice
<b>Discourse Theory (Foucault)</b>	Knowledge & Discourses Discourses & Power Agency
<b>Cultural Reproduction Theory (Bourdieu)</b>	Capital Habitus

A detailed account of the nodes which emerged in Rushgreen during the second round of coding is available in Appendix Q. As I began to interpret my findings and complete further analytic memos, I coded for a third time creating consolidated codes. A detailed account of the nodes which emerged in Rushgreen during the third round of coding is available in Appendix R.

“A good interpretation forces us to think – and rethink” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p.168). I endeavoured to think in a dialectic way and to be reflexive about my interpretations. I was conscious of the inevitable impact that a critical theory ideology would have on my analysis. Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) caution that there is a danger that those operating in a critical theory paradigm may be “caught in a negative binding to the targets of critique and that ‘the usual suspects’ are accused, assessed and condemned without open-ended inquiry” (P.167). As stated above, in analysing my findings I used analytical memos and applied multiple social theories (critical multicultural theory & poststructural theory)

to help explain my findings so that I would not be constrained and blinkered by critical theory alone. I then wrote a second draft report of each case study school.

### **3.8 Validation of Data**

Irrespective of paradigm, it is essential to apply criteria against which the trustworthiness, soundness and accuracy of research can be assessed (Angen 2000 as cited in Creswell, 2007). Case study research is habitually accused of lacking methodological rigour (Gibbert, Ruigrok, & Wick, 2008; Yin, 2009; Denscombe, 2007). Stake (2005) remarks that the knowledge acquired by the researcher during data collection “faces hazardous passage from writing to reading.” He maintains that the writer must “seek[s] ways of safeguarding the trip” (p.455). In an effort to “safeguard” the transfer of knowledge from researcher to reader, I implemented several strategies. These strategies will be examined under the headings of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba and Lincoln, 1985 as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

#### **3.8.1 Credibility<sup>24</sup>**

In order to persuade the reader that my study is credible, I endeavoured to show that my data is “accurate and appropriate” (Denscombe, 2007, p. 297). While it is impossible for me to provide irrefutable proof that I “got it right”, I took steps to prove that my findings are “*reasonably likely* to be accurate and appropriate” (Denscombe, 2007, p. 297).

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<sup>24</sup> In positivist terminology credibility is the equivalent of internal validity.

I spent a relatively long time period in the field (16 weeks) conducting observations and engaging with participants. I used multiple sources of data and multiple methods to confirm and corroborate the emerging findings (triangulation). Eisner (1991) asserts that “we seek a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility, that allows us to feel confident about our observations, interpretations and conclusions” (as cited in Creswell, 2007, p.204). My supervisors reviewed and critiqued my work during all stages of the research process and they provided an “external check” during the planning, field work and data analysis phases of the research.<sup>25</sup> Once I had transcribed my interviews, I e-mailed the transcripts to the participants and asked them to examine the accuracy of what I had written and to suggest alternative language if necessary (Stake, 1995) (member checking). Similarly, when I had completed the first draft of my report on each school, I returned to present my initial findings to participants and to conduct a second round of interviews. I selected the sections relevant to each participant and spent a week in each school seeking clarification (particularly where divergences were evident between data gathered from different sources) and elaboration on the significant arising issues. I also asked participants to provide critical observations and interpretations of my findings (Stake, 1995). This allowed participants to either confirm or refute what I had written. I then had the opportunity to amend my findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that this practice is “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (as cited in Creswell, 2007, p.207).

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<sup>25</sup> This review is similar to Guba and Lincoln’s (1985) “peer debriefing”. Creswell (2007) asserts that the peer debriefer acts as a “devil’s advocate”. He elaborates that it is “an individual who keeps the researcher honest; asks hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations; and provides the researcher with the opportunity for catharsis by sympathetically listening to the researcher’s feelings” (p.207). Creswell (2007) citing Eisner (1991) suggests that the aim of criticism is to shed light on the subject matter and to produce “more complex and sensitive human perception and understanding” (p.204)



### **3.8.2 Transferability<sup>26</sup>**

I took two steps to ensure that readers can make informed judgements about the transferability of my findings to other research settings and contexts. I provide detailed descriptions of the research settings which enables the reader to infer whether my findings could be applied and transferred to other situations. Secondly, I endeavoured to present my assertions in a logical and transparent manner and to provide adequate evidence to support each assertion.

### **3.8.3 Dependability<sup>27</sup>**

I sought to ensure the dependability of my research by taking detailed and explicit field notes and by adhering to my case study protocol.<sup>28</sup> A preliminary draft of this chapter was completed prior to data collection and this set out my case study protocol in detail. Similarly, my analytic memos show as far as possible and in as much detail as possible how I came to my conclusions.

### **3.8.4 Confirmability<sup>29</sup>**

In essence, confirmability examines the objectivity of the researcher and thus of the research findings. However, Smith and Deemer (2002) assert that “we must see ourselves as practical and moral beings, and abandon hope for knowledge that is

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<sup>26</sup> In positivist terminology transferability is the equivalent of external validity.

<sup>27</sup> In positivist terminology dependability is the equivalent of reliability. Reliability “basically means consistency” (Punch, 2005, p.95).

<sup>28</sup> Yin (2009) asserts that a case study protocol should contain the following four elements: An overview of the case study project, field procedures, case study questions and a guide for the case study report. The overview of the case study project, field procedures, case study questions and a guide for the case study report are provided in this chapter.

<sup>29</sup> In positivist terminology confirmability is the equivalent of objectivity.

not embedded with our historical, cultural, and gendered ways of being” (as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.205). As set out in chapter one, I recognise that all aspects of this study are influenced by my worldview and theoretical and philosophical assumptions. As a consequence, I endeavoured to make these as clear as possible in chapter one so that the reader understands my positionality in relation to the study.

Notwithstanding this, I endeavoured to provide balanced findings. In this regard I sought to be reflective, reflexive, open-minded and self-monitoring throughout the research process (Denscombe, 2007; MacPherson et al., 2000). I was cautious of taking descriptive rather than judgemental field notes and when analysing the data, I did not ignore data that did not correlate with my own analysis but rather I actively searched for alternative explanations (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Denscombe, 2007). Furthermore, my supervisors monitored and critiqued my work, I maintained an audit trail and I read widely around the area of bias and subjectivity.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

As stated in the introduction, the main aim of this chapter was to outline the study’s conceptual framework and research design. It commenced with a graphic outline of the study’s methodological framework which outlined the research questions, methods (observation, semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, document analysis), participants (principals, teachers & students) and documents (IEGs, school policy documents, teachers’ schemes of work, student textbooks) which form part of the study’s ethnographic case study methodology. The study’s theoretical framework was then outlined. This framework sought to explicate how

the study's empirical findings were to be interpreted and extended by drawing on concepts from critical social theories such as critical multiculturalism and poststructural social theories such as discourse theory.

Reflecting the study's ethnographic case study methodology, a rationale for the selection of the case study schools, participants and the qualitative research methods was then provided. This was followed by a detailed examination of the data collection and analysis procedures. The chapter concluded with an examination of the data validation procedures that I employed to enhance the study's credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

## **Chapter Four: Case Study School One**

### **Rushgreen Primary School**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter explores and critically analyses Rushgreen Primary School's approach to intercultural education. It is subdivided into two sections. Section one sets the context, providing an overview of the school and its Educate Together ethos, followed by a brief biographical sketch of the school's principal, Oliver Flynn.<sup>30</sup> Section two explores the school's endeavours to promote a critical multicultural approach. It also explores the complex and fluid relationship that exists between wider social and educational structures and the capacity of teachers and principals to enact agency and effect change within the school. Using critical multicultural theory, transformative leadership theory and Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory as analytical lenses, this section interrogates the school's policy and practice from a critical standpoint highlighting fault lines between the school's practice and critical multicultural theory.

#### **4.2 Section One: Setting the Context**

Rushgreen is located in a large residential area on the outskirts of a medium sized urban centre. It is a co-educational school under the patronage of "Educate Together." The school was founded seven years ago largely in response to the exponential rise in children seeking school places in the area. Initially based in a

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<sup>30</sup> Educate Together is an independent Non-Government Organisation. A detailed account of Educate Together is provided on p.95.

number of temporary prefabricated buildings, the school moved to a permanent building in June 2010, five years after its establishment. There are approximately 300 students enrolled at the school, many of whom are multilingual. The school has 28 staff members including an administrative principal, 14 mainstream teachers, five Learning Support (LS) teachers, six English as an Additional Language (EAL) support teachers, one Home-School-Community-Liaison co-ordinator (HSCL) and one part-time Resource teacher.<sup>31</sup> There are six Special Needs Assistants (SNAs). The school is a designated disadvantaged school and has DEIS Band One (Urban) status.<sup>32</sup>

A large rectangular sign affixed to the front of the school building promulgates the Educate Together motto “No Child is an Outsider”. Similarly, a poster on the main external door proclaims “Learn Together to Live Together”. This rights inspired approach continues in the internal environs of the school. A framed copy of a section of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is prominently displayed on a bookcase in the principal’s office; notice boards support displays of human rights related artwork (“the right to education”) and photographs of the students participating in human rights related dramas such as a photographic display on “Cambodia – The Killing Fields, 1967” and “India – Street Children Today”. Project work completed by students on prominent human rights activists such as Martin Luther King also adorns the walls. Signs and posters which promote cultural diversity and acceptance are a noticeable feature.

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<sup>31</sup> The six teachers who participated in this study were assigned the following pseudonyms: Peter Smith, Karen Hume, Rebecca Byrne, Cathal Neary, Keith Browne and Therese Ryan. As the teachers in this school are addressed by their first names, their first names will also be used throughout this dissertation.

<sup>32</sup> DEIS is an acronym which stands for “Delivering Equality of Opportunities in School.” The DEIS Programme is funded by the Department of Education and Skills (DES). It provides schools which have been given disadvantaged status, with additional funding, access to the Schools’ Completion Programme, a Home-School-Community-Liaison Co-ordinator, a lower teacher-student ratio and professional development opportunities for teachers in the teaching of numeracy and literacy.

“Let’s give diversity the thumbs up!”

“Different

“Individuals

Valuing

Each other

Regardless of

Skin

Intellect

Talents or

Years”

“Be Yourself – An original is always worth more than a copy.”

Student artwork inspired by diverse cultures accompanies these posters on the internal walls of the school. A montage of paintings influenced by Australian Aboriginal art hangs outside the fourth class classroom as do photographs of the students completing this work.

Such displays are indicative of the multicultural nature of the student population and the centrality of child-centeredness and celebratory multiculturalism in the school’s approach to education. They are also a visual representation of the school’s promotion of “cultural maintenance”, defined by May (1994) as “the fostering of identity and self-esteem through affirmation of cultural difference” (p.61). While significance is accorded to cultural maintenance in the school, even greater significance is accorded to giving students “access to power” (May, 1994, p.61). The principal’s recognition of unequal power relations and of the existence of processes which undermine educational equity has led to the considered establishment of a network of organisational structures. These organisational

structures are designed to promote processes which support social justice, democracy and equity and to provide students with the skills and cultural and intellectual capital to be academically successful in school and in wider society.<sup>33</sup> The school's determination in this regard is evidenced in the following extract:

The remit which we set ourselves is wider than that set down by the curriculum. We aim to bring all but the most extreme needs within reach of our normal provision and curriculum (An Seomra Suaimhneach Policy).

The school's commitment to inclusion and equity is further evidenced in its endeavours to promote a critical multicultural approach.

#### **4.3 Local Circumstances: An Overview of "Templemines"**

"Templemines" experienced extensive demographic and physical change during the Celtic Tiger era of economic expansion. The 2011 Census suggests that the population of Templemines grew by 57.5% between 2006 and 2011 (Central Statistics Office (CSO), 2011). The CSO attributes this significant population increase to rapid housing development coupled with a large increase in the number of young families settling in the area (2011).<sup>34</sup> According to the principal, Oliver Flynn, Templemines was "a small industrial town" with "a certain amount of diversity" when he came to teach in the area in 1982. Despite the presence of industry, Oliver asserts that the town has always been considered socio-economically disadvantaged relative to its more prosperous neighbours (Interview 2). Indeed, the

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<sup>33</sup> These organisational structures will be explored in detail in section two.

<sup>34</sup> There is a dearth of information available about the area of Templemines. As a result, a significant amount of the detail presented in this section is drawn from the interviews conducted with the principal.

local County Council's Corporate Plan 2010-2014 acknowledges that "unemployment, poverty and social disadvantage" remain "serious problems" in certain areas (2010, p.7).

Templemines is home to a large African population. Oliver states that the schools still frequently receives applications from African families who had initially settled in other urban centres. Students from the countries of Eastern Europe account for the second largest group of students in the school. Largely recruited to work in the construction industry, Oliver states that similar to the African population, the settlement of a certain number of Eastern European families initially attracted the settlement of many more families from similar language and cultural backgrounds. Oliver asserts that despite the economic recession, a high percentage of the Eastern European population are still employed in the area.

#### **4.4 Educate Together Ethos**

Rushgreen is under the patronage of Educate Together and therefore the school's ethos is underpinned by the liberal and democratic philosophy of the Educate Together movement. This vision is set out in the seminal documents *The Educate Together Charter* and *What is an Educate Together School?* (Educate Together, 2004a, 2005). The four central principles which comprise the ethos of Educate Together are: multi-denominationalism; co-education; child-centred education; and democratic governorship. In respect of these key tenets, the school's Mission Statement states:

Our school is multi-denominational. We are committed to the principle that all religious backgrounds are equally respected in the operation of the school



including humanist, agnostic and atheistic viewpoints and a generic concept of a “personal creed.”

Our school is co-educational. Our school is proactive in promoting an approach to learning that encourages and supports the wide variety and range of talents among the children irrespective of gender. All children are actively encouraged to participate in all curriculum areas and given equal opportunities and access.

Our school is child-centred. Our board makes decisions primarily based on the broad educational and developmental needs of the children. Our school is democratically run. A partnership exists between parents and teachers in the operation of our school. Parents are actively encouraged to become more involved in the educational process.

The Mission Statement further stipulates that “The Board of Management. . . operates a school that delivers equality of access and esteem to all children, irrespective of their social, cultural and religious backgrounds.”

The school’s ethos is also shaped by the Learn Together Ethical Curriculum propounded by Educate Together (Educate Together, 2004). Based on the key principles of Educate Together, the curriculum contains the following four strands: The Moral and Spiritual Strand; The Equality and Justice Strand; The Belief Strand; and, The Ethics and Environment Strand. The primary curriculum document states that the Ethical Education Curriculum “clearly identifies the importance of an

inclusive ethos and affords an opportunity for whole school communities to embrace the reality of what it means to live out the ideal of learning together to live together” (Learn Together An Ethical Curriculum for Educate Together Schools, 2004, p.8). The influence of the Educate Together ideology is evident in many aspects of school life. These aspects will be explored in detail in section two.

#### **4.5 School Leadership**

More than any other staff member, school principals have the capacity to exercise considerable influence in shaping their school’s culture, policy and practice. A substantial corpus of academic literature documents this phenomenon (Fullan, 2006; Blase & Blase, 1999; Spillane & Diamond, 2007; Shields, 2004, 2010; Blair, 2002; Southworth, 2003; Beare, Caldwell, & Millikan, 1997; Brown, 2004a, 2004b; Riehl, 2000; McInerney, 2003; Ryan, 2003; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). While undoubtedly restricted by wider systemic forces, principals have the capacity to enact what Herndl and Licona (2007) term “constrained agency”, and in this context, they have the capacity to facilitate change. Oliver’s role in this regard will be explored in the following sections.

Oliver’s worldview is justice and rights oriented. Having worked in an inner city multicultural school setting in the United Kingdom, completed further study in the areas of social justice and multicultural education and published in the area of human rights, he is committed to promoting a model of critical multiculturalism in the school. He views himself as an agent of change in Rushgreen and is motivated by a desire not only to challenge the conditions which create inequity in the school but also to transform the wider education system. He states, “I’m personally committed to being an activist in trying to bring the Irish education system from

where it has come to historically to a new structure that would suit modern Ireland” (Interview 2).

Since becoming the school’s first principal in 2005, Oliver has deliberately sought to hire like-minded staff members who share his commitment to social justice and human rights. He has a very good working relationship with the teaching and care-staff in the school. The “me-them” binary which often characterises the relationship between principals and teaching staff does not appear to exist in Rushgreen. Oliver is viewed as one of the team. Peter Smith states,

I think that the big thing. . . and, having experienced other principals in other schools, is that Oliver is part of the school community and so many principals aren’t. (Interview 2).

The esteem with which the teaching staff members hold Oliver is evident in the following comments. Karen Hume states, “He’s just amazing. . . I don’t think anybody could top him. I don’t want to work anywhere else and I think every other person in the school would feel the same way and would agree with me. . .” (Interview 2). Peter Smith endorses this point strongly. He asserts,

Oliver is fantastic. . . He’s such a good leader. He’s just such a good man. He’s a very genuine man. He practises what he preaches. He believes so strongly in human rights. . . He’s always there. . . he is there to support you one hundred percent, to guide you and to give you his wealth of experience but at the same time to be open to you making your own decisions (Peter Smith, Interview 2).

Oliver is described by staff members as being commanding and strong but also congenial, democratic and progressive. Keith Browne describes him as “a very strong leader” who “is very open to the opinions of staff and. . . very skilled in the way that he can share his vision” (interview 2). Rebecca Byrne describes him as being “. . . extremely democratic and . . . progressive. . . ” (Interview 2). The term “strong” can have negative connotations in a leadership context, often being associated with authoritarian and domineering styles of leadership. Blair (2002) suggests, however, that rather than being viewed in this way, “strong” should be understood as “the strength to hold on to “the vision” and the courage to examine and implement this vision in practice. . . ” (p.186).

This research suggests that the ideology of Educate Together and the leadership philosophy of the Rushgreen’s principal, Oliver Flynn, are particularly salient factors in shaping the school’s approach to intercultural education. According to Oliver and the school’s policy documents, the school advances a model of critical multiculturalism. Within this context, the following section examines the school’s policy and practice in this regard.

#### **4.6 Section Two: A “Critical Multicultural” Approach**

Influenced by the scholarship of critical theorists including Freire (1972), Kincheloe and Steinberg (2005), May (1994, 1999) amongst others, Oliver defines his personal understanding of intercultural education to be,

. . . what you might call critical multiculturalism. So we don’t try to minimise people’s diversity but to maximise both its visibility and its voice. . . we try to develop the channels and structures by which that voice is heard

and is catered for in the school through parental involvement and through maximum amount of children involvement. It takes a phenomenal amount of reflective practice. . . I think intercultural education is about being recognising but also willing to be critical. . . (Interview 1).

In endeavouring to adopt a critical multicultural approach in the school, priority is accorded to tackling undemocratic power relations, creating systemic opportunities for reflection and dialogue, eliminating institutional barriers to access and equity, and formulating structures and processes that promote equity and facilitate students' academic success in the school.

#### **4.7 Towards a Democratisation of School Relations: Leadership for Democracy and Social Justice**

Oliver is a progressive educator whose rights-based and democratic approach to school leadership permeates all aspects of the school environment. He states,

I've a really good team of people around me and I feel that I am actually able to allow that team to function. I hope that my leadership style would be around the kind of sense of democracy, sense of collaboration, sense of shared purpose, a sense of critical reflection. . . I hope that everybody feels that their work is recognised and acknowledged. I hope that there's a sense of we're all in this together (Oliver Flynn, Interview 1).

According to Freire (1993), "Democracy demands structures that democratise" (as cited in Weiner, 2003, p.93). In order to tackle unequal power

relations in the school – an essential component of critical multicultural education (May, 1994) - Oliver has endeavoured to create a network of democratising structures. The following sections explore the impact of these structures on organisational and pedagogical relations in the school (Baker et al., 2009).

#### ***4.7.1 Tackling Asymmetric Power Relations: Principal-Teacher Relations***

Oliver has endeavoured to adopt a non-hierarchical and egalitarian approach to school governance. Peter Smith states, “Oliver obviously is the principal but there’s *no sense of hierarchy* [italics added]. He’s *one of us* [italics added] and we all work together, so it’s a team and he’s part of that team” (Interview 2). While there is a senior management team, Karen Hume observes, “everyone else feels just as involved” (Interview 2).<sup>35</sup> This sense of involvement may be attributed to the collaborative team approach and the “allowed-to-be-a-leader culture” (Duignan, 2007, p.15) which exist in the school. Teachers can, and indeed, are encouraged to assume “provisional authority” irrespective of their rank or position (May, 1994, p.98). Oliver states,

We. . . hand over as much authority as possible to the staff themselves. We don’t have an attitude of “well you know, who are you to be telling me to be doing this?” in the school. Very often, any person can assume authority if it’s to get something going that has been more globally agreed (Interview 2).

Depending on where their expertise and interests lie, individual staff members assume leadership roles in curricular initiatives and meetings such as the

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<sup>35</sup> Distributed leadership means that leadership ‘is *stretched over* the work of multiple leaders’ (Spillane & Diamond, 2007, p.9). The Senior Management team comprises of the Principal, Deputy Principal, Assistant Principals and all staff members who hold a post of responsibility.

school's Thursday Policy Development Meetings; Class-band Planning Team Meetings and Curriculum Planning Team Meetings (Spillane & Diamond, 2007).<sup>36</sup> This role interchange means that individual staff members (including the principal) are sometimes leaders, sometimes followers, and move in and out of these roles depending on their proficiency and interest in the relevant areas (Southworth, 2003; Spillane & Diamond, 2007). Speaking of the teaching teams which straddle the curricular subjects, Oliver asserts,

Now people are in two or three of those kinds of [curricular] teams. Now when they meet in order to execute a particular project, usually by the time they leave their first meeting, they're taking leadership of some aspect of what's coming up and I think that that is very motivating (Interview 2).

This form of leadership, as Oliver points out, is very motivating for the staff. It is also empowering and gives staff members a sense of ownership of the projects that emanate from these various fora. The staff is further empowered by the professional freedom accorded to them. One teacher states,

Oliver gives you as much rein as you need. If you go to him with an idea and you think it's good and it's something you want to try out, he's more than happy to put his support behind it which is a huge benefit here. . . . (Cathal Neary, Interview 2).

Peter Smith echoes this observation. He states, "He's also prepared to allow you to make decisions and to follow that through yourself. I think for me, that's one of the

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<sup>36</sup> The staff is divided into two policy development teams (A & B) and has policy development meetings on alternate Thursdays. Policies are collaboratively developed during these sessions.

biggest gifts that he's given me in this role, is kind of encouraging me to be as independent as I can" (Interview 2).

Oliver's distributed leadership style enables staff members to exercise a greater degree of power and influence than more centralised models of leadership and the data suggests that teachers recognise, appreciate and are empowered by this freedom. However, the degree to which staff can exercise power is constrained by the realities of the hierarchical arrangement of the Irish school system, which mandates that principals have greater authority (and responsibility) than their teaching peers. Nonetheless, Oliver's leadership style and collaborative dialogical approach to decision-making helps to mitigate the antidemocratic conditions which the aforementioned hierarchical structure engenders.

#### ***4.7.2 Tackling Asymmetric Power Relations: Teacher-Student Relations***

In an effort to democratise teacher-student relations, the school actively promotes a democratic interactive pedagogical approach (Tibbitts, 2002). It also foregrounds participatory formal organisational structures such as The Student Council and The Green Team.<sup>37</sup> Both processes seek to challenge and reconfigure traditional teacher-student power relations. Influenced by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989), the school foregrounds a rights-based approach to education, which

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<sup>37</sup> The Green Team (student led) was established as part of an initiative called 'The Green Schools Programme' (known internationally as 'Eco-Schools'). Funded by An Taisce, a body of the Department of the Environment and Local Government, it is an international environmental education programme, environmental management system and award scheme that promotes and acknowledges long-term, whole school action for the environment' (For more information see <http://www.greenschoolsireland.org/>).



emphasises students' participatory rights and student voice (Human Rights Month Policy). Students' right to express their views freely and to have their views given due weight, as enshrined in Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, is accorded particular attention at the school. In this context, the following section examines the school's efforts to promote a participatory democratic culture specifically through its pedagogic practice and through formal organisational structures such as the Student Council. However, as will be discussed, the positioning of the school's approach to critical multiculturalism within a human rights framework that is liberal in orientation can be constraining.

#### ***4.7.2.1 An Interactive Pedagogical Approach***

Beane and Apple (1999) maintain that students can only truly learn about the democratic way of life by actively experiencing it in the classroom. The centrality of the classroom as a space where students' voice is articulated is highlighted by Oliver in the following extract. He states,

I do feel that really the most important place for children's voice to be articulated, asserted and paid heed to is in the classrooms, so trying to ensure that the kind of pedagogies that go on in the school allow the children to feel that confident to make their assertions and that their assertions matter. . . to feel that their opinion matters. . . (Oliver Flynn, Interview 2).

Transmission and banking forms of pedagogy are strongly resisted in Rushgreen. Rather, as far as possible the teachers engage students in dialogue and

active learning.<sup>38</sup> This dialogical process usurps traditional notions of teachers as active depositors of knowledge and the student as passive “knowledge consumers” and enables students to become “meaning makers” in their own right (Beane & Apple, 1999, p.17). In this regard, such an approach disrupts the traditional asymmetric power relations which characterise teacher-student relations. The teachers in Rushgreen endeavour to work in partnership with the students and to draw on students’ cultural knowledge and prior experiences as much as possible (Gay, 2005; May, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994) as is illustrated by Cathal in the following quotation.

You’re not just talking about a different culture or a different religion; you can actually draw from their own experiences, either with each other or asking some of the kids to back you up or to give a little bit of extra information (Interview 1).

Importantly, the school accords significant attention to mainstream academic and school knowledge recognising that this is the knowledge that students require “to negotiate their way past the gatekeepers of socioeconomic access” (Beane & Apple, 1999, p.19). The school’s attempts to balance official knowledge with students’ personal and cultural knowledge (Banks, 2007) is exemplified by Cathal:

Just one example, one kid in our class from Turkey, we were doing a unit of work based on Islam and she was able to bring in prayer beads and maps and that sort of stuff and share them with the class and share her own experience of being a young Muslim and particularly being a young Muslim in Ireland. . (Interview 1).

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<sup>38</sup> The (a)critical and (a)political nature of this dialogue will be discussed in the following section.

The manner in which teachers interact with students suggests a respect for students' rights and dignity (Howe & Covell, 2005). High teacher expectation with regard to student attainment is an important component of critical multicultural education (Nieto, 2004a; May, 1994; Banks, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Both classroom observations of teachers' interactions with students and school documentation confirm "high teacher aspiration and expectations with regard to pupil attainment. . . across the breadth of the curriculum. . ." (DEIS Research and Evaluation Project, p.3).

A climate of trust and security exists in the school, where students have "the power. . . to raise questions" (Giroux, 2004, p.43) and staff members are encouraged to take risks and to experiment with new methodologies. In keeping with multicultural best practice, a wide variety of interactive teaching methodologies are employed, including circle time, thinking time, play, cooperative group work, station teaching for literacy and numeracy, off-campus fieldwork, classroom visitors, blogging, story, poetry, debate, project work, cooperative games, digital learning and drama activities such as hot seating, freeze-framing, conscience alley, role play (Field Notes). The school places particular emphasis on off-campus fieldwork. In this regard, Oliver notes "our children are very frequently excluded from the norm [sic] access of Irish children to local, regional and national historical, geographical, cultural and educational facilities through lack of access or lack of priority. In order for these children to function in the discussive [sic] classroom envisaged by the 1999 Revised Curriculum addressing this lacuna is a matter of priority" (DEIS Research & Evaluation Project, p.2).

In addition to students experiencing the democratic process through the promotion of a dialogic approach, the school also enthusiastically promotes more conventional conceptualisations of democracy. Interpreting democracy in its most literal sense, teachers provide students with opportunities to vote on pertinent everyday issues, for example, what topic to gather data on in mathematics' lesson? (First Class, Field Notes), what motivational targets to focus on for the week? (Junior Infants, Field Notes), which *brainstormed characters to include in creative writing stories?* (Fourth Class, Field Notes). Cathal Neary, the fourth class teacher, asserts,

Like, say in our class, most aspects of the daily routine have been voted on and decided on by the children in a very democratic way. There are constant votes and ballots on who's going to be on the Green Team, who's the class group captain, who's going to be the new librarian. We are fairly much voting on something at least once a day. I think as well that they respond much better to that (Cathal Neary, Interview 1).

I've always tried to employ a kind of democratic approach where as much as possible, they have a say in what we do in class or you know the extent to which we do something. . . (Cathal Neary, Interview 2).

Such practice enables students to directly experience the democratic process in the classroom – a practice deemed essential by advocates of citizenship and democratic education (Beane & Apple, 1999; Biesta & Lawy, 2006; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). Moreover, it fosters the development of “civic skills” in the areas of advocacy, negotiation, compromise and collective responsibility (Effrat & Schimmel, 2003, p.8). However, while such practice promotes important democratic values, the narrow focus of the issues which students can vote on suggests quite a limited form

of participatory democracy. Authentic democratic practice requires student involvement in decisions which have a direct impact on their school lives, namely, decisions pertaining to the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment procedures (Osler & Starkey, 2010; Beane & Apple, 1999).<sup>39</sup> While students are voting on curricular issues, they are afforded little real choice and the available issues are arguably of minor importance.

Similarly, the dialogue which takes place at a pedagogical level in the school does not appear to be critical in nature. Drawing on scholarship from antiracist education, critical race theory and critical pedagogy, May and Sleeter (2010) contend that critical multiculturalism requires “a dialogical process in which the teacher, acting as a partner with students, helps them to examine the world *critically and politically* [italics added], using a problem-posing process that begins with their own experience and historical location” (p.9). While teachers engage students in dialogue and draw on students’ experiences, they tend to focus on anodyne apolitical issues. Teachers do not seek to help students to develop an understanding of the wider sociocultural, sociopolitical and socio-economic contexts of their lives. Students are not provided with opportunities to explore or critique inequitable social structures nor the asymmetric power relations which shape their identities and influence their future life chances. This lack of critical engagement means that students are not motivated nor provided with opportunities to enact agency and effect change in the name of creating a more just society. These endeavours are essential features of *critical multiculturalism* (May & Sleeter, 2010).

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<sup>39</sup> The literature suggests that conceptualisations of student voice vary, ranging from students “having a say” and expressing their viewpoints to being provided with opportunities to exercise agency and to play an active and meaningful role in shaping and determining their experiences of schooling (Cook-Sather, 2006; Holdsworth, 2000).

Influenced by critical pedagogy, critical multiculturalism is also concerned with the knowledge construction process and its impact in perpetuating an unjust status quo (Banks, 2007; May & Sleeter, 2010; Burbules & Berk, 1999). In Rushgreen, teachers eschew the use of textbooks (with the exception of Irish, English & Mathematics) and therefore avoid an overreliance on the perceived “high status knowledge” of the dominant culture (Beane & Apple, 1999, p.15). Students are given access to a wide variety of information from a wide variety of sources and are also given the opportunity to voice their opinions - an important feature of critical multicultural education. However, there is little evidence to suggest that teachers provide opportunities for students to question how knowledge is generated or to problematise or challenge its partisan nature and its role in perpetuating the status quo. Rather, it appears that knowledge is unproblematically accepted as neutral and apolitical and consequently students are not encouraged to be “critical readers of their society” (Beane & Apple, 1999, p.17).

This unquestioning acceptance of knowledge as value-free and neutral is related to a broader overarching more substantive issue - the way in which the term “critical” is conceptualised in the school (Burbules & Berk, 1999). It appears that when the term “critical” is used in policy and rhetoric, it is with reference to a “critical thinking” interpretation of what it means to be critical (a component of liberal multiculturalism) rather than a critical pedagogy interpretation of what it means to be critical (a component of critical multiculturalism). According to Burbules and Berk (1999), while critical thinking is concerned with “recognising faulty arguments, hasty generalisations, assertions lacking evidence, truth claims based on unreliable authority, ambiguous or obscure concepts”. . . (p.46), critical pedagogy is concerned with challenging “claims that are repressive, partisan, or

implicated in the preservation of an unjust status quo” (p.51). Critical thinking is therefore concerned with the validity of assertions, while critical pedagogy is concerned with helping students to develop a sociopolitical consciousness and motivating them to critique and transform the existing social order (Burbules & Berk, 1999). Further evidence of the significant influence of critical pedagogy on critical multicultural theory is evident in Wright’s (2004) conceptualisation of critical multiculturalism, which he asserts involves “assisting students to examine and challenge the status quo, the dominant constructions of reality, and the power relations that produce inequalities” (Wright, 2004 as cited in Fitzpatrick, 2010, p.184). It is argued that assisting students to develop criticality in a critical pedagogy sense will enable them to resist the effects of asymmetric power relations (Burbules & Berk, 1999). However, the difficulties that teachers are experiencing in this domain are symptomatic of broader systemic failures and reflective of the wider sociopolitical culture within which the teachers operate. In addition to failing to provide teachers with adequate training in how to foster critical thinking skills, critical enquiry skills and dialectic thinking, teachers are operating in a wider sociopolitical culture which has historically promoted acquiescence and compliant thinking over critique and social action (Lynch et al., 2012).

As will be discussed in more detail in the following sections, observations of classroom practice, teachers’ schemes of work and information garnered from teacher interviews suggest that the focus at classroom level is on developing empathy and increasing awareness of other cultures and of social injustices rather than critically questioning or critically reflecting upon.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, while the students in the senior classes (fifth & sixth) have their own blogs published on the school’s

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<sup>40</sup> See section 4.11.3 “Social Justice, Human Rights and Citizenship Education” in particular.

public website - arguably an ideal forum through which students can exercise their voice and blog about issues that are of concern to them - they tend to blog about safe, noncontentious issues and generally provide a descriptive account of school activities. It is possible that students' lack of criticality in this regard is indicative of a wider school culture where student engagement in critical enquiry is not facilitated or promoted.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the shortcomings of the school's approach in this regard, the aforementioned practices promote values central to democracy and children's rights - freedom of expression and participation. Irrespective of its neglect of certain aspects of critical multiculturalism, it is a school "where participation is encouraged, where views can be expressed openly and discussed, where there is freedom of expression for pupils and teachers, where there is fairness and justice" (Council of Europe, 1985 as cited in Carter & Osler, 2000, p.339).

The following section examines the Student Council – the school's flagship formal democratic structure for promoting student voice and participation. Fielding and Ruddock (2006) provide a useful framework (Power Relations, Authenticity & Inclusion) within which the authenticity of the Student Council may be assessed. Two further concepts, congruent with the aforementioned framework will also be applied to the analysis: the degree to which the Student Council members are in control (Whitty & Wisby, 2007) and the degree to which what Student Council members say matters and shapes action (Cook-Sather, 2006) – in other words - the degree to which students are enabled to exercise power.

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<sup>41</sup> While this "language of critique" is important, Giroux also stresses the need for "a language of possibility" which encourages students "to think better about how arrangements might be otherwise" (Dean, 2000 as cited in Giroux, 2004, p.43).



#### 4.7.2.2 *Organisational Structures: The Student Council*

According to Alderson (2000), “School councils are a key practical and symbolic indicator of respect for children’s rights” (p.124). In addition to signalling a respect for and commitment to children’s rights and a view of students as competent social actors, student councils are also an important feature of democratic school governance (Alderson, 2000; Backman & Trafford 2006 as cited in Yeun & Leung, 2010). Student Councils can provide students with the opportunity to exercise genuine authority by influencing the decisions that affect their lives (Wyness, 2009; Alderson, 1999; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000; Lodge, 2005; MacBeath et al., 2001; Fielding, 2004; Yeun & Leung, 2010). Rushgreen’s Student Council was established to promote student voice, to facilitate learning through democratic participation, to act as “a sounding board” on “smaller school initiatives” and to represent the school in certain out of school activities (Student Council: Why?). A new Council is elected during Human Rights Month each October and meetings are attended by either the SPHE post-holder or another facilitating teacher. The Council is deemed to be a forum in which “children’s right to voice, opinion, freedom and experience of democracy” is realised (Student Council Statement). The school promotes a model of democracy premised on the first-past-the-post electoral system with quotas to ensure equal gender representation - the Council contains an equal number of male and female representatives from second to sixth classes. Students from junior infants to first class are not permitted to contest Student Council elections and therefore are not represented on the Council. Once elected, members are provided with training in relation to the “functions” of the Council, including how to make representations on behalf of peers and how to conduct a meeting

(Student Council Statement). Student Council meetings are accorded status in the school taking place during curriculum time, every two weeks.

The influence of Article 12 of the UNCRC on the school's conceptualisation of student voice and participation is evident from the outset. Article 12 states that students have the right to "express. . . [their] views freely". In Rushgreen, student voice is interpreted as students' "right to say what they think" (SPHE Post-holder Action Plan). Classroom observations and observations of Student Council meetings indicate that freedom of expression is foregrounded in the school. Students are actively encouraged to voice their opinions and views. Article 12 also states that students should be able to articulate their views "in *all* matters affecting them" [italics added]. The nature and authenticity of the Student Council's involvement in "*all* matters" which affect the student body in Rushgreen will be explored in the following section.

Similar to other European countries, issues discussed at Student Council meetings in Rushgreen generally tend to be safe, noncontentious, comfort issues divorced from core educational priorities such as teaching, learning and assessment (Wyness, 2009; Alderson, 1999; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000; Lodge, 2005; MacBeath et al., 2001). During data collection, issues discussed by the Council included students' desire for a school swimming pool, a chocolate fountain, additional play time, a uniform day for teachers and the possibility of a "pet day" where all students could bring their pets to school (Student Council Meeting). When issues relating to teaching and learning were discussed, it was in the context of school events, for example, Féile na Gaeilge or Get Active Week and students' views were sought on possible activities. Consequently, students acted as "sounding boards" and as de facto "data sources" (Lodge, 2005; Fielding, 2004; MacBeath et al., 2001). While it

may not be intentional, this focus means that students' influence is marginal with regards to the decisions that affect their lives. Similarly, Oliver states that students should "feel that their opinion matters, that they are consulted with regard to things that are even being done *for* them. . . [italics added]" (Interview 2). The notion of "things" being "done *for* them" is contrary to the notion of more critical interpretations of student voice, which advocate work being done "with" as opposed to "for" students. While the activities that the students are engaged in do provide them with the opportunity to exercise their voice, listen to one another, discuss and debate alternative suggestions, negotiate and compromise, such a focus forecloses student involvement in issues which have a significant impact on their experiences of schooling and identities as learners, for example issues around school governance, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment procedures.

Interestingly, while Rudduck & Flutter (2000) argue that student councils are often appropriated as a means of "channelling criticism" as opposed to affecting change, during the observed Council meeting, members did not criticise a single issue (p.83). This may suggest, as has been addressed in the previous section, the existence of a culture which does not promote critical enquiry at student level.

Given the relatively small amount of control and power that students are able to exercise, their participation could be viewed as somewhat tokenistic. The teachers rather than the students decide on what events will take place, when, who will be involved etc. and students are invited to merely suggest activities that can be tacked onto proceedings. In the same vein, during data collection, the Council was invited to devise recruitment criteria for prospective new teachers. While significant, in keeping with the school's limited interpretation of student voice and participation, no member of the Council was invited to sit on the interviewing panel. It could be

argued that participation is therefore tokenistic and once again students act as “sources of data rather than agents of transformation” (Fielding, 2001, p.101).

While some of the teachers believe that the school’s Student Council involves all students, for example, Karen Hume states, “I think that the Student Council that we have here is involved in quite a few of the decisions and they would then feed back to their classes so in actual fact all the children are involved in the decisions” (Interview 1), this does not appear to be the case. At one of the Student Council meetings, the facilitating teacher reported to the members that when the fifth class were asked by visiting inspectors about the work of the Student Council, the students reported that “they didn’t think that the Student Council did a lot” (Student Council Meeting). This suggests that members’ involvement in and engagement with the wider student body is quite limited (Whitty & Wisby, 2007). In addition, while students can engage individually with Council members and place written submissions in the class suggestion box, the lack of a structured classroom based fora, such as fortnightly Circle Time sessions where members can report and brief the student body and all students can engage in dialogue and debate around relevant issues limits the Council’s inclusionary potential. The limited minute taking observed during data collection and the lack of notes taken by members may explain the limited feedback. If effective structured feedback mechanisms are not in place, the Student Council can become quite exclusive and it could be argued that only its members are given the opportunity to experience the democratic process.

Such practice is incompatible with critical multicultural education as existing power relations remain intact and are reproduced rather than contested in the school. While students are enabled to exercise power (although limited), the parameters within which they can do so are framed and constrained by teachers. The Council’s

narrow remit and the failure to alert students to the fact that they could play a role in in-school governance, planning, monitoring, evaluation, curricular and pedagogic negotiation means that such structures are ineffective. In this context, it has been argued that student councils can “simply be a way of containing voice within the parameters of time, place and representative advocacy” (MacBeath et al., 2001, p.79). Moreover, it could be argued that the narrow remit which has been given to the Student Council in Rushgreen means that it serves as a forum which detracts from and forecloses genuine democratic alternatives.

However, as suggested by Beane and Apple (1999), realising genuine democratic practices is an extremely challenging endeavour fraught with tensions and contradictions. They state, “Exercising democracy involves tensions and contradictions. . . Such contradictions and tensions point to the fact that bringing democracy to life is always a struggle” (pp.8-9). Moreover, the shortcomings of the school’s approach are symptomatic of wider systemic failures, most particularly, the DES’ failure to make student councils mandatory in all primary schools and to provide schools with relevant supports. This failure means that schools that seek to advance participatory student structures are operating in a legislative and policy vacuum, with no guidelines to inform practice and no evaluative process to assess authenticity. Despite the shortcomings of aspects of the student council model promoted at Rushgreen, students are given the opportunity to experience the democratic process, to represent the interests of their peers, to engage in collective collaborative decision making and to voice their opinions. Moreover, creating a critical multicultural school which foregrounds critical notions of democracy is a process which requires “a progressive adoption of democratic methods so that students and staff have time to work with them” (Carter & Osler, 2000, p.353).

#### 4.7.3 *Tackling Asymmetric Power Relations: Parent-School Relations*

In accordance with Educate Together's ethos, parents' participation in their children's education is proactively encouraged in Rushgreen. The school's Multiculturalism Policy states that the staff should, ". . . encourage the parent . . . body to engage with us in a manner that allows us to learn from them about all aspects of their lives and specifically about their educational concerns for their children." Recognising the barriers which frequently inhibit ethnic minority parents' participation in their children's schooling, a number of structures exist in the school to increase parents' "voice, options and power" at formal (BOM & Parents Association) and informal (Ethnic Focus Groups & Blog Discussion Forum) levels (Wilson Cooper, Riehl, & Hasan, 2010, p.762). According to the school's Multicultural Policy, ethnic focus groups comprised of parents from the various ethnic groupings which make up the school community were to be established. The policy states, ". . . for the purpose of creating a forum within which both the groups and individuals can *air their views* [italics added], learn from one another, seek advice and help, *narrate their own stories, organise themselves to lobby or agitate* [italics added]" (Multiculturalism Policy).

These groups were to be facilitated by experts from outside the school but within the ethnic community of the group and to be funded by either an outside agency or the school's BOM (Multiculturalism Policy). The focus groups' aims of promoting voice and collective social action are very compatible with critical multiculturalism. While ethnic focus groups were established, they were led by Oliver rather than "experts from outside the school" and their initial remit was policy development rather than social action. Nonetheless, the groups proved very successful. They increased parental participation, enabled parents to share their

views and to engage in dialogue with one another and with Oliver. However, Oliver explains that as the PA and BOM became more ethnically heterogeneous and as policy documents related to interculturalism were formulated, the need for the ethnic focus groups diminished and, therefore, the groups had only been convened sporadically over the previous two years. Moreover, the groups' remit has changed substantially – from policy development and playing an active role in the decision making process to passively acting as a sounding board for new school initiatives etc. Oliver states,

Every now and again when something crops up, if I feel, you know, how is this going to go down with our Nigerian community? How is this going to go down with our Muslim community? I will invite four or five people from that community together so that there's a conversation (Interview 3).

Within the context of promoting a critical multicultural approach, it would be worthwhile for the school to consider reformulating the ethnic focus groups as they were initially envisaged – as “a forum within which both the groups and individuals can *air their views*, learn from one another, seek advice and help, *narrate their own stories, organise themselves to lobby or agitate*” [italics added] (Multicultural Policy). Drawing on the work of Giroux (1997), Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) argue that, “in a critical multicultural school. . . students and their family members. . . [should] study both how power shapes their lives and what they can do to resist its oppressive presence” (p.28). The parents' focus groups as they were initially conceptualised would be an ideal forum for such dialogue, reflection and action to take place.

The school has been very successful at involving parents in curricular initiatives around literacy, numeracy and the arts. Indeed, the response has been so positive that “the school is challenged to meet the take-up for numbers/spaces when offering initiatives” (DEIS Research & Evaluation Project). According to May (1994), such a high level of volunteerism is unusual amongst ethnic minority parents as they “often feel alienated by schooling” (p.87). In this context, the school’s success is particularly commendable. The wider parent body is also encouraged to visit classrooms to share their knowledge, to demonstrate a musical or artistic skill and to discuss their jobs etc. (Mission Statement). The school website and particularly the Principal’s Blog regularly request the parents’ opinion on matters relating to school life, inviting them to leave comments. Examples include the principal requesting parents’ opinions on “Timebanks” and their opinions on whether the wearing of make-up should be permissible in the school. The parents were also invited to participate in the creation of the School Development Plan 2010-2015. A meeting was held in the school and facilitated by one of the parents. All parents were invited to attend and to share their views.

The school also seeks to proactively employ staff members that reflect the ethnic diversity of the school. In addition to empowering the parents, research suggests that students from ethnic minority backgrounds are empowered by seeing members of their own ethnic group employed in the school (Nieto, 2004a). While the school has found it difficult to recruit teaching staff due to the mandated need for an Irish qualification, it has employed a number of care staff. One of the SNAs is Polish, one is Nigerian, one is American and two are Irish. Another Nigerian woman is currently doing a placement in the school as part of her training to become a fully qualified SNA (Field notes).



#### **4.8 Institutionalising Antiracism**

Influenced by the theories of antiracist education and critical race theory, antiracism is a central tenet of critical multiculturalism and is accorded significant status in the school.<sup>42</sup> The school's Antiracism Statement acknowledges the existence of conscious and subconscious racism at an individual and institutional level. The Antiracism Statement asserts,

We acknowledge the harm caused by racism, sexism and all other forms of group or individual discrimination on grounds of gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual-identity, age or special needs. We acknowledge that it is within the personal capacity of all individuals in the school community (Patron Body, Principal, Teachers, SNAs, Other School Staff, Parents and Children) to act either consciously or subconsciously in a discriminatory manner. We acknowledge that it is within the capacity of the Institution of our school to act either consciously or subconsciously in a discriminatory manner.

Amongst other measures, the school promotes critical reflection in an effort to avoid dysconscious racism (King, 2004).<sup>43</sup> The school's Antiracism Statement states,

In order to ensure that discrimination. . . does not occur in our school we undertake to: Reflect critically on an ongoing basis on our personal-practice conscious at all times of the possibility that we have acted personally in a discriminatory manner. Reflect critically on an ongoing basis on our

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<sup>42</sup> Critical race theory and anti-racist education will be discussed in detail in section 4.11.2 "Antiracist Education."

<sup>43</sup> King (2004) defines "dysconsciousness" as "an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given" (p.73).

institutional practice conscious at all times of the possibility that as an institution the School, the BOM, the Parent Association, the Teaching Staff, the Support Staff we may have acted in a discriminatory manner (Antiracism Statement).

The school proactively monitors the ethnic distribution of rewards and sanctions in the school, regularly reviews pertinent policies, explicitly teaches about antiracism in classrooms and engages in academic reading about racism and antiracism (Antiracism Statement).

Spearheaded by Oliver, the school also takes proactive steps to ensure that school practices, including student sorting processes do not reinforce structurally generated inequities including but not confined to racism (Baker et al., 2009; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997; May & Sleeter, 2010). Recognising the imperative of promoting structural equity, every effort is made to ensure that students have equal access to educational opportunities, but also to “the outcomes the school values” (Beane & Apple, 1999, p.12). In this regard, the following sections explore grouping procedures, assessment procedures and the steps taken by the school to tackle educational disadvantage and to increase student social and cultural capital.

#### **4.9 Ensuring Equity in Institutionalised Practices**

The following sections explore the school’s practice with regards to streaming, grouping, assessment procedures and enrolment. It also explores school initiatives employed to tackle educational disadvantage.

#### ***4.9.1 Streaming and Grouping***

All classroom teachers eschew inequitable practices such as streaming and ability grouping. Existing literature suggests that such practices disproportionately disadvantage students from poorer, working-class and subordinated ethnic minority group backgrounds (Baker et al., 2009; Lynch, 1999; Nieto, 2004a). Rather, in order to cater for the diversity of needs in the classroom, the class teacher engages in team teaching in the classroom with the Learning Support teachers. In this regard, Oliver states, “There is absolutely no streaming and more importantly with regards children making progress, we have a learning support model in the school, whereby it’s very very highly ratioed towards in-class support” (Interview 3). In-class support helps to avoid the creation of a hierarchical system within the classroom and avoids that stigma which is frequently attached to students who leave the classroom to attend learning support.

#### ***4.9.2 Assessment Procedures***

The school engages in standardised testing – a practice deemed highly inequitable by equality and multicultural scholars, specifically because of its linguistic and logical-mathematical bias, its bias towards the habitus of the middle classes and its association with inequitable processes such as streaming and ability grouping (Baker et al., 2009; Nieto, 2004a). As is acknowledged by Oliver, the linguistic bias which standardised testing engenders particularly disadvantages students from ethnic minority backgrounds who may not speak English as their first language. He states,

[For] our children for whom English is not their first language or many of our children who are coming into school who have fissured school histories and, like, fissured personal lives and that, it serves them very poorly. It will always and ever grossly underrepresent their intelligence and their capabilities and the rapid rate at which they make progress, once they become settled with us.

For this reason, amongst others, standardised tests are not used to sort or stratify students into ability groups or streams rather the tests are used to gain additional resources and supports for the students in the school (Baker et al, 2009, p.147). Oliver states, "I suppose the main function of standardised testing is to convince others of our need for the supports that are available in that area" (Interview 3). Moreover, standardised testing is viewed as secondary to teacher-devised assessment procedures. Oliver states,

I would see them as secondary to our normal teaching based assessment in terms of trying to work out the progress a child is making or finding out what gaps or lacuna the child has in his/her learning, in order to plan effectively. So I would see them as secondary (Interview 3).

By using standardised testing to acquire additional resources rather than to sort students into ability group or streams, the school effectively circumvents the inequities which these processes frequently reproduce.

#### ***4.9.3 Tackling Educational Disadvantage: Extended Learning Opportunities***

Firmly rooted within liberal ideology, the school promotes the Government's equality of opportunity scheme – DEIS – “Delivering Equality of Opportunity in School”. However, as has already been highlighted, the school takes this programme a step further by endeavouring to ensure that students have access to equality of outcome as well as equality of opportunity. It took over two years of campaigning by Oliver and Peter, the current Home-School-Community-Liaison co-ordinator, to gain DEIS status. The DEIS programme provides the school with additional funding, access to the Schools' Completion Programme, a Home-School-Community-Liaison co-ordinator, a lower teacher-student ratio and professional development opportunities for teachers in the teaching of numeracy and literacy. Oliver believes that having such status has helped the school “phenomenally.” He states,

The biggest factors being, it has helped teachers in their pedagogies. . . It has also helped us to resource the school in a way that people feel that it's the easier thing to do to implement or collaboratively arrive at school policy than to not do so. . . And also I feel the kind of professional development that we have done around our understanding of education disadvantage and how we tend to address educational disadvantage in the school has been very hand in glove with intercultural education (Interview 1).

In terms of professional development, Oliver states that the staff engaged in academic reading around educational disadvantage. He asserts that as a result of this endeavour the staff had adopted “more radical understandings of educational

disadvantage” (Interview 1). Moreover, greater emphasis is now placed on promoting “a pedagogy of care” as is illustrated by Oliver in the following extract (Noddings, 1986 as cited in Shields, 2004, p.114). Understandings of education disadvantage shifted to,

... ones that were very much concerned with a care orientation as opposed to a catch-up orientation. I feel that those articles when we read them were extremely timely for us in our school because people were beginning to think about, exactly what are we addressing when we are addressing education disadvantage?

As part of the DEIS programme the school facilitates the following initiatives which are aimed at readdressing educational disadvantage: Breakfast Club, Homework Club, Parents-Together Parenting Course, School Lunches, Child Counselling and Attendance and Punctuality Awards. In terms of learning initiatives, the school coordinates Ready, Set, Go Maths Programme in Junior and Senior Infants, Maths Recovery, Maths for Fun, Maths Stations, Literacy Initiatives such as Reading Recovery; “First Steps” Reading and Writing, Samba Club.

Supporting parents is seen as an important aspect of building understanding of and strong relationships with the parent body. This support is provided by the Home-School-Community-Liaison co-ordinator, Peter Smith. Peter states that the focus of this role is interpreted differently in every school, but his interpretation is that his role is “to help parents help with the education of their children” (Interview 1). Based on this interpretation, Peter runs parenting courses for the parents, which

Oliver describes as “a kind of a parent sharing forum” (Interview 1). Both Peter and Oliver reported that the uptake by parents has been high and proportionate in terms of the demography of the school.

The school promotes a number of initiatives to increase the students’ social and cultural capital, namely, the After School Clubs Programme; Arts’ Week; Off-Campus Fieldwork; and, Digital and Computer assisted projects in areas such as Photography, Film-Making, e-twinning; School Car; Special Event Weekends; Citizenship & Human Rights initiatives and participation in Get Active Week and a wide range of sports. The school makes a concerted effort to involve students in activities and initiatives that they may not otherwise have an opportunity to participate in due to financial and other constraints. Their participation in these initiatives significantly increases students’ cultural and social capital. The school owns a school car which facilitates off-campus fieldwork. It is used “to ‘stimulate’ targeted children by providing fieldwork opportunities in the Arts, History, Geography and Science for children who would never otherwise get to visit or have hands-on experiences of these curricular areas” (DEIS Research & Evaluation Project). The school also runs two ten week cycles of daily after school clubs financed predominantly by the PA. The clubs are “carefully designed. . . [and] aimed at enhancing all of the children’s attainment across the broad curriculum. . . [they are] undertaken by the majority of the teachers and some community personnel in a mixture of paid, unpaid and voluntary capacities” (DEIS Research & Evaluation Project).

Children who cannot afford to pay for these clubs are admitted free of charge.

Similarly, children who cannot afford to pay the small fee paid to the teacher who runs the Special Events Weekend aimed at “gifted” children are admitted free of charge. Arts Week is an annual event which takes place every December. Subjects such as Visual Arts, Drama, Music, Dance, Literature, Creative Writing and Poetry are accorded prominence. The week includes a celebration of the above disciplines, visits by children’s authors, off-campus visits to professional theatres, galleries and concert halls. Other initiatives that celebrate the arts are promoted throughout the year such as Samba Band, Winter Concerts, Junior and Senior school choir and participation in important local/regional/national Arts Competitions. All of these endeavours increase the students’ social and cultural capital.

#### ***4.9.4 Enrolment Policy***

In terms of enrolment, Educate Together states that, “all children have equal right of access to Educate Together schools” (Learn Together An Ethical Curriculum for Educate Together Schools, 2004, p.7). In keeping with this and the Educate Together motto of “No Child is an Outsider”, prospective students seeking a place in Rushgreen are accepted on a “first-come-first-served” basis. In an effort to ensure that all students have equal access, parents who do not speak English or who have any difficulty in understanding any aspect of the enrolment application are provided with translation assistance (Enrolment Policy).

A “first-come-first-served” policy has a number of merits. In theory, it does not directly discriminate against children on the grounds of religious belief, gender, race, ethnicity, family status, sexual orientation, disability or membership of the nomadic Traveller community. Moreover, in theory, every family irrespective of the



aforementioned grounds has an equal opportunity to complete a pre-enrolment form. As Oliver states, “if you put your name down today, you will be ahead of someone who puts their name down tomorrow, so there’s no discrimination going on, in that sense” (Interview 3). However, a closer examination of the school’s “first-come-first-served” enrolment policy reveals a number of negative implications.

As suggested by both the Smyth et al. (2009) and the DES (2011b), policies that operate on a “first-come-first-served” basis disadvantage new residents in a geographical area, including members of the Traveller Community. Moreover, the liberal equality of opportunity argument which underpins Educate Together ideology fails to take structural and sociocultural factors into account and therefore does not result in equality of outcome for all students. Research suggests that such a “first-come-first-served” model privileges middle-class families who have the requisite knowledge to research school enrolment policies. Moreover, these families recognise the imperative of completing pre-enrolment forms at the earliest opportunity. It could be argued that such a policy therefore not only disadvantages those who have recently settled in the area but also those with less cultural and social capital. While on the one hand, it could be argued that the influence of wider sociocultural factors are beyond the remit of school management, on the other hand, the school purports to promote a policy of critical multiculturalism and as such, all policies should be critically examined for structures which may unwittingly reproduce patterns of inequality.

While acknowledging that the school’s enrolment policy discriminates against families who move into the area, Oliver contends that amongst the families

who have settled in the area on a more long term basis, that no one group is particularly marginalised. He states,

We don't find that any of our groups particularly get discriminated against. The only people who really get discriminated against are, the only people who really don't get a fair shot at it are, the people who arrive to live in Templemines last Monday and are seeking places for their children in the school.

He states that the school's enrolment policy is known by all families in the area irrespective of social class.

We feel that our enrolment policy of first-come-first-served is known across all social classes and all immigrant groups and the number of Roma children, for example, in our school, the very big number of Roma children in our school will be testimony to the fact that I think our enrolment policy is known and understood.

Moreover, Oliver asserts that the school does endeavour to facilitate new families when possible through its "Enrolment Practice". He states that while the school may not be able to facilitate a child who has recently moved to the area, the child's name will be placed on a waiting list and if a place becomes available the family will be informed. He also asserts that Rushgreen is the only school in the town which permits families to fill out pre-enrolment forms for students seeking places from senior infants to sixth class. In addition, the school enquires as to whether the family has any younger children and provides families will pre-

enrolment forms to fill out immediately. Moreover, the school's enrolment policy explicitly states and actively encourages parents to appeal any decision they are dissatisfied with in relation to enrolment and provides them with the relevant information.

As an Educate Together school, Rushgreen is required to enforce a "first-come-first-served" enrolment policy. However, as has been explored, such a policy is problematic. While the school has taken a number of steps to mitigate the inequity which this policy reproduces, it remains contrary to and incompatible with a policy of critical multiculturalism.

The following section examines the critical approaches that underpin and inform the decision making and evaluative process at Rushgreen as part of the school promotion of a critical multicultural approach.

#### **4.10 Critique, Reflection and Action**

Initially spearheaded by Oliver, a critical multicultural approach was adopted by the wider teaching body after participation in a series of professional development days. Facilitated by Oliver, these days provided opportunities for debate and critical reflection on issues around identity, culture, racism and benevolent multiculturalism. The staff also explored and critiqued the liberal ethos of Educate Together and the appropriateness and necessity of a more radical interpretation of multiculturalism for the school. The staff agreed upon a policy of Critical Multiculturalism. The school's Multiculturalism Policy states that the staff should,

. . . form a clear understanding of critical multiculturalism and understand the differences between critical multiculturalism and other forms of citizenship models (e.g. nationalism) and multiculturalist models (e.g. assimilative models, soft multiculturalism). . . . come to an understanding of racism in both its individual and institutional forms and promote antiracism.[and]. . . engage in self-reflection and critical-reflection at personal, professional and institutional levels.

In this regard, Oliver has endeavoured to create safe psychological spaces where staff members can voice their views without fear of being isolated or marginalised. He states,

I think it's also very important to have the natural critical voices, to have room for them to make their criticisms. So I think it's important to have an atmosphere in the school whereby people can talk frankly without what I would fear being seen as either disingenuous or radical or whatever. . . . teachers are encouraged if you like to be openly reflective of both their own and others' practice (Oliver Flynn, Interview 1).

Phronesis and praxis are promoted as central features of the school's critical multicultural approach.

#### **4.10.1 *Phronesis and Praxis***

Oliver's leadership approach is underpinned by the philosophy of phronesis, which he describes as, “. . . the Aristotelian notion that we only become experienced by being action orientated and then reflective on our action and also then endlessly willing to be dialogical” (Oliver Flynn, Interview 1). The influence of this approach

is evident in a number of areas including school policy development, evaluation processes and in the professional development opportunities afforded to teachers. All three areas are premised on the need to provide a high quality education that meets the needs of all students.

#### ***4.10.1.1 School Policy Development***

Policy development is guided by a praxis-orientated approach. For example, the school's Antiracism Statement was developed following a phronetic cycle of action, critical reflection and dialogue which began during the construction of the school's Multiculturalism Policy. The outcome of this cycle (the necessity for a comprehensive antiracism statement) coupled with the reading of an academic article on racism in Irish primary schools stimulated the genesis of another phronetic cycle characterised by action, reflection and dialogue.<sup>44</sup> Referring to the collaborative reflective practice which takes place during policy development, Oliver states,

They're [policy documents] not a set of handed down documents, garnered here there and everywhere and made to fit our school. They have been collaboratively and contextually evolved. We have hopefully also been reflective on the practice in the school (Oliver Flynn, Interview 1).

The centrality of the reflective process in the school's praxis-oriented approach is further evident in the Discussion Document on the School's Five Year Plan, which states, "A willingness to critically self-reflect, both as individual

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<sup>44</sup> The staff read and critiqued the following article: Devine, D. (2005). 'Welcome to the Celtic Tiger?' Teacher responses to immigration and increasing ethnic diversity in Irish schools. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 15 (1), pp.49-70.

teachers/care-workers and as an institution is paramount to the healthy development of the school.”

Professional development is viewed as an essential component part of the school’s praxis-oriented approach to critical multiculturalism. Over the years, a vibrant “professional community” has emerged amongst the staff (Halverson, 2007, p.36) characterised by high levels of “professional trust” (Halverson, 2007, p.53). Through the weekly policy development meetings, weekly teacher class-band meeting, curricular team meeting and monthly staff meetings, staff members are enabled to extend their knowledge and share their expertise in a collaborative and dialogic environment. Oliver plays a key role in this “deprivatisation of [classroom] practice” both directly and indirectly (Halverson, 2007, p.41). He was instrumental in setting up these fora and he facilitates Monday Assemblies so that teachers are released to engage in collaborative class-band planning. In addition to the sharing of internal knowledge and expertise, Oliver draws on external expertise in the form of academic journal articles and outside speakers. Past readings have included articles on Critical Multiculturalism, Educational Disadvantage, Happiness in Education and Racism. The staff read, reflect upon and critique the articles in advance of meetings. They then engage in dialogue with other staff members during the meetings. Research is thus used to inform practice.

Further professional development and sharing takes place through the organisation and implementation of the school’s flagship programmes such as Human Rights Month, Féile na Gaeilge, Arts Week etc. The school maintains a professional development fund which assists in the financing of out-of-school postgraduate courses such as Diplomas, Masters Degree and Doctorates. It also pays

for staff to attend training days and conference which will benefit the school. The fund is financed partly by the small contribution that children make towards the After-School Clubs Programme and partly by the BOM. Action is taken following the reflective research-informed collaborative generation of school policy, which is then evaluated and reflected upon once again.

#### **4.10.1.2 Evaluation**

The evaluation of policies and programmes is on-going in the school. Critique and reflection are central to this process. The school engages in an internal Whole School Evaluation (WSE) every year. All teaching and care staff, members of the school's BOM and PA are invited to critically reflect upon the school's performance and to make written submissions. These are then incorporated into the WSE report. This form of critique is not standard practice in Irish education contexts. Of the internal WSE Peter Smith states,

Always at the end of the year, we'd all individually write an evaluation of the year and what we felt has gone well and what hasn't and Oliver would correlate them. He'd then come back with an evaluation and say people have thought that this has worked really well but this hasn't. We take that on our first staff meeting back and we discuss that and we make amendments then for the next year accordingly (Interview 2).

This ongoing cycle of critique, reflection and action leads to improved practice but also to the creation of new initiatives, for example, the need to "raise the profile" of the Irish language in the school led to the development of the Féile Na

Gaeilge festival (Principal's Blog). Beginning in 2011, this three day Irish festival celebrates the Irish language and Irish culture. This festival was in turn evaluated at the end of the school year and recommendations made for the following year in the internal WSE. This "reflective loop" (Halverson, 2007, p.42) ensures that such initiatives grow and develop each year. The school also engages in evaluation through participation in research projects by Masters and PhD students.

#### **4.10.3            *Critical Reflection***

While naturally contemplative, Oliver's interest in and study of both philosophy and critical theory have given him a self-conscious awareness of his own meaning systems, theoretical orientations and philosophical assumptions and a heightened awareness of the ramifications of oppressive policies and practices that "devalue the identities of some students while overvaluing others" (Nieto, 2004a, p.183). However, while Oliver is conversant with critical multicultural theory and its antecedent critical theory, it does not appear that the other staff members have a similar familiarity, particularly with regards to the elements of critical multiculturalism associated with critical pedagogy.

The critical reflection which takes place at staff level (with the exception of Oliver) appears to relate predominantly to quality control in terms of teaching and learning and relationships. However, staff members also reflect on their own practice to ensure that it does not discriminate against students in any way. Following this reflection, practices are either amended or discontinued or new structures are put in place. While this form of reflection is extremely important, it falls short of the kind of critical reflection demanded by critical multiculturalism. In



this context, Brown (2004a) suggests that the purpose of critical reflection is “to externalise and investigate power relationships and to uncover hegemonic assumptions” (p.84). Rather than assessing the quality of teaching and learning or the quality of relationships in the school, it involves examining how certain power relations and institutionalised practices reproduce inequalities and in doing so reinforce rather than challenge the unjust status quo.

#### **4.10.3.1 Democratic Practice or the “Engineering of Consent”?**<sup>45</sup>

While the school’s policy documents and the principal emphasise the centrality of dialogue, collaborative processes and critical reflection in the school, there are a small number of inconsistencies which lead to a questioning of these assertions. The disparities that exist between policy references to critical multicultural practice and teachers’ conceptualisations of intercultural education raise questions about the degree to which the philosophy of critical multiculturalism has been internalised by the staff members. In the introductory paragraph of section one, the school’s “Multiculturalism Policy” states,

This “road map” is written in two parts. The first part identifies a set of Principles which assert our philosophical stance, and, together, make up a model of school ethos, policy and practice in accordance *with the author’s understanding of critical multiculturalism* [italics added].

Under section 2 “A checklist of initiatives”, paragraph one asserts,

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<sup>45</sup> Graebner, 1988 as cited in Beane & Apple (1999, p.9).

Pertaining to (a) that we as a staff form a clear understanding of critical multiculturalism (*Kincheloe and Strinberg* [sic], year) [italics added] and understand the differences between critical-multiculturalism. . . .

These issues are interrelated. It is evident from both the policy document and the interviews conducted with the staff that the understanding of critical multicultural education propounded by the school is closer to Oliver's individual understanding of the concept, rather than the collective understanding of the staff. The use of the phrase "the author's understanding of critical multiculturalism" coupled with the reference to Kincheloe and Steinberg (2005), authors of "Changing Multiculturalism", which Oliver has studied, adds further weight to this interpretation. When asked to define intercultural education, Oliver replied that his understanding is "what you might call critical multiculturalism" (interview 1). He then elaborates to provide a definition of critical multiculturalism quite consistent with conceptualisations generated by critical theorists such as Kincheloe and Steinberg (2005). In contrast, the definitions provided by the other six staff members (four of whom were present during the policy's construction) are consistent with benevolent or soft forms of multiculturalism with the exception of one teacher, Rebecca Byrne, whose conceptualisation makes reference to one element of critical multiculturalism. Rebecca, who is completing a Masters Degree in Human Rights and Citizenship Education states that intercultural education encourages students to "question and critique a little bit more" (interview 1). Indeed, none of the teachers mentioned the term "critical multiculturalism" even though it is *the* approach promoted by the school. The definitions provided by teachers include teaching about other cultures and celebrating other cultures - both synonymous with benevolent or soft multiculturalism. Karen Hume conceptualises intercultural education as "the

teaching of the cultures that are within the school and beyond. . . ” (Interview 1). Similarly, Peter Smith understands it to be “an awareness of different cultures, an understanding of different cultures. . . ” (Interview 1). Cathal Neary and Keith Browne foreground its celebratory role. Keith states, “It’s a very wide spread, global look at education. I see it as kind of a celebration of all the many cultures that are in my classroom and also that aren’t in my classroom. . . ” (Interview 1). In the same vein, Cathal asserts,

My personal take on it is how it’s approached in class and I think it is very important to use it as a celebratory line. You’re taking into account this diverse population you have in your class and to actually celebrate that rather than making any form of stigma about one religion, one culture. . . (Interview 1).

These findings raise questions about the quality of the collaboration taking place during policy generation and whether Oliver is imposing his own ideology on the staff and engineering their consent for decisions and policy positions that he has already taken. Moreover, it raises further questions about teachers’ familiarity with and understandings of the theory of critical multiculturalism, but also about the accessibility of this theory to teachers and the practicalities of implementing a critical multicultural approach in real schools. May and Sleeter (2010) contend that teachers are “more likely to struggle with critical multiculturalism than with liberal multiculturalism” (p.12), citing a lack of concrete guidance on what critical multiculturalism looks like in practice as one of the causal factors. In this regard, critical multicultural theorists are similar to critical pedagogues who Usher and Edwards (1994) state display a “curious silence on concrete educational practices”

(as cited in Johnston, 1999, p.559).<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) maintain that the critical multicultural teacher “is a scholar who spends a lifetime studying the pedagogical and its concern with the intersection of power, identity and knowledge” (p.29). In this context, the school’s efforts to put authentic critical multiculturalism into action have not been a complete success. In this regard, strong leadership and additional guidance from Oliver who is conversant with critical multicultural theory is arguably necessary.

#### **4.11 Mainstreaming a Multifaceted Curricular Approach**

Staff members are conscious of ensuring that the curriculum is made accessible to all students. One of the school’s policy documents states that, “Every effort is made to ensure that access to the curriculum is possible for all, using whatever strategies and resources that can be obtained” (An Seomra Suaimhneach Policy). According to the teachers in Rushgreen, in addition the Primary Curriculum (NCCA, 1999) and The Learn Together Ethical Curriculum (Educate Together, 2004b) students’ life experiences, community issues, social justice and current affairs issues influence the taught curriculum in the school (Field Notes).<sup>47</sup> Students are therefore given access to diverse forms of knowledge rather than relying solely on the knowledge propounded by the formal curriculum.

Three distinct aspects of multicultural education are apparent in Rushgreen, Celebratory Multicultural Education; Social Justice, Human Rights and Citizenship

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<sup>46</sup> According to May and Sleeter (2010), there are some “notable exceptions” with examples of critical multicultural education in practice provided by Bigelow & Peterson (2002); Gutstein & Peterson, 2005; May, 1994; Mayo, 1999; Shor, 1992, 1996; Sleeter, 1995 (p.10). More recently, May & Sleeter (2010) edited a book called *Critical Multiculturalism Theory and Praxis* which provides practical examples of a critical multicultural education in action.

<sup>47</sup> A democratic education must involve “real life problems and issues” and “knowledge that is intimately connected to the communities and biographies of real people” (Apple & Beane, 1999, p.119).

Education; and Antiracism Education. The critical literature suggests that celebratory forms of multicultural education - central to liberal forms of multicultural education - are highly incompatible with critical multiculturalism, particularly the areas of critical pedagogy, critical race theory and antiracist education, this assertion will be explored in the following sections.

#### ***4.11.1 Celebratory Multicultural Education***

A considerable amount of curricular time is accorded to “learning about” and “celebrating” other cultures in Rushgreen. Benevolent forms of multicultural education are encouraged by the Primary Curriculum (NCCA, 1999), the IEGs (NCCA, 2005) and the Learn Together Ethical Curriculum (Educate Together, 2004b).<sup>48</sup> In liberal multicultural theory, such approaches are believed to increase students’ cultural pride and self-esteem, and ultimately their life chances (May, 1994). However, critical multiculturalists argue that such approaches confuse “psychological affirmation with political empowerment” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p.15).

Learning about and celebrating other cultures is an important feature of Rushgreen’s curriculum. Peter Smith states “it’s very much an implicit part of the curriculum” (Interview 2). A considerable amount of time is accorded to the study of

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<sup>48</sup> The IEGs recommend “celebrating special events in the calendars of a diversity of cultures” (p.30) and “celebration of a diversity of cultural traditions” (p.81). The Primary Curriculum (1999) recommends that students should “celebrate difference” (SPHE Teacher Guidelines, 1999, p.17). The Learn Together Ethical Curriculum (2004) has a sub-strand unit called “Celebrations” (p.38). This curriculum also encourages the celebrations of “people who have made a difference or brought about a fairer world” (p.30), the celebration of “people who have made a difference through campaigning or protest” (p.32) the raising of awareness of equality issues through “celebrations,” e.g. May Day, International Children’s Day (p.31).

the artefacts of culture, particularly at the lower end of the school, as part of Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) as illustrated below by Rebecca.

We bring intercultural education to our theme work, with SESE themes, for example, we plan thematically for SESE and we try to pick themes like food . . . homes. . . clothes, toys, games . . . If you're doing homes, for example, you'll do all of them, if you're doing clothes and culture, you will try to cover all of them (Interview 1).

While endeavouring to increase students' cultural knowledge has merit, there is little evidence to suggest that it leads to greater intercultural understanding or to a reduction in prejudice. On the contrary, a large body of research suggests that this weak, benevolent or soft approach to intercultural education tends to be reductionist, to essentialise and reify cultural groups and cultural difference and to reinforce stereotypes by presenting cultural practices out of context (May & Sleeter, 2010; May, 1994; Rattansi, 1999; Aveling, 2007; Troyna, 1987; Haran & Tormey, 2002; Parker-Jenkins, 2005; Ramsey, 2008; Gannon, 2005; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2009). Rather than "framing culture as an artefact of the past" a critical multicultural approach "frames culture in the context of how unequal power relations, lived out in daily interactions, contribute toward its production" (May & Sleeter, 2010, p.10). The apolitical, deracialised, decontextualised approach promoted by the school detracts attention from a critical analysis of the role played by social, cultural, political and economic structures in perpetuating social inequalities and maintaining an unjust status quo. Indeed, even when framed within a liberal paradigm, research does not support such an approach. Recent Irish research suggests that many Traveller students "felt isolated and humiliated when teachers tried to highlight their culture in class" (Murray, 2010).

As delineated in the Learn Together Ethical Curriculum, the school also celebrates ethnic heroes and heroines. Several class-band assemblies were observed during fieldwork – one of these assemblies was facilitated by the second class teacher, Rebecca Byrne. This assembly was premised on the notion of meritocracy and illustrated by drawing on the story of the winner of the London Marathon, Tsegage Kebede. Following an introductory questions and answers session on successful historical figures, such as Amelia Earhart, Martin Luther King and Copernicus, Rebecca told the classes the story of Tsegage Kebede. She told the students that Tsegage was one of 13 children and that he was from a very poor family in Ethiopia. She explained that he started working so that he could afford to support his family and go to school. He worked as a goat herder and collected firewood but only earned 30 cent a day. He only began running at sixteen. He was soon spotted by a talent coach and six years later went on to win the London Marathon. She said that since his victory he had moved his family to Europe and that he continued to send money home to the Ethiopian village where he spent the early years of his life. She concluded by telling the children that that if they could achieve anything if they simply put their minds to it.

The above vignette is typical of the type of lessons which take place in the school. However, the critical literature suggests that messages communicated to students through such lessons are problematic as they propound a false myth of opportunity and merit. The liberal meritocratic notion that anyone can “make it” by working hard is at odds with critical multicultural ideology. Critical multiculturalists argue that opportunity structures are deeply raced, classed and gendered and therefore groups do not compete equally for resources (May & Sleeter, 2010; May, 1994; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2009). The notion of meritocracy is therefore

inimical to the cause of equality as it masks the existence and impact of structural inequalities (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997).

A more critical approach to this story would involve students examining the reasons why Tsegage's family experienced such acute poverty in the first place. Students would engage in structural analysis of the root causes of poverty in Africa, particularly in Ethiopia, and its impact at local level on Tsegage's family. In this regard, students would be provided with opportunities to engage in critical analyses of how wider social, economic and political structures contribute to poverty, discrimination and other forms of inequity (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Different religious and nonreligious festivals are regularly celebrated in the school but in a "reasonable low key" manner (Oliver Flynn, Interview 1). Oliver succinctly summarises the school's approach. He states, "We ensure that every festival as it occurs on the calendar has an assembly around it but we don't necessarily make a massive song and dance, our by-line is that all are treated equally" (Interview 1).

Within a liberal framework, the consistency with which the various religious festivals are celebrated and the low key way in which the celebration takes place helps to temper the charges of tokenism and exoticism which are frequently levelled at celebratory forms of multicultural education.<sup>x</sup> However, it could be argued that acritically celebrating religious festivals deprives students of the opportunity to critically engage with the hegemonic taken-for-granted truths that surround cultural and religious practices and festivals. While this form of debate does take place at teacher level, it appears that at classroom level, there is an unquestioning adherence to the liberal form of multiculturalism advocated by Educate Together. The students



are encouraged to “respect” all religions and cultural practices without question. This point is illustrated by Rebecca Byrne in respect of her Masters’ Degree research with newly qualified teachers. She states,

. . . one of the things for this school in the future is trying to encourage critical debate within the classroom without undermining a child’s culture in doing so. . . .the staff feel that that is something that they would really like in-service on, in terms of correct language use, in terms of teacher confidence in bringing critical dialogue into the classroom around different beliefs and around different cultures so that it’s not just celebratory multiculturalism (Interview 2).

In respect of an arising cultural issue, Rebecca found that teachers “tend to sort of gloss over it rather than to generate a whole class debate, or maybe generate a critique or a questioning of it because they feel what may come up might be so sensitive that they won’t be able to deal with it. . . .” (Rebecca Byrne, Interview 1). Rebecca’s research exposes the lack of criticality in the classrooms of the newly qualified teachers in the school. However, my research suggests that this phenomenon is not restricted solely to newly qualified teachers and is something that needs to be addressed at a school wide level.

Critical scholars argue that the politically muted approach advocated by celebratory forms of multicultural education fails to address the more substantive issues facing marginalised groups, namely, poverty, powerlessness, racism and other forms of discrimination and inequality (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; May & Sleeter, 2010). Such approaches also fail to address discourses of Whiteness which privilege some members of society (White people) at the expense of others (members

of nondominant groups). These issues will be explored in more detail in the following section.

#### **4.11.2        *Antiracism Education***

According to Berlak and Moyenda (2001), “Central to critical multiculturalism is naming and actively challenging racism and other forms of injustice. . . .” (as cited in May & Sleeter, 2010, p.10). Antiracism Education is a key feature of the school’s critical multicultural approach. Racism occurring at a personal or individual level is explicitly named and challenged by teachers. Its importance is exemplified by Karen and Rebecca hereunder. They state,

If you don’t discuss racism with them, they think that it is taboo and they think that it is okay as well. That’s the great thing about here. I think the children are given a lot more time to discuss their feelings and discuss maybe taboo subjects or subjects that aren’t really covered in maybe other schools. . . . (Karen Hume, Interview 1).

I think it’s very important to discuss racism and again I think sometimes in schools it’s one that teachers can shy away from a little bit. You know if there’s a racist remark made . . . I don’t think it’s enough to say to a child that it’s wrong . . . a child needs to understand why it’s wrong. . . . We need to do more than human rights education, we need to get a child to recognise why it’s wrong . . . and to understand how they have come to that thinking in the first place (Rebecca Byrne, Interview 2).

The school proactively teaches about racism and antiracism. The school’s

Antiracism policy states, “We undertake to prioritise the teaching of antiracism in our class work across all the curricular areas, and as outlined in the Intercultural Guidelines document.” Oliver states,

We would be proactively antiracist in the teaching of SPHE and in our behaviour management protocols and that so there would be proactive. . . Racism, antiracism would be taught in a classroom before any racist issue, like you know in the normal timetable not awaiting an incident in order for it to be post incident (Oliver Flynn, Interview 1).

However, the school’s approach to antiracism is limited for a number of reasons, including: some teachers’ misunderstandings of the causes of prejudice and racism and teachers’ lack of recognition of structural racism, asymmetric power relations and White privilege.

#### ***4.11.2.1 Misunderstanding the Causes of Prejudice?***

“Understanding the nature of bias is an essential first step in taking action to combat it” (Dovidio, Gaertner, Stewart, Esses, Vergert, & Hodson 2004 as cited in Esses & Hodson, 2006, p.466). Social psychology theorists suggest that the causes of prejudice are multifaceted and emanate from a wide range of social, cultural and psychological processes (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2010; Esses & Hodson, 2006). Factors such as the way we process information and assign meaning to observed elements (social cognition theory); competition and conflict between groups (realistic conflict theory) and people’s desire to conform to normative rules (normative conformity) are the most likely causes of prejudice. It is generally accepted that prejudice “is the inevitable by-product of the way we process

and organise information” (Aronson et al., 2010, p.424).<sup>49</sup> During the interviews, some teachers exhibited quite a limited understanding of the causes of prejudice and bias. “Ignorance” or “a lack of knowledge” were the most commonly as cited causal factors. Teachers reasoned that learning about other cultures would eradicate ignorance, which would in turn eliminate prejudice and racism. There is little support for this hypothesis in social psychological literature. It has been argued that failing to understand the nature of bias and prejudice may serve to legitimise myths that perpetuate prejudice and maintain the status quo (Esses & Hodson, 2005).

Similarly, when questioned about racism, teachers articulated an understanding of racism as existing exclusively on an individual level. In this regard, they failed to recognise the role of institutional practices and processes in perpetuating racism and inequity. This may partly explain why teachers fail to engage students in a structural analysis of unequal power relations and an exploration of White privilege. According to May (2009), critical multicultural theorists interpret identity through a sociological lens, viewing it as “the multiple, complex strands and influences that make up who we are” (as cited in May & Sleeter 2010, p.11). In this regard, Robinson and Jones Diaz (2009) argue that critical multiculturalism requires a deconstruction of “self” (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2009, p.79). Such a deconstruction enables students to explore why they are the way they are, why they look at the world the way they do and the role of dominant discourses in this regard (Robinson and Jones Diaz, 2009, p.28). In particular, critical multiculturalism provides opportunities for students to critically explore and deconstruct discourses of Whiteness, particularly the normativity of Whiteness and the unacknowledged and unearned privileges which Whiteness bestows on White

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<sup>49</sup> People construct in-groups and out-groups based on certain characteristics, out-group members are stereotyped as ‘other’ leading to the emergence of an “us-them” binary.

people (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). Such work enables students to understand their own behaviour but also the relationship between this behaviour and wider social, economic and political structures (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2009).

While the school's current antiracism practice is not incompatible with critical multiculturalism, a more multilayered critical approach is necessary if students are to be motivated to be motivated and empowered to take action to challenge discrimination and racism.

#### **4.11.3            *Social Justice, Human Rights and Citizenship Education***

Social justice issues dominate particularly, but not exclusively, at the senior end of the school. The school endeavours to provide a high quality, rights-based education for all the students in the school. Teachers place an emphasis on increasing students' familiarity with and understandings of social justice issues, human rights instruments and principles, and on fostering solidarity with those who are marginalised and denied their rights (Osler & Starkey, 2010). The school's Multicultural Policy states,

. . . we as a staff embrace the UN Universal Declaration Human Rights and the UN Charter on the Rights of the Child. . . That we incorporate the central assertions of these documents into School Policy. . . That we promote Human Rights Education both with the children body and the parent body.

Human Rights Month is integrated into most subjects during the month of October. The following provides some examples of the types of activities that take place during the month: the teaching of Human Rights Programmes (published by

Amnesty International) such as “The Right Start” (Junior & Senior Infants), “Lift Off” (1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> classes) and “Me, You and Everyone” (4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> classes); Human Rights themed assemblies; educational visits/visitors, distribution of child-friendly UN Convention of the Rights of the Child posters; participation of local, regional and national projects promoted by agencies such as Irish Aid, Amnesty, Educate Together and a variety of NGOs, annual election of the new Student Council. The approach is reflective of level one of Tibbitts’ (2002) model of human rights education – the values and awareness model. This approach encourages students to become human rights advocates rather than activists (Tibbitts, 2002). In this regard, it fails to operationalise human rights “as a tool for change and transformation” (Osler & Starkey, 2010, p.17).

However, as documented widely in the literature, the relegation of multicultural, human rights, citizenship or antiracism initiatives to annual days, weeks or months is highly problematic (Pearce, 2007; Bryan & Bracken, 2011a). It could be argued that such an approach discourages “sustained engagement” (Bryan & Bracken, 2011a, p. 41) with human rights issues as “Human Rights Month” is seen as *the* time when such issues are addressed. Oliver’s assertions support this assessment and highlight the inadequacies of such an approach. He states,

This is just a normal week in the school; it’s not human rights month or whatever. If you were going to go down right now and you were going to go into a senior infant class where you know perhaps, something was going to crop up in a story that they were reading that might be about racism, I wouldn’t guarantee you that that particular practitioner will be critically

multiculturalist in their discussion of racism in that story. But I know for certain that they would have been in human rights month because I would have seen their lessons. They would have been motivated (Interview 3).

This abstract perfectly encapsulates the shortcomings of relegating engagement with issues pertaining to social justice or structural inequalities to a particularly time period. Such approaches provide teachers, which research shows in the main are uncomfortable talking about such issues, with a get out clause for most of the school year and in this regard, perpetuate inequalities by failing to challenge them except during “Human Rights Month”. Such an approach is counter to critical multiculturalism – which requires a culture of critique to exist in the school and pervade all areas of the school, rather than critique being tacked onto lessons during specific time periods.

However, that being said, the school engages in some very important work during Human Rights Month. Fourth class, for example, followed the Human Rights Programme “Me, You and Everyone” (Amnesty International), studied the Suffragette Movement, World Poverty Project for Irish Aid Award, Human Rights Activists, Ireland compared with Cambodia, Conflict in Cambodia – The Story of Loung Ung, Mohammad Ali and Student Council Manifestos. They studied songs about slavery and participated in a lengthy human rights art competition for the European Commission. The impact of this focus on human rights and social justice issues is evident in the following extract.

I’ve a kid in my class and we were talking about Zimbabwe and Robert Mugabe during Human Rights Month and he was able to tie them in, “well this is going on now and that’s like” and he mentioned Pol Pot in Cambodia

and he mentioned Israel and Palestine and I was thinking: this lad is in sixth class and he's so aware of these things going on around the world and it's fantastic. I mean I would have assumed that Pol Pot was something you cooked in when I was that age. You know, it's pretty impressive (Cathal Neary, Interview 2).

Moreover, rights-based language has become a significant part of the students' vernacular. During my time at the school I noted that students frequently referred to the language of human rights as is evident in the following extract from the Principal's Blog on whether students should be permitted to wear make-up

At the children-level, the Student Council representatives have gleaned the views from all the boys and girls in their classes and brought them to the Council meetings. They are quite "split" in their opinions. Many have argued that it is the child's right to express himself/herself in this way, in a similar vein as we do when we have our "no uniform" policy about clothes. Other children feel that they are being pressurised by their peers into wearing make-up and that they would prefer if there was a clear ban from the school on wearing make-up. One or two have said that those children wearing make-up are subtly bullying those who don't by asserting that "cool" people wear make-up and those who don't (or aren't allowed) "aren't cool" (Principal's Blog).

A number of lessons framed around the theme of social justice were also observed during data collection. One such lesson took place in first class and was facilitated by Therese Ryan. The lesson was based on the Millennium Development



Goals. Using the overhead projector Therese displayed images which represented each of the Millennium Development Goals. These images were used to elicit discussion. In keeping with a critical multicultural approach, Therese then drew on students' personal knowledge and prior experiences and supplemented these with additional information. The students volunteered a wide range of views and interpretations. At one stage, Therese asked the class if anyone knew of a country where there was poor health service provision. One student told of her experiences of visiting her extended family in Nigeria and visiting her mother's friend in a poorly resourced hospital. Class discussion then focused on the prevalence of poverty in "developing" countries with no mention of poverty in Ireland until eventually a student raised the issue.

Throughout the lesson, a number of significant social justice issues were addressed as was the necessity for people to take action. This lesson also facilitated the development of students' understanding of global justice issues and fostered in them a sense of empathy and civic responsibility. However, a closer analysis of this lesson and Rebecca's lesson on Tsegage Kebede – the winner of the London Marathon - suggests that aspects of each reinforce negative stereotypes about both Nigeria and Ethiopia. Moreover, both countries are portrayed as internally homogenous. Rebecca's lesson portrays Ethiopia as a rural, desolate, poverty stricken country. Similarly, in Therese's lesson on the Millennium Development Goals, it is a Nigerian student rather than the teacher who eventually mentions that poverty didn't just exist in Nigeria but that it also exists in Ireland. While Rebecca unwittingly provides a narrow negative portrayal of both African countries, Therese fails to challenge the stereotype that poverty only exists in the so called "developing world". Such portrayals facilitate the establishment of a deficit perspective about the

continent of Africa and have the potential to damage the self-esteem of students from these countries.

While assisting students to respect and be empathetic towards other cultures is an important aspect of intercultural education, care needs to be taken to avoid overtly simplistic analysis of issues and biased accounts of events. Young (2010) stresses the importance of teachers being aware of “potential misunderstandings, generalisations and assumptions” when teaching about other peoples and places. She argues that, “without an understanding of the issues involved, such work can lead to stereotyping of individuals or whole nations and actually serve to promote mistrust and intolerance” (p.220). Thus, well intentioned teachers can unwittingly generate new stereotypes and make students’ existing stereotypes more entrenched unless extreme care is taken.

Despite the shortcomings of both of these lessons, they help students to develop an understanding of injustice, an appreciation of diversity and difference and sense of connectedness with the wider global community. There’s lesson in particular also encourages students to be active and responsible members of the local and global community. Social action and civic responsibility are encouraged at the school, particularly with regards to environmental issues, which are explored in a local and global context. The school also has a very active Green Team, which regularly engages in community work such as beach cleans. With regards to the school’s environmental focus, Peter Smith states that,

[The students] are encouraged to be aware of the community and to see themselves as part of the community as opposed to being this isolated entity within the community so there is an understanding that we are part of

something bigger and yes they would be encouraged to look after the community and to look after the school. . . (Interview 2).

Similarly, the students are involved in projects related to environmental planning and development. During data collection, the fourth class students were involved in an element of the Templemines Spatial Plan. According to Oliver, the students submitted “ideas for how Templemines could look more interesting geographically and building wise” (Interview 2).

Reflecting the Primary Curriculum (1999), most particularly the model of action institutionalised in the SPHE curriculum, the students are encouraged and indeed are active in the local community. However, their involvement is limited to safe uncontroversial issues. This form of “obedient activism” (Bryan & Bracken, 2011a) is also evident with regards to human rights issues. Students are encouraged to lend their support to those who campaign for a more just world. During the period of data collection, the students in fourth class wrote letters to the Cambodian-American human rights activist Loung Ung and signed an on-line petition on the Amnesty International website (Field Notes). Moreover, on a return visit to the school during member checking, Oliver and a number of other teachers were putting the final touches to a “Citizen of the Year” award which was going to be presented at the sixth class graduation ceremony the following evening. The concept of a “Citizen of the Year” award promotes the notion of the “personally responsible citizen” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p.240). This focus on the individual rather than collective engagement is redolent of a liberal rather than a critical multicultural approach.

Such an understanding of citizenship is contrary to critical multicultural education which foregrounds the notion of the critically engaged politicised citizen. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) advance the notion of the “justice-oriented citizen” who critically analyses the “root cause” of social inequities, most particularly the role of social, political and economic structures in this regard (p. 243). Such citizens work collectively to transform the status quo. In this form of critical citizenship, students are also encouraged to be reflexive and to interrogate and deconstruct their own complicity in perpetuating wider social inequalities (Bryan & Bracken, 2011a). Thus, while students in Rushgreen are engaged in social action, the action pertains to depoliticised issues, which support existing social and political structures.

Nonetheless, the importance of students being engaged as active citizens and in developing their “civic competencies” cannot be understated (Holdsworth, 2000, p.351). While the students may not engage with issues on a political level and may not be encouraged to “decode the political nature of events and institutions” (Kaplan, 1991 as cited in Burbules & Berk, 1999, p.54), they are involved in and participate in the school community (Student Council, The Green Schools Programme), their local community (beach cleans, The Templemines Spatial Plan) and in wider society (The Yellow Flag Award & The Irish Aid School Awards).

Moreover, since the initial phase of data collection, the school has endeavoured to adopt a more critical multicultural approach. During the school’s most recent celebration of Human Rights Month the staff “discussed at huge length, what is a critical multiculturalist’s understanding of human rights education” and endeavoured to embed a moral critical approach into the teaching of SPHE, geography, history and the ethical curriculum lesson during the month (Oliver Flynn, Interview 3). Oliver maintains that adopting this approach was identified as a risk,

but states that it was “a risk we were taking because. . . it was a critical multicultural understanding of human rights education” (Interview 3). The school’s progression in terms of criticality lends further weight to the notion of intercultural education being a process.

#### **4.11.3.1      *Current Affairs***

The students in the junior end of the school are made aware of current affairs issues. During data collection the junior infant students discussed the plane crash that killed the Polish President Lech Kaczynski in Russia and the earthquake that killed thousands of people in Haiti. Students at the senior end of the school, in particular are provided with opportunities to engage in discussion on national and international political and social issues. However, many issues that could generate critical debate are either deflected or dealt with in a very superficial manner.

Cathal Neary, the fourth class teacher, states that students “would definitely be very aware of the political things that would be going on” (Interview 2). Cathal’s class watch “news2day” on the RTE Player each Tuesday morning and discuss current “world issues” (Field Notes). On one particular Tuesday, the news2day reported a series of tornadoes in America. The teacher reminded them that they had come across Mississippi before in the context of Hurricane Katrina. One of the students made a comment which the other students disagreed with. However, rather than encouraging each student to present an argument for or against the first student’s assertion, the teacher changed the subject. Moreover, the discussion on the earthquakes and Hurricane Katrina were quite superficial and uncritical. The students basically retold the news in their own words. The news provided the perfect stimulus for a critical discussion on inequitable socioeconomic structures and for a

questioning of the interpretation of these phenomena as natural disasters in the first place (Beane & Apple, 1999). The mediating impact of colour and wealth is one aspect that could have been explored. In this regard, the students could also explore whose best interests are served by framing these events as natural disasters in the first place (Beane & Apple, 1999). Beane and Apple (1999) state that,

Helping students to understand the different ways. . . [events such as famines, “natural disasters” etc.] could be interpreted, and the benefits to different groups of people each interpretation brings, could ultimately lead them to a richer and more ethically committed sensitivity to the societies around them” (p.16).

The curtailment of numerous potential critical discussions and debates was observed during data collection, for example, when students disagreed with one another’s opinions, rather than exploring issues in more detail, the students were frequently silenced by teachers with “everyone is entitled to their own opinion” or “we must respect everyone’s opinion” (Field Notes). Such an approach is limiting as it dissuades critical reflection and debate. Moreover, it promotes the view that all opinions are equally valid, which is contrary to critical pedagogy (Freire, 1998 as cited in May & Sleeter 2010). Smith and Hodkinson (2005) maintain that, “No one believes that all things are equal, and no one could lead his or her life guided by that belief” (p.921). Students would be far better served by being taught how to listen to, reflect upon, and devise counter arguments, rather than to passively accept one another’s point of view.

While an awareness of current affairs is undoubtedly important, a “discussion” which involves an uncritical recall of what has just been watched, rather

than a robust critical debate is a missed opportunity for students to develop a sociopolitical consciousness and ultimately to take informed social action in the name of creating a more just society.

The taught curriculum in Rushgreen is redolent of benevolent rather than critical multiculturalism. Critical multiculturalism requires “a critical perspective on relations of power and a commitment that education should prepare students to critique, challenge, and question the existing social order so that they can participate in the struggle for a more just world” (Gutstein, 2010, p.127). While the school recognises students as citizens in their own right and encourages them to take action, the apolitical acritical exploration of issues makes many aspects of the school’s curricular approach incompatible with critical multicultural theory.

#### **4.12 Moral Courage, Advocacy and Activism**

Shields (2010) argues that transformative educational leaders, “must be able to work from *within* dominant social formations to *exercise effective oppositional power* [italics added], to resist courageously, and to be activists and voices for change and transformation (p.570). Oliver demonstrates moral courage in both his advocacy and activism. He is politically savvy and ethically orientated. Taking advantage of the fact that he has “one foot in the dominant structures of power and authority,” (Weiner, 2003, p.91), Oliver uses his position to advocate for the rights of marginalised students, to highlight inequity and to challenge the status quo. He views himself as an agent of change. He states, “I’m personally committed to being an activist in trying to bring the Irish education system from where it has come to historically to a new structure that would suit modern Ireland” (Oliver Flynn,

Interview 1). He has been particularly vocal in railing against the enrolment policies of the Catholic schools in the Templemines area as he believes such policies promote inequities. Oliver's courage and willingness to take risks is evident in the following extract from the school's Enrolment Policy. It states, "As part of the School Antiracist Statement the school Principal will collate and publicise the Enrolment Policies of other schools or Patron Bodies that approximate discrimination on the grounds of race, religious-identity, special needs or any other equality issue" (Enrolment Policy). Again Oliver demonstrates courage in his advocacy for additional resources for the school and his commitment to publicly document the school's experience of State agencies. The Discussion Document of the school's Five Year Plan notes, "Agencies outside our control but charged with responsibilities for the provision of these services proved to be bureaucratic, evasive, occasionally obstructive and frequently unhelpful" (Discussion Document Five Year Plan).

Oliver is referring in particular here to the school's battle to retain its English as an Additional Language support teachers and Learning Support teachers. Through persistent correspondence, he managed to regain the positions of the two EAL teachers which the DES had rescinded and to also retain the school's Learning Support teachers as is evident in the following statement. "Persistence, however, has ensured that we now enter the second five year plan for the school with greater capacity to deliver the quality of learning support needed" (Discussion Document Five Year Plan).

Oliver's recognition of the need to challenge and take action against perceived injustices is also evident in a number of the aims of the Five Year Plan 2010-2015 which states that the school will,



Continue to agitate for a full and proper school hall for Physical Education, Concerts and Assemblies. . . Campaign against the moratorium on promotional posts which, if it continues will, over the five year period of this School Development Plan, hinder the school in its development of curricular, pastoral and organisational initiatives.

“Critical, transformative leaders enter and remain in education not to carry on business as usual but to work for social change and social justice” (Brown, 2004a, p.96). As is evident above and in the manner in which the school is structured, Oliver demonstrates a remarkable commitment to equity and social justice. Rather than accepting the status quo, he actively seeks to change “the way things are” (Freire, 1972, p.17) in order to increase the life chances of the students in the school.

#### **4.13 Rushgreen – A Model of Liberal or Critical Multicultural Education?**

Rushgreen is under the patronage of Educate Together and the ethical curriculum (Learn Together) which it promotes contains strand units such as: Exploring Human Rights, Promoting Equality, Exploring the Democratic Process, Activating Equality through Positive Action, Knowledge and Awareness of Environmental Issues, Activation of Responsibility and Stewardship and Exploring the Important Celebrations Associated With Such Belief Systems (Educate Together 2004, pp.27-43). An analysis of this document suggests that Educate Together’s philosophy is underpinned by concepts and values typical of liberal education: democracy, children’s rights, equality of opportunity and respect, critical openness, critical thinking skills and open-mindedness, citizenship, and the celebration of

diversity (Halstead, 2005, pp.112-118). When asked whether he thought Educate Together's ethos was incompatible with critical multiculturalism, Oliver replied, "Philosophically yes, almost certainly, but in practice I don't think that Educate Together's espousal of liberal multiculturalism in its ethos cramps or resists a school doing critical multicultural *things*" (Oliver Flynn, Interview 3).

Theoretically, liberal and critical models of multicultural education are highly incompatible. They vary in terms of focus – liberal models tend to focus on culture which is narrowly conceptualised as something that can be learned about and understood by exploring the cuisine, customs and festivals of ethnic and cultural groups in exotic locales, while critical multiculturalism focuses on the critical analysis of power asymmetries and on structural inequities. Similarly, both vary depending on how they conceptualise what it means to be "critical", with liberal models tending to focus on critical thinking skills and critical models focusing on critical pedagogy. Burbules and Berk (1999) state that, "Critical thinking's claim is, at heart, to teach how to think critically, not how to think politically; for critical pedagogy, this is a false distinction" (p.55). In general, liberal models of multicultural education foreground concepts such as democracy, citizenship, children's rights and personal autonomy; while critical models foreground concepts such as critical consciousness and a critical deconstruction of the knowledge construction process.

Classifying multicultural practice at Rushgreen is far from straightforward. It is acutely nuanced and tensions, contradictions and fault lines are apparent at every level. At an institutional level, there is evidence of elements of critical multicultural practice. Under Oliver's leadership, critique, reflection, action and democratic practice have become the cornerstones of this approach. Oliver is familiar with

critical theory and has proactively sought to tackle power asymmetries within the school. Recognising that structurally generated inequalities can be reinforced through the school's policies and practices, he has actively endeavoured to formulate structures that promote equity and facilitate students' academic success in the school. In this regard, the school avoids practices such as ability grouping and streaming, employs a wide variety of teaching methodologies, engages in student assessment and uses this data to lobby and fight for additional supports, and recognising the importance of augmenting students' social, political and cultural capital brings students to cultural and educational events to which they normally wouldn't have access.

Cognisant of the ramifications of institutional racism, the school proactively promotes antiracism and is vigilant at all times to ensure practice in the school is equitable – an importance feature of critical multiculturalism. The school adopts a praxis oriented approach to policy development and teachers regularly engage in critique, reflection, discussion and debate.

At classroom level, a more liberal approach to multicultural education is evident. Here, while the focus is on human rights and citizenship education rather than on culture and the celebration of diversity, this human rights focus still firmly roots the school's approach within a liberal paradigm. Counter to critical multiculturalism, knowledge is accepted as neutral and apolitical and the teachers do not seek to help students develop Critical Consciousness, nor do they seek to help students to understand how power influences their lives and shapes their identities or to question what social groups benefit from the propagation of current knowledge systems and the maintenance of the status quo. Rather, similar to liberal multicultural practice, the focus at classroom level is on *developing empathy* and

*increasing awareness of other cultures and of social injustices* rather than encouraging students to become critically engaged politicised citizens who actively and collectively challenge the status quo. It is possible that the foregrounding of liberal conceptualisations of human rights and democracy detracts attention away from critical and political engagement.

As has been highlighted throughout the chapter, a number of fault lines are evident between aspects of the school's policy and practice and critical multicultural theory. Fault lines are also evident between aspects of the school's policy and practice. Indeed, such ruptures are quite typical in the field of multicultural education - as has been highlighted in chapter two. Smith (1987) argues that the identification of fault lines can be advantageous for an institution. She states that fault lines "direct attention to a possible set of questions that may not have been posed or a set of puzzles that do not yet exist in the form of puzzles" (as cited in Rusch, 2004, p.18). While confronting fault lines is not an easy task, the structures through which these fault lines can be addressed are already in place in Rushgreen. The presentation of the aforementioned fault lines in this case study report provides the impetus for a phronetic cycle of critique, reflection and action in the school. Many examples have been presented in this report which attest to the principal's and staff's willingness to engage in critical reflection and to modify practice accordingly.

#### **4.14 Conclusion**

Rushgreen endeavours to promote a critical multicultural approach to intercultural education. Oliver defines intercultural education as,

. . . a whole school process in the same way as child centred education is a whole school process. Everything - from the manner in which staff understand how to work together, through to how a teacher in his or her classroom behaviourally manages the children, through to the support that the teachers are given to develop pedagogies that are less autocratic and more democratic - All of those things are necessary for intercultural education and they are all I think whole school issues (Oliver Flynn, Interview 1).

Oliver's conceptualisation of intercultural education as "a whole school process" is redolent of national (NCCA, 2005; Smyth et al., 2009) and international conceptualisations (Nieto, 2004a; Banks, 2006, 2011; May, 1994; Lea, 2010). Viewed as a philosophy rather than a series of lessons that can be tacked on to the existing curriculum, intercultural education underpins the culture, ethos, policy and practice at Rushgreen. It is evident in the taught curriculum, hidden curriculum, pedagogic strategies, instructional materials, professional development opportunities and the physical environment of the school.

Current practice at the school appears to be an amalgam of elements from both liberal and critical multiculturalism. The school is endeavouring to promote a critical multicultural approach but is currently constrained by a wide variety of structural constraints including Educate Together's liberal ethos, a lack of critical awareness and confidence in this area and a deficit of critical literacy and critical discourse analysis skills at teacher level. Promoting a critical multicultural approach is an ongoing endeavour and an ongoing struggle which demands constant critical reflection, negotiation, action and evaluation. Recognising this, Oliver states critical multicultural education is "a process and we're just not there yet".

## **Chapter Five: Case Study School Two**

### **Seven Oaks Primary School**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter explores and critically analyses Seven Oaks Primary School's approach to intercultural education. It is subdivided into two sections. Section one sets the context, providing an overview of the school followed by a brief delineation of the educational priorities and leadership style of the school's principal, Mr. Lavelle. Section two explores the school's endeavours to promote an intercultural approach. School policy and practice and teacher rhetoric will be critically analysed using concepts drawn from critical multicultural theory and discourse theory. Moreover, the impact of the principal's and teachers' actions in mediating the effects of wider social and educational structures will be explored. Fault lines between policy and practice will also be highlighted.

#### **5.2 Section One: Setting the Context**

Seven Oaks is a co-educational primary school under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Church. The school was built in 1986 to accommodate eight mainstream classrooms. It has grown exponentially over the last ten years and currently has 51 staff members. The current staff includes an administrative principal and deputy principal, 32 mainstream teachers, 12 Learning Support and Resource teachers, two English as an Additional Language support teachers, two Resource teachers for Travellers and one Home-School-Community-Liaison co-

ordinator.<sup>50</sup> There are approximately 700 students enrolled in the school from almost 40 nationalities. Ethnic minority students including Travellers make up 51% of the students who attend Seven Oaks. Of these students, 4.5% are Traveller students, 25% are from countries in Eastern Europe and 15% are from countries in Africa.

According to the school's principal, Mr. Lavelle, for the first 13 years of its existence, the school's student population was socio-economically diverse, drawing students from middle-class and working-class backgrounds. However, Mr. Lavelle maintains that the opening of a co-educational Gaelscoil, the year before he assumed his position as principal, resulted in a dramatic change in the school's student profile. The decline in middle-class enrolment was accompanied by a concomitant increase in working-class student enrolment. In an effort to meet the needs of its increasingly disadvantaged student body, Mr. Lavelle immediately set about acquiring additional funding from the Department of Education and Science.<sup>51</sup> Following a lengthy campaign over a six year period, the school acquired DEIS Band One status.

Establishing strong home-school links is a key feature of the DEIS Programme and the priority accorded by the school to this feature is visible immediately upon entering the school building. A brightly decorated parents' notice board is located directly opposite the school's main door. Displaying large photographs of the diverse parent population engaged in various collaborative curricular initiatives, the notice board's contents and prominent location is indicative of the school's endeavours to promote an inclusive and supportive school culture. In the same vein, the Green Schools' notice board, located beside the parents' notice

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<sup>50</sup> The teachers who participated in this study were assigned the following pseudonyms: Mr. Mulligan, Ms. Brennan, Ms. Tuohy, Ms. Jackson, Ms. Hogan, Ms. Devlin, Ms. Molloy and Ms. Cooney.

<sup>51</sup> The Department of Education and Science was renamed the Department of Education and Skills in 2010.

board contains photographs of the school's diverse student population engaged in various green initiatives including tending to the school's garden boxes.

The multicultural nature of the school is further represented by a painting of a tree whose leaves represent the flags of the students' countries of origin. As the corridor which supports these multicultural representations opens on to a wider hallway, however, the school's religious ethos becomes immediately evident. Iconographic images, including large portraits of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, hang outside the Deputy Principal's Office and above the school's photocopier respectively. These portraits are surrounded by photographs of some of the students on their First Holy Communion and Confirmation Days.

The combined multicultural and religious visual representations accurately encapsulate the tension that exists in the school, as it tries to balance its inclusionary Vision Statement with its arguably exclusionary Catholic ethos. These potentially conflicting visual representations are also indicative of the conflicting discourses which circulate in the school, which simultaneously position ethnic minority students as "one of us" and as "other" (Mama, 1995 as cited in Grace, 2008, p.132).

### **5.3 Local Circumstances: An Overview of "Barrowglen"**

Seven Oaks is situated on the periphery of a large town in the midlands fictitiously named "Barrowglen". The most recent Census (2011) figures indicate that the population of Barrowglen grew by 33% between 2006 and 2011 (CSO, 2011). Barrowglen developed as one of Ireland's most rapidly growing commuter towns during the Celtic Tiger era, growing by 13% between 2002 and 2006 (CSO, 2007). Its proximity to Dublin and its affordable housing were cited as the two



major factors contributing to the unprecedented levels of internal and external migration (Mac Connell, 2011). The Census also indicated that there were 183 Travellers living in the town of Barrowglen in 2006 (CSO, 2007). According to the school's principal, Mr. Lavelle, Barrowglen is an "unemployment blackspot" supporting one of the highest live register figures in the country.

While Mr. Lavelle and the other teachers have the capacity to exercise agency and therefore to offer the possibility of effecting change, this is undoubtedly mediated by structural and educational forces. Acknowledging this dialectical relationship, the following sections provide a critical analysis of how the effects of certain structures such as denominational patronage, for example, are mediated and mitigated by the actions of the principal and teachers in the school. Drawing on critical multicultural theory, a critical analysis of existing structures in the school including the leadership model, streaming, pedagogic, curricular and assessment procedures will also be provided.

#### **5.4 School Ethos**

Similar to the majority of primary schools in Ireland, Seven Oaks is under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Church and therefore the school's ethos is underpinned by Roman Catholic doctrine, traditions and practices.<sup>52</sup> This patronage structure has important implications for the school's policies and practices, most particularly, for its enrolment and religious education policies.<sup>53</sup> However, its impact

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<sup>52</sup> 89.6% of primary schools are under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Church (Coolahan, Hussey & Kilfeather, 2012).

<sup>53</sup> Similar to all Irish primary schools, the school is required to assume the religious/ethical education programme of its patron body.

extends further than this as both the *Primary Curriculum* (1999) and *The Rules for National Schools* (1965) affirm that religion should permeate the whole school day as part of an integrated curriculum. Indeed, the *Primary Curriculum* (1999) includes religion in its curricular framework, recommending that it be taught for two hours and thirty minutes each week (NCCA, 1999). Moreover, Rule 68 of *The Rules of National Schools* (1965) states “Of all the parts of a school curriculum Religious instruction is by far the most important. . . .a religious spirit should vivify the whole work of the school.” Religion is therefore accorded preeminent status in denominational primary schools, permeating all aspects of the school environment.<sup>54</sup>

In an effort to mediate the effects of this structural constraint, the principal and teachers in the school have collectively agreed that as far as possible the school’s Catholic ethos should not influence the content of policy documents. Indeed, none of the school’s policy documents make any reference to the school’s Catholic ethos. This mediation is very significant and has important implications for the school’s enrolment policy (see section 5.7 “Anyone Who Wants to Come Can Come”).

## **5.5 School Leadership: A Human Relations Approach**

School principals play a key role in mediating and navigating the interface between national educational policy and internal school practice (Devine, 2011). In this context, the following section provides a brief account of the educational priorities and leadership qualities of Seven Oaks’ principal – Mr. Lavelle. Mr.

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<sup>54</sup> However, a changing policy approach is evident in the recently published report by the advisory group to *The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector* (2012). The advisory group recommends the removal of denominational religious education from the integrated curriculum and the urgent removal of Rule 68 from *The Rules for National Schools* (Coolahan, et al., 2012, pp.105-111).<sup>54</sup> Religious education is instead to be taught as a “discrete subject” (Coolahan et al., 2012, p.111).

Lavelle has been principal of the school for the past fourteen years. Committed to meeting the needs of students from socio-economically deprived backgrounds and students with special education needs, these issues have topped the school's educational agenda since he assumed the role of principal. With regards to his interest in Special Education, he states,

I would have a sister with special needs and a nephew with profound autism. So I would have had, at a personal level, I would have had an interest from an early age. Since coming here that's one area that I've really focused on would have been the Special Ed. side of things, making sure that we maximise resources that are available and fought the fight (Interview 2).

Similarly, immediately on taking up his position as principal, he set about trying to get the school into the "Giving Children an Even Break" programme. While it took a number of years to acquire designated disadvantaged status, the school was finally accepted into the DEIS Programme six years ago. Mr. Lavelle is respected by staff members. Mr. Mulligan and Ms. Hogan describe Mr. Lavelle as being approachable, empathetic and understanding. Ms. Hogan states that Mr. Lavelle is "a great principal. He's very easy to deal with. . . he's very empathetic. He's understanding . . ." (Interview 1). Similarly, Mr. Mulligan asserts,

He's very accessible to staff. . . to parents and. . . to pupils. . . He has a great rapport with the parents. I know there is a system in place in the school where, by right, you're supposed to have an appointment to see him but if a parent knocks on his door and he sees a worried look in that parent's eyes or a serious expression on their face, he'll meet them. . . He's very open in the way that he runs the school. He's very approachable. He's very open to

change if it's for the betterment of teaching in the school and the pupils (Interview 1).

In the same vein, Ms. Brennan and Ms. Jackson describe him as being supportive and caring. Ms. Brennan maintains that Mr. Lavelle is “a super principal. He's extremely supportive as a principal for all staff members. He's always there. Nothing is a problem. Nothing is too much trouble for him. . . .” (Interview 2). Reflecting this, Ms. Jackson states,

In general, he is the most supportive principal that I've ever come across. . . . It's not an easy school to come into straight out of college. It's very. . . . overwhelming and he's been absolutely brilliant. No matter what goes wrong, he has your back. He'll talk to you through things. He always has time for people. He's very dedicated to what he does (Interview 2).

As is evident from the teachers' comments, Mr. Lavelle foregrounds a “human relations” approach to intercultural education (Grant & Sleeter, 1994). Establishing and maintaining strong relationships within the school (between staff members, between students, between staff members and students), with the parent body and with the wider school community is of central importance. In this regard, Mr. Lavelle states “On a personal level, I suppose it's just connecting with them [the staff] and trying to keep the old antennae out as to what's going on” (Interview 2). This human relations approach is also evident in the school's Vision Statement. It states,

Our school is a happy, caring, safe and creative community where we actively seek to understand, accept and respect each individual. We work together to consistently create a positive environment in which all can enjoy a

full and rounded learning experience. We are committed to providing the life skills and knowledge necessary for all in our community to achieve their full potential.

### ***5.5.1 Principal-Teacher Relations - A Model of Authentic or Nominal Distributed Leadership?***

Mr. Lavelle promotes a form of distributive leadership. This structure serves to democratise principal-teacher power relations by institutionalising a process of shared, collaborative decision-making. Mr. Lavelle meets with the school's senior management team (comprised of eight senior staff members) once a week and they engage in collaborative decision making. The minutes and issues arising from the meetings are relayed to all staff members. Each member of the senior management team reports to a specific group within the school (e.g. class-band teachers, SNAs etc.) and then relays that particular group's feedback to the senior management team at the next meeting. In this regard, this structure promotes a more transparent and democratic approach to decision-making than more traditional approaches, as all staff members are kept apprised to the school's business and are provided with opportunities to exercise their voices. However, it could be argued that the senior management team structure itself is elitist as it is comprised exclusively of a small group of senior staff members. Equally, it could also be argued that this structure promotes a form of nominal inclusion, as ultimately, decisions about what issues are shared and what final decisions are taken are made by the senior management team (Hatcher, 2005). As Wainwright (2003) observes "I participate, we participate, but they decide over what kind of issue we can decide" (as cited in Hatcher, 2005,

p.259). While this model, in effect, remains hierarchical and the capacity to exercise strategic power rests with the senior management team, it nonetheless provides the school's large staff with a structured opportunity to exercise their voices on matters which have an impact on their professional lives (Hatcher, 2005). As will be explored in the following section, the emphasis on human relations, particularly, home-school links is an important component of the school's intercultural approach.

## **5.6 Section Two: An Intercultural Approach**

In keeping with the State's official policy response to cultural diversity, Seven Oaks promotes a policy of intercultural education. The school's intercultural policy suggests that cultural pluralism and inclusion are central features of this approach. The school seeks to promote a culture of inclusivity and reciprocal relations, where diversity is appreciated, valued, respected and celebrated. In this regard, the school's Intercultural Policy states that in promoting an intercultural approach, the school seeks to:

Develop in each child a respect for self and for others. . . . Ensure each child feels valued and has a sense of who they are. . . . Develop an appreciation of difference. . . . Recognise the value of different cultures. . . . Recognise and value the symbolic role of the presence of mother tongues in the school. . . . Provide opportunities for communication regardless of mother tongue and enhance social skills.

While the promotion of these principles is important, it could be argued that they reflect weaker conceptualisations of intercultural education which ignore power asymmetries and structural inequities. They therefore have little impact on the life

chances of ethnic minority students. While the school's intercultural policy fails to address these issues, the school's DEIS policy shows a recognition of the need to tackle educational disadvantage. This issue will be discussed in more detail in section 5.9 "Tackling Educational Disadvantage."

Student welfare is a priority at the school. Motivated by an ethic of care, staff members endeavour to create a nurturing and supportive school environment. Located in a socio-economically deprived area, the school has been described as "an oasis" in the community by teachers - a physically and psychologically safe space where students can feel happy and secure (Mr. Lavelle, Interview 1).<sup>55</sup> Ms. Brennan states,

The whole attitude of the school is to make the school a happy place for the children because a lot of these children, not necessarily the migrants or the Travellers, but a lot of our other children would be coming from very difficult backgrounds where there is a lot of unhappiness, a lot of problems, a lot of social problems. So school might be the only happy time in the day that they have. The attitude of all teachers and the school would be to try and make it as happy and as positive a place as possible (Interview 1).

Similarly, Ms. Cooney states "For some children it's the only time in the day when they're really protected and looked after and settled. . ." Perpetuated by wider structural inequities, the social problems endemic in the communities in which the students live has resulted in staff taking a collective decision to bend the rules in order to support the students but also to encourage attendance. In this regard, the school welcomes students no matter what time they come in at. Ms. Devlin

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<sup>55</sup> The teachers here talk about the school as being an oasis in the general area, a place where the children come and feel safe and it doesn't matter what colour they are, what country they came from. That's the philosophy here (Mr. Lavelle).

maintains “If the children come late, we say “you’re welcome, come in” because some of the children have to get themselves up and out to school in the mornings” (Interview 1).

While there is consensus amongst staff about the need to bend the rules with regards to attendance procedures, a divergence is evident between staff members regarding induction procedures. Some teachers promote a buddy system in their classrooms and specific induction procedures for new migrant pupils as set down in the school’s Intercultural Policy, while others believe that such practices highlight students’ perceived differences.<sup>56</sup> Ms. Hogan states “We just get on as normal. I think if you highlight. . . unless the child is very nervous or whatever, if they’re willing to get on as normal, I wouldn’t really be highlighting the fact that they’re different” (Interview 2). This teacher’s assertion is part of a wider get-on-as-normal discourse which operates in the school alongside a competing celebrate-difference-and-diversity discourse. This issue will be discussed in detail in section 5.12 “A Practical Tolerance?” In the same vein, Mr. Lavelle’s assertion that “There was a culture of inclusivity in this school *ever before* [italics added] children from other countries came here” may suggest, as Devine (2011) has noted elsewhere, a taken for granted assumption that inclusion happens naturally in schools “because it’s what schools are supposed to do” (p.77). It may also indicate an assumption that rhetorically valuing inclusion and equity automatically leads to inclusive and equitable practices (Devine, 2011). The extent to which such assumptions may impede the inclusion and equitable treatment of migrant and Traveller students will be explored throughout this chapter.

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<sup>56</sup> A “buddy” - a peer who shares the migrant student’s mother tongue (when possible) is assigned to new students. This buddy looks after the student during his/her first days at the school.



## 5.7 “Anyone Who Wants to Come Can Come.”

Structural constraints including a denominational patronage model present schools which seek to be inclusive of all students with certain challenges, particularly at the time of enrolment. Despite being under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Church and thereby having the right by law (Equal Status Acts, 2000-2008) to accord preferential treatment to Catholic students, the school does not exercise this right. The school’s intercultural policy states, “We welcome all pupils to enrol in our school for as long as space allows.” Reflecting this, Mr. Mulligan asserts that “Religion does not come into enrolment. You wouldn’t get preference over another child just because of your religion” (Interview 2). Therefore, despite this exclusionary structural feature, the school embraces and seeks to include all students, particularly students susceptible to societal marginalisation. The school’s Enrolment Policy states,

Equality of access is the key value that determines the enrolment of children to our school. No child is refused admission for reasons of ethnicity, special educational needs, disability, language/accent, gender, traveller status, asylum-seeker/refugee status, religious/political beliefs and values, family or social circumstances.

However, despite the inclusion of a broad range of grounds on which students will not be excluded, “sexuality” or “sexual orientation” is noticeably absent. When asked about its omission, Mr. Lavelle explains “it just never crossed our minds. We will discuss this at our next meeting though” (Interview 2). Irrespective of the motivation behind its omission, it could be argued that by failing to explicitly name “sexual orientation” the enrolment policy de-legitimises the identities of gay,

lesbian and bisexual students and by extension, gay, lesbian and bisexual teachers. It has been argued by Baker et al. (2009) that such exclusion forces gay, lesbian and bisexual teachers “into deceptions and denials about their personal lives” (p.155). It could also be argued that a failure to list this ground in its enrolment policy may be indicative of a wider culture in the school where controversial or difficult issues are not discussed and therefore are abnormalised. In this regard, Robinson and Jones Diaz (2009) argue “Children are as vulnerable to omissions as they are to inaccuracies and stereotypes. What isn’t seen can be as powerful a contributor to attitudes as what is seen” (p.175).

Despite the presence of seven other primary schools in Barrowglen, students come from all over the town to attend Seven Oaks. Ms. Cooney states “Anyone who wants to come can come and they basically come from all over the town. We don’t distinguish. We don’t give preference to any area” (Interview 1). Similarly, Ms. Brennan asserts, “All cultures are welcome. It’s not an Educate Together School but all cultures are welcomed. . .” (Interview 2). Rather than turning students away, the school has endeavoured to facilitate as many students as possible. As a result, the school has expanded rapidly growing from a 25 to a 51 teacher school during the last ten years. In an effort to eliminate barriers that may impede enrolment, the school provides a translation service for non-English speaking parents. The Intercultural Post-holder, Ms. Molloy, maintains that the school is considered both inclusive and welcoming by the broader community and attributes the school’s ever expanding enrolment numbers to this ethos of inclusion. In this regard, she states,

We do have such big numbers because I think parents feel that the school is welcoming. . . If a child comes to school here and can’t afford a breakfast or

uniform or books or lunch or anything we provide everything they need to be in school.... (Interview 1).

Building strong relationships with parents, both Irish and international, is an important feature of the school's intercultural approach.

### **5.8 “Parents have a pivotal role in the success of the school.”**

The school's Intercultural Policy states “It is appreciated that healthy home-school links are central to the success of this intercultural policy. . .” In addition to being a key feature of the DEIS Programme, building and maintaining strong home-school links is an important component of multicultural education (NCCA, 2005; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). The school's Intercultural Policy also states that the school endeavours to make “all parents feel equally welcome”. Building parents' confidence and making parents feel welcome, accepted, valued and included is one of the school's key priorities. In an effort to create a welcoming and affirming school environment, the school provides and promotes the following: Parents' Notice Board, Parents' Suggestion Box, Parents' Room, An Open Door Policy, various Adult Education initiatives, and, Literacy and Numeracy classroom initiatives. Support is also provided by the HSCL co-ordinator Mr. Mulligan and the Intercultural Post-holder Ms. Molloy. A more detailed account of these inclusive initiatives is available in Appendix S. Both teachers are available to parents during school hours. Ms. Molloy liaises with and supports both migrant students and their parents. She assists students in accessing books and uniforms and informs parents about pertinent DES circulars and pertinent amendments to school policy documents. She also has responsibility for recruiting multilingual parents to assist the school in

translation work and in communicating messages to non-English speaking parents (Ms. Molloy, Interview 1).

### **5.8.1 “It’s about making that bond with parents.”**

Mr. Mulligan, the HSCL co-ordinator, plays a pivotal role in the creation and maintenance of the strong home-links that exist between the school and the parent body. Mr. Mulligan has gained crucial experience over a long period of years having taught in the school in a variety of roles including mainstream, Learning Support and Resource since 1988. It is a role in which Mr. Mulligan has been particularly effective specifically in facilitating a “communicative relationship” between the different members of the school community. Ms. Brennan states “We have a HSCL teacher now. We only have one for the last two years and he’s done a wonderful job in establishing good relationships between the Traveller families and the school. . . ” (Interview 1). Similarly, the DEIS Report goes on to note that “Parents expressed their satisfaction with the level of support they receive from the school through the HSCL programme. . . ” (DEIS Research Evaluation 2010).

Mr. Mulligan reports that he starts to work on building a rapport with parents as soon as their children commence formal schooling in Junior Infants, “We start that in junior infants so that I can get the parents to get to make the association, make the bond with the parents. So we do it in junior infants” (Interview 1). He realises the importance of starting small, “We have them in for little English board games so that I get to know the parents from day one. . . ” (Interview 1). In respect of the “sharing of information” with parents about their children’s progress, Mr. Mulligan visits

homes in an effort to allay parents' fears with regard to formal school meetings. He states,

Part of my job would be to call to anybody who missed a parent-teacher meeting just to explain to them that they won't be intimidated in any way, that it's just an update on how their child is doing and it won't involve them having to read any documents or anything like that, that they come to the school to have a friendly chat with the teacher.

He also plays an important role in making the physical environment of the school as welcoming as possible. The school promotes a number of inclusive initiatives including Adult Education courses, a "Parents' Suggestion Box", a Parents' Notice Board, and a Parents' Room. It also promotes an open door policy and endeavours to involve parents in policy development. Details of these endeavours can be found in Appendix U.

While the school makes a conscious effort to include parents in the PA, the Intercultural Policy makes no reference to the BOM – the influential forum which manages the school and therefore makes all of the key decisions associated with running of the school. The school's endeavour to involve ethnic minority parents in the PA has been somewhat successful with two Polish members. However, this falls far short of being representative of the 40 nationalities in the school. Moreover, the BOM is composed exclusively of Irish parents, with no ethnic minority members. The salience of both "race" and class as is evident in the overrepresentation of White-middle-class parents on the BOM and PA is reflective of national and international literature (Devine, 2011; Levine-Rasky, 2009; Crozier, 2001). The school's failure to recognise the importance of and to recruit a PA and BOM which

reflects the diversity of the student population serves to reproduce inequality and perpetuate the status quo.

While the teachers indicated the most of the parents of migrant students attended parent-teacher meetings, they reported mixed experiences with regard to Indigenous Irish Traveller parents, Romany parents and South Eastern European parents.

### ***5.8.2 “Some have and some haven’t in the past.”***

Regarding Traveller parents’ attendance at parent-teacher meetings, Ms. Tuohy states, “I’ve never seen them [Traveller parents]. In the three years that I’m in this school - and I’ve had Traveller children each year I’ve never had a Traveller parent come to a parent-teacher meeting” (Interview 2). Other teachers report mixed experiences. Ms. Jackson asserts, “Well I know, from my experience last year, the parent I had did. . . this year, at least two of them did out of about four. So yeah they seem to” (Interview 2), while Ms. Devlin states, “Some have and some haven’t in the past” (Interview 2). Ms. Brennan explains that while Traveller parents might not necessarily attend the formal parent-teacher meeting, that they do keep abreast of their children’s progress in a more informal manner. She states,

I would say the Traveller parents have a very good working relationship [with the school]. Formal parent-teacher meetings mightn’t be the best attended but you always have the Traveller parents in during the year on a regular basis. You know they mightn’t come when you want them, like on the day of

a formal parent teacher meeting but they're in regular communication with the school. They're in and out (Interview 2).

Trust is central to the open and communicative relationship that exists between the parents and the school. The literature suggests that the issue of trust is particularly salient for Traveller families (Bhopal, 2010; Bhopal & Myers, 2009; Derrington, 2005), especially but not exclusively because of many Travellers' negative experiences of schooling and the inevitable fears that such experiences engender with regards to their children (Bhopal & Myers, 2009). The school has cultivated this relationship over a long period of years and many of the staff members particularly the Deputy Principal, Ms. Cooney and the HSCL co-ordinator Mr. Mulligan are well known to the Traveller parents. Both Ms. Cooney and Mr. Mulligan are longstanding staff members, having worked in the school since 1986 and 1988 respectively. In terms of school-Traveller parent relations, Ms. Cooney has operated as the named person and trusted teacher in the school for a number of years. Having worked in the school since it first opened and as a Resource teacher for Travellers for two years, she has built a strong and open relationship with the Traveller parents, who also have a long history in the community. In addition, she has developed considerable cultural knowledge from her interactions with Traveller students and parents. The combination of both relationship building and increased knowledge has made her a trusted confidant for the Travellers families and an invaluable resource for the school. She states, "Now I'm not a Resource teacher for Travellers anymore but I'm really the contact person, so the parents still come to me and they know they can trust me" (Interview 2). They seek guidance and advice from Ms. Cooney, "They just come in and ask me 'can you do this?', 'what will I do about that?' or to ask me about the children if they are off line" (Interview 2).

Bhopal and Myers (2009) maintain that an open door policy is particularly important in a Traveller context due to the heightened level of fear and anxiety that many Traveller experience with regard to schooling. Ms. Cooney states, “The Travellers would recognise you as someone who they can talk to and I always keep an open talk policy. . . ” Ms. Cooney uses her acquired cultural knowledge to put Traveller students at their ease and to encourage them to confide any difficulties that they are experiencing with her, “So the children, I have a few horses myself and of course, once they know you have a horse that gets the conversation going, so it works” (Interview 2). In addition to Ms. Cooney, since commencing his role as HSCL coordinator, Mr. Mulligan has also endeavoured to build relationships with the Traveller families. Ms. Brennan credits Mr. Mulligan with the improvement in Traveller involvement. She states,

We have a HSCL teacher now. We only have one for the last two years and he’s done a wonderful job in establishing good relationships between the Traveller families and the school, you know making the Parents’ room. . . making that a very welcome place for the Travellers and any other parents to come in (Interview 2).

While the Traveller parents may not attend formal meetings, as indicated by Ms. Brennan they are in contact with the school. However, for a range of reasons, despite the school’s efforts, parents from the Romany Community and from some countries in South Eastern Europe remain on the margins.



## 5.9 Tackling Educational Disadvantage

While students' identities are shaped by a multitude of factors including, religion, "race", ethnicity, disability, sexuality etc., Lodge and Lynch (2004) maintain that social class has the greatest impact on students' academic attainment. They state that students from the lowest socio-economic groups "experience the greatest disadvantage within any given status group" (p.7). In this regard, the school operates the DEIS Programme and has done so for the past six years. This programme provides the school with increased financial assistance, a reduced teacher-student ratio, access to the Schools' Completion Programme, a Home-School-Community-Liaison co-ordinator and school-based supports for literacy and numeracy including professional development opportunities for teachers in these areas. Ms. Cooney states that DEIS status has provided the school with "more opportunities to improve things" (interview 1). It facilitates a range of curricular and extramural activities.<sup>57</sup>

Within the context of its intercultural approach, despite the significant challenges and constraints placed on the school by its rapid expansion and denominational patronage, it has implemented broad inclusive initiatives around enrolment and parental involvement without significant difficulty. However, the data suggests that a host of structural constraints have made the mainstreaming of a pedagogic and curricular approach which supports the principles of intercultural

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<sup>57</sup> As part of DEIS, the school takes part in the following initiatives: Breakfast Club, Homework Club, School Lunches, Attendance and Punctuality Awards, Science for Fun, Yoga in the Classroom, Garden Programme and Stop Ask Listen and Talk (SALT). In terms of learning initiatives, the school coordinates numeracy initiatives such as Ready, Set, Go Maths; Maths Recovery; and Maths for Fun, and Literacy Initiatives such as First Steps; Reading Recovery; Literacy for Fun; Literacy Lift Off; Reading for Fun; DEAR time and Touch Type Read and Spell (TTRS). All members of the teaching staff work collaboratively to set targets for literacy in the DEIS Plan. Students are actively encouraged to read widely, to take home books and to bring library books into school and the school is presently endeavouring to establish a branch of the County Library in the school for the convenience of pupils and the local school community.

education more problematic. In this context, the following section explores pedagogic and curricular approaches at the school.

### **5.10 Pedagogic Approaches and Streaming Procedures – Inclusive and Equitable?**

While some group and pair work and use of the local environment was observed during data collection, reflecting previous Irish research findings, the teachers in Seven Oaks predominantly engage in didactic teaching methods involving direct teaching and independent seatwork (Waldron et al., 2009; Smyth et al., 2009; Varley et al., 2008). One of the teachers attributes this more traditional approach to particular classroom dynamics. Ms. Tuohy states,

I actually think it depends on the class because different classes vary. Whereas last year, I did a lot of group work. . . this year it's more direct teaching as they're not so good at pair work or group work. They don't get along that well together in small groups so it's harder to get quality work out of them.

Adherence to more traditional didactic approaches is counter to intercultural education, which promotes a variety of teaching methodologies to accommodate students' diverse learning styles (Nieto, 2004a). The predominantly didactic approach adopted in the school suggests an assumption that all students learn in the same way. It could be argued, as previous research has indicated, that such approaches fail to meet the needs of all students (Banks, 2006; Grant & Sleeter, 1994; Nieto, 2004a, 2004b). Didactic teaching methods also promote more traditional undemocratic power relations between teachers and students, as students

are not provided with opportunities to exercise their voices. The school however is involved in the Green Schools Programme, an important democratic participative formal structure, which requires students (with the assistance of selected adults) to develop, operationalise and monitor an environmental management scheme in the school (An Taisce, 2012). This democratic initiative has the capacity to facilitate student voice and student participation. However, participation in Seven Oaks is limited to sixth class students only and rather than engaging in democratic candidate selection, the Deputy Principal chooses the committee members. The students in the school are therefore afforded little opportunity to exercise power or influence.

While the Green Schools Programme promotes adult and student co-operation, the significant role played by the Deputy Principal in selecting the Committee's members suggests that the Committee is adult rather than student-led. In this regard, it reproduces rather than contests asymmetric power relations. Giving students the opportunity to contest a Green Schools Committee election would provide them with the opportunity to experience authentic democracy and in this regard to learn "through" rather than "about" the democratic process. No Green Schools Committee meetings took place during data collection so it was not possible to observe the extent to which students could exercise power during official meetings. However, it could be argued, based the teachers' accounts of the Green Schools Committee, that the way in which the initiative is operationalised in Seven Oaks results in a very limited form of participative democracy.

The shortcomings of the aforementioned dominant pedagogic approaches are compounded by the considerable amount of time spent working directly from mainstream textbooks. Similar to traditional pedagogic approaches, textbooks privilege and reflect the habitus of dominant groups while simultaneously

delegitimising the habitus of marginalised groups. In addition, an overreliance on textbooks significantly restricts students' exposure to multiple knowledge sources and multiple narratives, thereby working against the multicultural principle of fostering multiple perspectives.

During the first phase of data collection, students in fifth and sixth classes were streamed for maths and English. This organisational structure reinforces the privilege of dominant groups and reproduces patterns of class and "race" based inequalities as ethnic minority students and students from lower-income families are frequently placed in the lowest academic streams (Baker et al., 2009; Lynch, 1999; O'Brien & Flynn, 2007; Drudy & Lynch, 1993; Nieto, 2004a). This placement has negative ramifications for students' self-esteem, academic attainment and peer relations (Baker, et al., 2009; Lynch, 1999). However, following a comprehensive review of its Special Education Needs Policy, the school abolished the practice prior to the second phase of data collection as teachers felt that it was inequitable and was further disadvantaging students in the lower streams. Teachers collaboratively engaged with the question: "How can we improve our model of learning support by introducing team teaching?" (Mr. Mulligan, Interview 2). Following a thematic analysis based on Guba and Lincoln's (1989) "Fourth Generation Evaluation Work", the school instead introduced a Special Educational Needs approach based on collaborative team teaching (Review of LS/RT). Guided by this framework and the key elements of "claims", "concerns" and "issues", the staff through collaborative engagement sought to address a number of pivotal questions. For example, "How can we ensure that LS/RT programmes are suitable, effective, allowing for progression with linking class teachers' support plan PPWs, ST plan and monthly report?" (Review of LS/RT). Encompassing both critical reflection and action, this

praxis-oriented approach is a commendable practice and an important feature of intercultural education. A more detailed account of the school's review process can be found in Appendix V.

### **5.11 Incorporating an “Intercultural Dimension” into the Curriculum**

The school's Intercultural Policy states that teachers seek “to facilitate an intercultural curriculum.” Before examining the school's practice in this regard, it is important to consider teachers' conceptualisations of what incorporating an intercultural dimension into the curriculum entails as their constructions of intercultural education will have important implications for the taught curriculum. In this regard, Ms. Tuohy and Ms. Molloy associate intercultural education with inclusion. Ms. Tuohy states, “I think it's just more of a . . . try and suit everyone. Try and touch on something from everyone's background, include everyone in the lessons” (Interview 1). Similarly, Ms. Molloy asserts, “I suppose you're trying to absorb them, include them” (Interview 1). Ms. Brennan and Ms. Jackson indicate that intercultural education involves teaching respect and making students aware of cultural diversity and its normativity. Ms. Brennan asserts, “To me it means to give each child in the school a broad understanding of differences that exist throughout the world with regard to different families and to be able to respect those and take them on board and deal with any situation that may arise” (Interview 1). Reflecting this, Ms. Jackson states,

To me intercultural education would basically be that you're not, while we are an Irish school, it's not our way is the only way. Basically making the children aware, and including all children so that they feel their culture is

being celebrated and that you're making the children aware that there are different cultures, that's fine and we can all work together (Ms. Jackson).

However, Ms. Molloy also states that while intercultural education involves "trying to . . . respect their [ethnic minority students]. . . language, their. . . culture", ultimately, teachers' principal concern is to teach the official "Irish" Curriculum. She states "at the end of the day our role here as teachers is to teach the Irish curriculum" (Interview 1). Ms. Molloy's comment seems to suggest that while she believes that ethnic minority students' cultures should be respected, she does not view their cultural knowledge as being a relevant or necessary part of the taught curriculum in the school.

In general, teachers narrowly conceptualise intercultural education, understanding it to be the inclusion of all students in lessons and classroom activities. Reflecting previous Irish research (Devine, 2011; Bryan, 2009b), teachers believe it involves incorporating elements of students' cultures into the existing curriculum rather than promoting radical curricular change. They also believe it involves making students aware of, celebrating and normalising the existence of other cultures. In this regard, teachers' conceptualisations are compatible with the school's Intercultural Policy. Fault lines are evident however between other aspects of teachers' understandings of intercultural education and the school's policy.

While the school's Intercultural Policy states that it seeks to "promote a sense of social responsibility and justice [and] challenge the socially biased and ethnocentric foci of pupils and teachers", none of the teachers mention equality or social justice issues in their conceptualisations of intercultural education or when speaking about intercultural education more generally. Moreover, there is little

evidence (schemes of work, classroom observations, teacher interviews) to suggest that teachers explore these issues in their classroom teaching. Indeed, teachers draw on discourses of student immaturity – cognitive and emotional - to justify the exclusion of these issues from the taught curriculum. Ms. Tuohy states, “Some of the ones around poverty, sometimes I think they’re a bit young to take it all on board. The fifth and sixth class okay; they’re a bit more mature” (Interview 2). Reflecting this, Ms. Jackson asserts, “I wouldn’t say anything under ten. Fifth class is definitely early enough for that because they [social justice and equality] are major issues” (Interview 2). Similarly, Ms. Devlin suggests, “Well not first class anyway. I suppose in this school anyway, it’s definitely further up. I think there’s enough negativity out there without bringing it in [to the classroom]. Let’s focus on the positive things of different countries” (Interview 2).

This discourse of immaturity is accompanied by a “no problem here” discourse which denies and downplays the existence of issues such as racism in the school (Gaine, 1995; Aveling, 2007). Mr. Lavelle, the school’s principal, maintains that there are no racist incidents in the school. He states, “I haven’t heard. I haven’t heard. . .” Similarly, Ms. Devlin asserts, “Not in here. Well I don’t do the yard either so I don’t know. I’ve never heard of feedback on it.” While Ms. Brennan believes that racist incidents do occur, she downplays them, “Occasionally, but our Travelling Community are very well settled here.” Only one teacher spoke about the existence of racism in the school and the tensions that exist between various social groups. Ms. Tuohy states, “Irish children sometimes think that they’re better than the Travellers. The Travellers think they’re better than the coloured children. They think they’re a cut above, you know. There’s a lot of name calling and that kind of thing.”

While the name calling mentioned by Ms. Tuohy is overt and arguably relatively easy for teachers to identify, Henze, Katz and Norte (2000) contend that this type of overt racism is in fact “the tip of the iceberg” in terms of what is really going on (p.195). In this context, it is likely that racism’s more covert manifestations, particularly racially motivated exclusionary behaviour may go completely unnoticed and consequently unchecked by teachers. Further evidence of racism’s covert nature is evident in parents’ requests that their children be moved from sitting beside children from the Travelling Community in the classroom. Significantly and surprisingly, many of the teachers failed to recognise the likely blatant racial undertones underpinning such requests. Rather, the teachers attributed such requests to individual differences. The exclusionary nature of racism and teachers’ failure to recognise incidents as “race” related seriously undermines the school’s inclusionary endeavours and has serious ramifications for the ethnic minority and migrant students who attend the school.

It is likely that teachers’ lack of consciousness is a consequence of the absence of an Antiracism Policy or Antiracism Charter in the school and, similarly, their absence influences teachers’ lack of consciousness. While both items are mentioned in the school’s Intercultural Policy, and therefore it is likely that these issues were discussed during the policy’s generation, to date neither have been constructed. The lack of importance attributed to racism is also evident in teachers’ contention that the issue of racism only needs to be discussed with students if racist incidents occur in the school. Ms. Tuohy states, “I don’t normally do it stand alone. I do it when it crops up. You know, it’s the same with any of the kind of areas around SPHE. . . Not really, unless there was an issue, unless there was bullying. . . ” (Interview 2). Reflecting this, Ms. Jackson asserts, “It would be something that I’d



definitely get on to, but it doesn't seem to be a problem here" (Interview 2). Teacher anxiety at offending students is another possible explanation for the lack of engagement with the issue of racism. Ms. Jackson states,

It's a very touchy subject to deal with without kind of insulting one race saying 'White children you're the ones who do it to the Black children' or vice versa. It is a very touchy subject but I do think it's important especially if it's going on (Interview 2).

Teachers' neglect of this key area means that students are not provided with the opportunity to problematise, discuss and reflect on their own attitudes and prejudices, nor are they provided with the space to develop an empathetic understanding of those who are marginalised, silenced and othered. Moreover, they are not provided with the opportunity to develop the requisite knowledge or skills to identify or challenge discrimination when they encounter it in real-life situations. The interviews indicate that teachers believe that students will develop positive emotional responses to diversity by simply being in the same classroom as migrant and ethnic minority students (*Contact Hypothesis*). In the same vein, there is no evidence to suggest that teachers promote critical thinking skills, despite their inclusion in the school's Intercultural Policy. However, the teachers in Seven Oaks are operating in a context where they have received no intercultural education training or in-service. Reflecting previous Irish research, the teachers felt that this lack of training negatively impacted on their ability to meet the needs of ethnic minority children (Smyth et al., 2009; McGorman & Sugrue, 2007). While the State's IEGs recommend, for example, that teachers should promote critical thinking skills, they provide no guidance and to show how teachers should approach this endeavour. Teachers are therefore operating in a guidance vacuum.

The school's Intercultural Policy also states that in promoting an intercultural approach, teachers seek to, "Introduce the children to the idea of political issues and their own involvement with them." Such an interpretation is redolent of more critical versions of multicultural education which promote the necessity for students to engage with political issues and develop a sociopolitical consciousness which enables them to critique cultural norms and values and to critically assess the manner in which society's organisation advantages some groups at the expense of others (May & Sleeter, 2010). However, there is little evidence (teacher interview, field notes, schemes of work) to suggest that it takes place in the school. Similar to previous Irish and international research findings, teachers appear to uncritically accept "the existing order of things as given" (King, 2004, p.73) and to fail to realise the extent to which they themselves embrace oppressive (sexist, racist, classist) ideologies, discourses and behaviours (Devine, 2005; Connolly, 2002; Sleeter, 2004). However, it is likely that this is due to the lack of opportunities afforded to teachers to engage in identity work, to explore their own attitudes and prejudices and how these attitudes and prejudices influence their teaching and how they interact with ethnic minority students.

#### **5.11.1            *Learning "About" Other Cultures and Countries***

While curricular time is accorded to the study of other cultures and countries, more often than not, despite the presence of approximately 40 nationalities in the school community, the selected cultures and countries do not represent the diverse student body. During data collection, fourth class were learning about Norway and

fifth class were about to start a module on Australia. The school contains neither Norwegian nor Australian students. While the study of other countries [two per year] forms part of each class-bands' curricular plan, according to the teachers, the inclusion of other cultures outside of the study of these countries is generally incidental. Ms. Hogan states, "Well I do projects on other countries as much as I can. . . otherwise it's incidental." Teachers are constrained however by these agreed curricular plans and are obliged to adhere to them despite the ethnic composition of their classes. In addition, despite the presence of 33 Traveller students in the school, no teacher mentioned teaching about or exploring Traveller culture.<sup>58</sup> While the teachers acknowledge that students' knowledge can "enrich instruction" - for example Ms. Devlin states, "instead of it being in the book. . . it's in the room. . ." there is little evidence to suggest that the teachers avail of this "resource" (Banks, 2007, p.101). Indeed, the following section, which presents a brief account of the second class teacher, Ms. Hogan's approach to a lesson on cultural artefacts suggests that, at times, some teachers actively silence students who try to share their cultural experiences.

Ms. Hogan's lesson involved the reading of a photocopied story from a student textbook called "Family Treasures". The story was about a boy living in Ireland who was originally from Pakistan. It included items that each member of the boy's family had brought with them to Ireland from Pakistan (a Koran, a hookah etc.). Following the reading of the story, a discussion ensued. Ms. Hogan's reactions to the students' comments is critically analysed in the section hereunder.

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<sup>58</sup> The *Guidelines on Traveller Education in the Primary School* (2002) indicate that schools should promote an intercultural approach that 'validat[es] Traveller culture within the curriculum (Department of Education & Science, 2002, p.39).

### ***5.11.1.1 Drawing on Students' Prior Knowledge and Personal Experience?***

Drawing on students' prior knowledge and personal experience is an essential feature of intercultural education (Nieto, 2004a; Banks, 2007). The "Family Treasures" lesson provided many opportunities for the teacher to engage students in dialogue about their cultural knowledge and personal experiences. However, rather than drawing on this resource, Ms. Hogan elected to search the internet for information. Moreover, she frequently resisted students' attempts to elaborate answers by changing the subject. At the start of the lesson, one of the children told the class that he had a friend from Pakistan. The teacher asked the friend's name and then moved onto the next question. Similarly, when one of the students volunteered that he had a Koran, something that was referred to in the story, rather than asking the child to elaborate, the teacher replied with, "We have a Bible." In the same vein, when it became apparent that two Muslim students were going to volunteer to bring their prayer mats to school (the students were loudly whispering about bringing the mats to school), the teacher pre-empted their suggestion asserting that she did not want any students to bring any items into school. The teacher's actions in this particular lesson deprived the class of receiving an authentic personal account of what it is like to be a young Muslim living in Ireland or indeed a young Irish Muslim. Moreover, these students' personal narratives might have provided a richer, more nuanced and contextualised account of how they and their families practice Islam. In addition, while unintentional, the teacher's actions privilege her own knowledge about Islam and information from the internet ahead of the authentic lived experience of the Muslim students in her class. Arguably, this has the effect of making the Muslim students feel as though their personal knowledge and cultural identities are irrelevant and inconsequential.

### **5.11.1.2      *Enhancing Students Sense of Belonging?***

Rather than assisting students in developing positive cultural identities and enhancing their sense of belonging the teacher, arguably unintentionally, frequently others the non-Catholic students in her class and highlights their “difference” in deficit terms. As previously stated, when one of the Muslim students volunteers that he has a Koran, the teacher responds with, “We have a Bible.” While it is unclear if by “we” she means Irish people in general, thereby conflating Irishness and Catholicism or if by “we” she is referring to herself and other Catholic students in the class, some of whom are Eastern European, she nonetheless reinforces an us-them binary, in the process othering the non-Catholic students in the class (Bryan, 2008). In the same vein, when referring to items that represent Irish culture, she states “you could bring our Bible”, once again othering the non-Catholic students, presenting Catholicism as the norm and associating Irishness with Catholicism.

The teacher’s reactions to students’ answers also indicate a more favourable disposition to the Catholic students. While these cues may be unintentional, more than once during the lesson, the teacher responds very positively to references to the Catholic religion while remaining mute or responding negatively when references are made to Islam. When one of the Catholic Eastern European students mentions that he has a picture of the Virgin Mary, the teacher replied, “very good.” In contrast, when one of the Muslim students says that he has a Koran, the teacher responds with, “We have the Bible”. Similarly, when the two students point out that they have special mats and a Koran that they use for prayer, the teacher responds with, “No, no one is allowed to bring this stuff to school.” The teacher is communicating, potentially unwittingly, that not only are the Muslim students different from the

Catholic students in the class but also that these students are different in a negative way.

Moreover, when asked about items that would represent Ireland, a country that has always been multicultural but even more so in recent years, the teacher's suggestions are Irish dancing shoes, oxtail soup and "our Bible". Such a conceptualisation is not redolent of modern or indeed historical Ireland. The use of the term "our Bible" automatically others and excludes non-Catholic students. Contrary to the notions of inclusion and respect for diversity promoted in intercultural education and by the school, throughout this lesson the teacher excludes and others the non-Catholic students in her class and arguably further reinforces the cultural boundaries that exist between the Catholic and non-Catholic students (Bryan, 2009).

The mobilisation of othering language is not limited to this particular teacher. During the course of the month, the teachers referred to the migrant students in their classes as "non-national children" and to the non-White students as "coloured". While arguably none of the teachers intended to be offensive, such language is nonetheless exclusionary. Similarly, while trying to be inclusive, sometimes the teachers' use of language seemed to have the opposite effect. For example, the first class teacher said to the migrant students in her class, "Remember I told you before if *you* have rhymes or songs in *your* language, *you* have to tell *us* as *we* would like to learn them" [italics added]. While the teacher is trying to encourage the students to share their mother tongues, her choice of words very much reinforces the notion of migrant students as other. As Bryan (2009b) argues this language "excludes" migrant students "from any sense of belonging, or being part, of the Irish nation" (p.234). Similarly, on another occasion, she asks an Irish child to explain how to

play “Pass the Parcel” to the class. She then explained to the class, “The children from the other countries mightn’t have known what ‘Pass the Parcel is’ that’s why I asked Orla to explain.” While the teacher was well intentioned, the language used further reinforces the migrant students’ sense of otherness. In this regard, Bryan (2009a) contends that, “The discursive positioning of ‘other nationalities’ as ‘them’ separates ‘them’ from ‘our’ majority and relegates them to the margins of the imagined community that constitutes the Irish nation” (p.306). While the school’s policy documents and staff stress the centrality of inclusive practice in the school, teachers’ language can be unintentionally exclusionary and arguably it further reinforces migrant students’ sense of otherness.

### **5.11.2 *Celebratory Multiculturalism***

Apart from the annual Intercultural Day, which is a whole school event, the celebration of the feasts and festivals of the various cultural groups represented in the school takes place on an ad hoc basis. The school’s Intercultural Policy states, “All world festivals relevant to our pupil population will be accepted, accommodated and when possible celebrated by the school community. It is also acknowledged that it may take several years for teachers to learn the subtleties of such celebrations.” While the school recognises that teachers may have a deficit of knowledge in respect of the various cultural groups represented in their classrooms, to date, it has taken little action to address this deficit. This laissez-faire approach can result in cultural misunderstandings, students’ emotional discomfort and an undermining of students’ cultural beliefs and practices.

Whether the feasts and festivals of the various cultural groups in the class are celebrated is also dependent on individual teachers. Referring to the Chinese New Year dragons which adorn one of the notice boards in the main corridor, Mr. Lavelle states, “That wouldn’t have been done as a whole school event. It would be done within class if you had children from a particular background in your class, the teachers could, would do that, but not as a whole school event.” While in-class celebrations vary from teacher to teacher, all teachers acknowledge the importance of having multicultural signs and photographs and cultural symbols visible on the walls of the classrooms. Ms. Brennan, the EAL teacher states,

It’s incumbent on all of us as teachers to celebrate this [students’ cultures] or you know, Johnny the Traveller, let him draw his picture of his horses - all of them regardless, they’re mad into their horses, mad into their boxing - so celebrate that. Each of them - their own cultures - should be celebrated and displayed in their own classroom and welcomed (Interview 1).

The popularity of celebratory and inclusive initiatives such as intercultural days and weeks has steadily increased in Irish schools since the early 2000s (Devine, 2011). Such events are generally very popular with teachers, parents and students (Devine, 2011). Seven Oaks’ annual Intercultural Day - the school’s flagship celebration of cultural diversity, which will be explored in the following section - may provide an explanation for the ad hoc nature of teachers’ inclusion of cultural diversity in the everyday taught curriculum. Pearce (2005) suggests that events such as Intercultural/Inclusion Days/Weeks can be viewed by teachers as *the* time of the school year when intercultural issues are addressed, and in this regard, such events



can work against the inclusion of an intercultural dimension into the curriculum on a more daily basis. She states, “Focusing on individuals from minority groups for one week in the year is much easier than working to incorporate a multi-ethnic dimension into all aspects of the curriculum all year round” (p.51).

#### **5.11.2.1 Intercultural Day**

While the celebration of students’ cultures takes place on an ad hoc basis, the school’s Intercultural Day is a structured opportunity to celebrate the student body’s cultural diversity. Through its Intercultural Day, the school seeks to affirm the cultures of the students in the school and strengthen relationships with parents. It is viewed by teachers as a day that builds awareness of the diversity of cultures represented in the school. According to Mr. Lavelle,

In a way, it’s through our intercultural day that we focus in on each culture - you know various cultures - and see how we can maybe focus on a couple and build it even more to make the whole school community more aware (Interview 1).

Similar to existing Irish research, all of the teachers in the school spoke very positively about the day (Devine, 2009a; Bryan, 2009b; Bryan & Bracken, 2011b). The teachers felt that the Intercultural Day was a good opportunity to reach out to migrant students and their families and to make them feel included in the school. Ms. Cooney states, “We did it because we wanted to recognise the variety of people. . . in the school and just to acknowledge the fact that they’re all integrated in one school.” Ms. Molloy highlights the school’s endeavour to include parents in particular. She states,

I suppose it was just a chance to say, “look we know that you’re here,” you know and “we want to welcome you in and we want to make you feel part of this school and we want to know more about you”. . . So it was, I suppose it was to find out more, to build links with these families. . .

The previous year’s Intercultural Day was the school’s first as it was also the school’s first year having an Intercultural Post-holder – whose principal duty is the organisation of the day. According to Ms. Molloy, organisation of the day began with the convening of a focus group made up of the principal, the Intercultural Post-holder, the Home-School-Community-Liaison co-ordinator and members of the PA. The group brainstormed a number of ideas and possible activities that could take place on the day. Invitations were sent out to parents, which had been translated into the five most commonly spoken languages in the school. Ms. Molloy states,

I suppose we thought even to get a letter in your own language - like so many letters go home from here and we don’t have the facilities to translate every note into five or six languages - but to actually get something that was in Lithuanian, to say, you know, saying “Hello, come in, see your children, see their school, see their classroom and meet other parents” and then we did work with the Parents Association as well (Interview 1).

The students were given considerable freedom in terms of what they wished to perform. Ms. Molloy maintains,

They just, it was what they brought themselves, and some of the teachers did kind of teach things as a whole class and others just kind of said: “this group want to do a dance, this group want to do a song” and there was a performance element to it as well (Interview 1).

The raising of the school's third Green Flag was incorporated into the school's first Intercultural Day in 2010. Details of the day can be found in Appendix T. According to Ms. Molloy, the Committee asked the Traveller students in fifth and sixth classes if they would like to perform but the students declined. Ms. Molloy states, "we got a group of them together and we asked them would they do something or could they think of anything to show you know and none of them were willing" (Interview 1). While the Traveller students did not perform something specific on Traveller culture, they did take part in the other performances that took place during the day. When asked about whether Traveller culture was celebrated, Mr. Mulligan replied, "I don't think it was specifically highlighted and celebrated even though all the Travellers in the school would have participated in it. All the kids participated in it" (Interview 1). Ms. Molloy felt that the Traveller students did not want to perform for a number of reasons, including fear of ridicule or being laughed at, and issues related to mistrust of the school. She states,

I think there's a lot of mistrust maybe between the Travelling community and any kind of authority. . . we would find the children are maybe even a bit secretive about things that go on in their culture. I don't know why that is. I don't know if it's that they think people would laugh at them. I don't know if they think it's not valid.

#### ***5.11.2.1.1 Intercultural Day – A Celebration of Diversity?***

The school manages to avoid some of the criticism levelled at celebratory forms of multiculturalism by also celebrating Irish culture. Rather than focusing solely on the exoticised other, Irish songs were performed and both Irish and migrant

students performed the various songs, poetry, dances etc. However, Irish research suggests that although schools are well intentioned, their attempted “good works” including intercultural days are often at best tokenistic and at worst can further marginalise ethnic minority students by reinforcing their sense of difference and otherness (Bryan, 2009b). In addition, such events can trivialise culture, lead to negative stereotyping and misrepresentations of students’ cultural identities and can abnormalise rather than normalise diversity, a stated aim of intercultural education (Bryan, 2008, 2009b, Devine, 2009a, 2011). Drawing on Goldberg (1994), Bryan (2009) argues that while such days are intended to celebrate and reinforce a sense of belonging, they “also have the effect of entrenching the boundaries between nationals and ‘non-national’ or ‘international students’” (p.306).

Recent Irish research suggests that many Traveller students “felt isolated and humiliated when teachers tried to highlight their culture in class” (Murray, 2010). Similarly, the Nigerian students in Seven Oaks experienced acute embarrassment when they dressed in their cultural costumes for Intercultural Day. Ms. Tuohy states, “. . . the Nigerian children dressed up in their own traditional costume [and] the children laughed. . . ” Moreover, Ms. Jackson’s comments support the contention that such days exoticise and essentialise students’ cultures, “Last year, we actually had an intercultural day and it was really successful. It was really interesting, like the African children came in in their gear and did a dance” (Interview 1).

Ms. Jackson speaks about the continent of Africa as a homogeneous entity. Moreover, her words also suggests an exoticised understanding of Africa – as a continent where culture is synonymous with cultural components such as dance, art, food and music. In this regard, Bryan and Bracken (2011a) suggest that intercultural days and related cultural explorations have “the potential to reinforce Western

exoticized perceptions of the lives of non-Western peoples” (Bryan & Bracken, 2011a, p.230).

Despite these shortcomings, existing research suggests that parents greatly appreciate teachers’ efforts to include students’ cultures in school and classroom practices (Devine, 2009a, 2011; Crozier, 2001). Moreover, according to the local newspaper that reported on the school’s 2011 Intercultural Day, over one thousand people attended the event and every class in the school participated. Thus, while the school’s intercultural day has serious and significant shortcomings, it is arguably very successful in terms of bringing parents into the school, building positive home-school relations and facilitating an enjoyable celebration of cultural diversity for most members of the school community.

### **5.11.3            *Competing Discourses***

When articulating their understandings of what addressing cultural diversity entails, the teachers draw on two competing discourses – a discourse of sameness and get-on-as-normal and a discourse of recognising-and-celebrating-diversity-and-difference. They seem to move in and out of these discourses depending on context. Citing Mama (1995), Grace (2008) contends that, “individuals move back and forth through discourses, taking up different social positions reflecting the varying social contexts and relations they find themselves in” ( p.142). When referring to their own classroom practice, teachers speak in terms of getting on as normal and not wanting to highlight difference. Ms. Hogan states, “I think we just get on as normal. I think if you highlight, unless the child is very nervous or whatever, if they’re willing to get on as normal, I wouldn’t really be highlighting the fact that they’re different”

(Interview 1). Reflecting this, Mr. Mulligan states, “It’s the same treatment for everyone” (Interview 1).

This is supported by classroom observations and by teachers’ schemes of work. In general, teachers teach “the Irish curriculum” – “our role here as teachers is to teach the Irish curriculum” (Ms. Molloy). These articulations suggest that teachers believe that ethnic differences have little influence on students’ experience of schooling. A substantial corpus of academic literature suggests the opposite (Connolly, 1998; Gillborn, 1995; Archer & Francis, 2007; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 1996; May, 1994, 1999; Short & Carrington, 1999; MacNaughton & Davis 2001; Raby, 2004; Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2009; Figueroa, 1999; 2005; McLaren & Torres, 1999; Henze, Lucas, & Scott 1998). The view that students are all the same means that inequitable social structures are ignored and as a result patterns of inequality are reproduced in the school. Getting on “as normal” has serious ramifications for ethnic minority students’ life chances.

However, the teachers also simultaneously draw on a discourse of recognising-and-celebrating-diversity-and-difference. Interestingly, it is the support teachers (HSCL, EAL) who speak at length about the importance of respecting and celebrating diversity and difference at classroom level. For example, Mr. Mulligan, the Home-School-Community-Liaison co-ordinator’s conceptualisation of intercultural education varies considerably from that of the mainstream teachers. He states,

It [intercultural education] means providing a broad and varied curriculum and education where people’s differences, diversities are recognised, celebrated and where people get a chance to talk, discuss, showcase if you

like their own country, their own culture, what's good about their country, the different aspects of their country and culture (Interview 1).

Similarly, the EAL teacher, Ms. Brennan states, "To me it means to give each child in the school a broad understanding of differences that exist throughout the world. . . . that all cultures are welcomed and celebrated in every single classroom" (Interview 1)

In contrast, the mainstream teachers speak about intercultural education in the context of the school's annual Intercultural Day. To them, this recognition and celebration takes place outside the classroom on this specifically designated day. This reflects Devine's (2011) research, which suggests that teachers tend to view intercultural education as a discrete area, and as an "add-on" rather than as a philosophy which should underpin the workings of the whole school environment. In the classroom, the focus is on students' sameness, what they have in common and getting on with the "normal. . . Irish curriculum".

In a similar vein, teachers expound the necessity of inclusion and of respecting all cultural groups, while simultaneously pathologising, stereotyping and expressing racist views about the students and their families. For example, when asked about her understanding of the term racism, the following exchange took place.

Ms. Brennan: When you just say racism to me, I probably think for all the wrong reasons, I think of the Nigerians and they are, above all nationalities in this school, we would have problems with them making comments about children from other different ethnic backgrounds. They can be very sharp and critical in their comments. And that particular culture,

that particular nation to me, in my personal view, if you say racism in Seven Oaks.

AM: Right, and would the Nigerian children themselves experience racism?

Ms. Brennan: Very rarely, no, very, very, very, rarely, because in a lot of cases, the other children would be, maybe, slightly intimidated by them and their parents. Nigerian children are frequently larger than life, colourful with loud personalities, as are their parents. So the other children in the class would be a little bit intimidated by them and it would be very rare that you would have another child taking on a Nigerian.

In her conceptualisation of racism Ms. Brennan pathologises and essentialises Nigerian people and expresses racist and stereotypical views. This clearly underlines the need for the school to devise and implement an antiracism policy.

While Seven Oaks seeks to promote inclusive equitable practice which respects all cultures, the school's Catholic ethos and its concomitant religious education programme presents teachers with some serious challenges.

#### **5.11.4 Faith Formation**

As Seven Oaks is under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Church, it follows the religious programme – Alive-O - which is devised by the Irish Episcopal Commission On Catechetics.



Perhaps one of the key equality issues for those of minority or secular beliefs attending primary. . . schools is the right not to participate in aspects of the life of the school that reflect a particular set of beliefs and practices. The Constitution guarantees the right of any child not to be given inappropriate religious instruction (Lodge & Lynch, 2004, p.50).

According to the Dublin Archdiocese (2011), the Alive-O programme is the only programme approved for use in Irish Catholic Primary Schools. This programme, based exclusively on Catholic doctrine, may be considered “inappropriate” by the parents of students from minority religious backgrounds. As set out in the preface of the *Rules for Primary Schools* (1965) and The Education Act 1998, parents have a constitutional right to withdraw their children from religious instruction which they deem inappropriate (IHRC, 2011). The Education Act 1998 states that students are not required “to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent of the student. . . ” (p.30). The students’ parents therefore have the right to withdraw their children during the teaching of the Alive-O Programme, which the school acknowledges in its Intercultural Policy. It states, “Parents have the right to absent their children from Religious instruction” (Intercultural Policy).

In his speech to the Human Rights Council (2011) on religious exemptions for children from minority backgrounds, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief states,

. . . the possibility of opting out should not be linked to onerous bureaucratic procedures and must never carry with it de jure or de facto penalties. . . . wherever possible, students not participating in religious instruction due to

their different faith should have access to alternative courses provided by the school (as cited in IHRC, 2011, p.92).

The IHRC (2011) reiterate the Rapporteur's comments stating that religious "exemption systems must not be burdensome to parents" (p.92). While the students in Seven Oaks can opt out of religious instruction, no additional religious programme is provided. Moreover, the students must remain in the classroom, unless a parent comes to the school and physically withdraws his/her child. In this regard, Ms. Cooney states,

Children are not forced to take part in religion class but they have to stay in the room unless that parent decides that he/she wants to come in and supervise them themselves. We don't make any arrangements to remove them from the classroom" (Interview 2).

It could therefore be argued that the option to withdraw students is neither practical nor viable for many parents and would be logistically very "burdensome". Moreover, even if the student is withdrawn during the "official" teaching of religion, religious instruction still takes places informally during the school day, specifically the recital of prayers in the morning and evening and before and after lunch breaks. Furthermore, religious instruction receives significantly more curricular time in second and sixth classes, as the students prepare for the Catholic sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation respectively. Students also spend considerable time at the local Catholic Church. However, students from minority religious backgrounds are not expected to attend these church practice sessions; they remain in the school supervised by another teacher. Ms. Molloy states, "in sacrament years

obviously there is a lot of up and down to the church and so they would go somewhere else, go to one of the other classrooms and sit in the back. . . [They] don't have to go to the church. . . .and that's not a big deal.”

Ms. Molloy's contention that it is “not a big deal” is reflective of teachers' attitudes generally. Issues are viewed from the perspective of the majority culture, with little consideration given to the minority cultures in the school. While teachers may not feel that it is “a big deal”, little consideration is given to how the non-Catholic students might feel. It is possible that these students feel excluded and isolated as they watch the majority of their peers leave the classroom in unison and collectively go to church to share a religious experience from which they themselves are excluded by virtue of their religious beliefs.

While the NCCA (2005) states that schools should make “alternative arrangements for those who do not wish to avail of the particular religious education it offers” (p.86) so that “the beliefs and sensibilities of each child are respected” (NCCA, 1999, p.58), no additional resources nor guidance have been provided to schools by the DES. This makes such an endeavour extremely difficult for schools, particularly with regards to student supervision. It is particularly difficult for primary schools specifically at second and sixth class levels, as significant periods of time are needed to prepare students for the sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation. The school's practice in this regard must therefore be interpreted within the context of wider structural failures to provide adequate resources and guidance to primary schools on how to best cater for the needs and rights of non-Catholic students.

For the most part, Seven Oaks interpretation of “alternative arrangements” consists of non-Catholic students remaining in the classroom and being given worksheets while the Catholic students work from the Alive-O Programme, “The children would just be getting on with their worksheet, or whatever, while religion is going on. . . .” (Ms. Cooney). Similarly, Ms. Devlin states, “He just goes down to the toilet when we’re doing the morning prayer and I just give him something else to do when we’re doing the Alive-O.”

However, according to the school, and reflecting previous research conducted by Devine (2011) most parents are satisfied for their children to take part in aspects of the religious lessons taught in the school (Intercultural Policy). When asked about the various prayers which the students say during the day and celebration of saints’ feast days, Ms. Cooney states,

Religion is meant to be for a half an hour each day. It’s a Catholic school; it’s on the timetable for a half an hour each day. We expect the teachers to do a morning prayer and an evening prayer. . . and hopefully a prayer before food and that’s basically it. We observe, say if it’s Christmas, there’s a lot about Christmas, if it’s St. Brigid’s Day we’ll do St. Brigid’s Day crosses, if it’s St. Patrick’s Day we get involved in that, you know? But it’s not other than that.

Ms. Cooney seems to be suggesting that despite the school’s patronage, the school’s approach to religion is quite *laissez-faire*. Ms. Cooney’s comments are supported by classroom observations during data collection. While religious instruction is meant to be delegated two and a half hours of curriculum time a week, despite having spent sixteen days observing in the school, only two religious lessons

were observed. Moreover, the amount of prayers recited very much depended on individual teachers. Research conducted by the IHRC (2011) indicates that observation of the two and half hour suggested time allocation for religion “does not appear to be adhered to in practice” (p.25). Despite its religious ethos, Seven Oaks does not seek to engage non-Catholics in any religious practice, nor does it seeks to proselytise. However, the lack of alternatives provided for non-Catholic students means that not all students in the school receive equal treatment. It is the State rather than the school that is culpable in this regard.

The NCCA (2005) stresses the importance of teachers acquiring knowledge about students’ religious affiliations, emphasising the import of gaining “a basic understanding of how they [students] practise” their respective religions (p.35). Whilst the school requests information regarding students’ religious affiliation (which creed or none), data analysis suggests that it fails to seek adequate details regarding students’ religious and cultural practices. As a result, teachers appear to be unaware of the need to modify certain classroom practices so that they do not disrespect students’ belief systems. This lack of information is compounded by a broader knowledge deficit regarding the basic principles of the main religions represented in the school. As is evident in the following short vignette, this dearth of knowledge and information can sometimes lead to cultural dissonance and cultural misunderstandings.

Replying to a question about whether she feels equipped to deal with the cultural diversity in her class, Ms. Hogan states,

No, not really. Say this boy here [points to an empty chair] is Muslim but there’s different levels like about how far they take it. I don’t really know a

lot, I'd have to say about especially say. . . Indians, Sikhs and all that, like, you know like, some of them can't drink and they can't. . . . I just really don't understand it I suppose. It's my own ignorance (Interview 1).

Referring to an incident which had taken place a few weeks before, Ms. Hogan asserts,

I was giving out jellies a couple of weeks ago, Christmas time and he [a Muslim boy] said "oh I can't have a jelly, my mom won't let me." I didn't know that they're not allowed the gelatine. I didn't realise.

While this student felt confident enough to tell Ms. Hogan that he was not allowed to eat gelatine, another child may have eaten the jelly sweet in an effort to avoid being identified as different or other, and as such, it could have caused serious distress to the child and to the child's parents. A situation, like this is entirely avoidable if teachers engage in dialogue with parents about their cultural and religious traditions and practices.

### **5.12 "A Practical Tolerance?"**

While the school's policy documents and teacher rhetoric promote the importance of "appreciating", "respecting" and "valuing" the cultural diversity present in the school, this respect for diversity discourse does not appear to extend beyond "a practical tolerance" (Blackmore, 2006, p.192). It could be argued that while teachers accept the diversity of cultures present in the school, their lack of engagement with ascertaining information on students' cultural practices, belief systems and values and the lack of alternative arrangements put in place for non-

Catholic students suggests a tolerance rather than a respect for diversity. There appears to be a taken for granted understanding of what it means to respect other cultures, a belief that articulating that the school promotes respect for all cultures is sufficient without problematising its implications for school practice.

### **5.13 Conclusion**

Teacher rhetoric and school policy documents at Seven Oaks highlight the importance of respecting and celebrating diversity and promoting inclusion and intercultural understanding. However, in general, there appears to be a taken for granted assumption that these values will naturally materialise into inclusive practices – as Devine (2011) notes, a belief that “with good intentions, inclusion will happen” (p.77). Moreover, there appears to be a taken for granted understanding of what it means to respect another culture, a belief that articulating that the school promotes respect for all cultures is sufficient without problematising its implications for school practice.

The school’s annual Intercultural Day (believed to celebrate and demonstrate respect for diversity), multi-ethnic classroom composition and parental involvement initiatives (believed to promote inclusion and intercultural understanding) are key features of the school’s intercultural approach. This appears to be the extent of the school’s intercultural endeavours. Reflecting previous research conducted by Devine (2011), there appears to be merely a surface engagement with the complex and multidimensional issues associated with cultural diversity (Devine, 2011). There appears to be a presumption that all groups within the school have equal access to social, economic and cultural capital and an accompanying perception that migrant

students have the same needs as non-migrant students, except, perhaps in the area of English language support. Mr. Mulligan states, “It’s the same treatment for everyone” (Interview 1). In this regard, there is failure to recognise that “power is not exercised through social class alone” and that students may be further marginalised and disadvantaged by their ethnicity, “race” or immigration status.

The existence of racism in the school is downplayed and often denied by teachers; where it is acknowledged, it is believed to exist exclusively on an individual level and as being a problem associated with racialised minorities rather than with the non-migrant Irish students (Bryan, 2009b). There is no recognition or acknowledgement of racism’s existence on a structural level and as a result existing racial hierarchies are reproduced. In this regard, Levine-Rasky (2009), citing Brubaker (2004) states that “power and privilege is sustained by actors’ incapacity to recognise them as such” (p.340).

At the level of classroom practice, the school endeavours to “get on as normal” as much as possible. In this regard, it promotes a “pragmatic sense of multiculturalism” (Connolly, 1998, p.84), seeking to meet ethnic minority students’ basic needs, while concomitantly making them feel welcome. Apart from some ad hoc lessons on “other” cultures, teachers teach the “Irish curriculum” using traditional pedagogic approaches.

While the school’s principal and the teaching staff work extremely hard and are dedicated to their students, the lack of meaningful discussion and debate around issues pertaining to cultural diversity, particularly the area of structural inequity means that the school’s intercultural policy and practice only scratch the surface in



terms of providing a meaningful whole school approach to intercultural education. In this regard, the school needs to work towards developing a strategy that shows recognition of “a respect for difference beyond practical tolerance” (Blackmore, 2006, p.192). Teachers, first and foremost, need to be given the opportunity to engage in identity work and to reflect critically on their personal histories, how they view the world, why they view the world the way they do and how this impacts on how they treat and view the students in their classrooms. Moreover, they need to be given the opportunity to engage in discussion about what respecting and celebrating diversity actually means and how a meaningful interpretation can be operationalised through the school’s policy documents and classroom practices (Blackmore, 2006).

## **Chapter Six: Case Study School Three**

### **Clarepark Primary School**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter explores and critically analyses Clarepark Primary School's approach to intercultural education. It is subdivided into two sections. Section one sets the context, providing an overview of the school followed by a brief delineation of the educational priorities and leadership style of the school's principal, Ms. Healy. School policy and practice and teacher rhetoric will be critically analysed using concepts drawn from critical multicultural theory and discourse theory. Moreover, the impact of the principal's and teachers' actions in mediating the effects of wider social and educational structures will be explored. Fault lines between policy and practice will also be highlighted.

#### **6.2 Section One: Setting the Context**

Clarepark Primary School is a co-educational school under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Church. It has 17 staff members including an administrative principal, eight mainstream teachers, two Learning Support teachers, one Resource teacher, one English as an Additional Language support teacher and one Home-School-Community-Liaison co-ordinator.<sup>59</sup> Ethnic minority students comprise one-quarter of the school's population of approximately 200 students. Of this 25%, students from Poland comprise the biggest group at five percent, followed by students from South-East Asia (4%), Eastern Europe (excluding Poland) (3.5%),

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<sup>59</sup> The teachers who participated in this study were assigned the following pseudonyms: Ms. Dowling, Ms. Clarke, Mr. Goodwin, Mr. Murphy, Ms. Phelan and Ms. Scott.

China (2.25%), Western Europe (2.25%) and students from the countries of Africa (2.25%) (Ms. Healy, Interview 2). The school gained DEIS Band II status in 2006 after a four year campaign led by the school's principal, Ms. Healy.

Built in the early twentieth century and refurbished in the early 1990s, the school's interiors, although dated, have been meticulously repaired and painted in order to make the school as bright and inviting as possible. Framed photographs of many of the school's students on their *Confirmation and First Communion Days* hang on the walls directly inside the school's main door. The walls in the school's main corridor contain framed pieces of artwork created by the students. The notice board directly outside the principal's office is titled "Penmanship Awards" and contains samples of the students' writing. Rosettes are placed on the samples denoting first, second and third place in each of the school's eight classrooms. Another notice board titled "Merit Awards" contains photographs of three children from each classroom, each being rewarded for a different endeavour. These include "wonderful manners", "trying her best", "great participation in class", "excellent behaviour", "outstanding artwork and work ethic" and "trying her best and being mannerly." Other notice boards contain exhibitions of students' work. These include creative writing compositions "Haiku Poetry," history project work "Life in 6<sup>th</sup> Century Early Christian Ireland" and drama project work "The Grumpy Old Man". The notice boards suggest the school's efforts to enhance students' self-esteem and self-confidence by prominently displaying their work and prominently acknowledging the winners of various school awards.

### 6.3 Local Circumstances: An Overview of “Bridgeview”

Clarepark is situated on the periphery of a mixed socio-economic city suburb fictitiously named “Bridgeview”. According to the 2006 Census, people from 41 nationalities live in Bridgeview making up 19% of the suburb’s population (CSO, 2008). The population of Bridgeview is younger in age than the national average and over 50% have been in the area for less than five years. The Census also indicates that the children who live in the area attend over 30 different schools, the majority of which are outside Bridgeview. The majority of these are immigrants who live in rented accommodation in the area. In contrast, the non-migrant Irish population who attend the school tend to live in a socially and economically deprived neighbouring suburb fictitiously called “Rossmount”. Unlike Bridgeview, Rossmount is a relatively “settled” area. The area experiences relatively high levels of unemployment, crime and drug abuse. Ms. Healy states that at the time when the school gained DEIS status, “there would have been a very high concentration of children from areas that were at risk, where there was crime, drugs, high unemployment and we had a big concentration.” However, according to Ms. Healy, the profile of the school has changed somewhat over the last three years, predominantly because a large number of new families have moved into the area. She states,

In the last two to three years, the profile has changed slightly because the school is a parish school and it was a very old community in the parish. The profile has changed . . . because a lot of those old people have passed away and new families have moved in. . . , but it would still be predominantly working class with a scattering of professionals (Interview 1).

#### **6.4 School Ethos – Inclusionary or Exclusionary?**

Recent Irish research illustrates the tensions faced by Catholic primary schools which seek to promote inclusive policies that welcome students of all religious creeds and none while simultaneously safeguarding their Catholic ethos (Devine, 2011). A similar predicament is evident in Clarepark. Ms. Healy highlights the heretofore exclusionary nature of the school's ethos and the action taken by staff to make it more inclusive. She states,

We have reviewed our Ethos Statement actually in the last few months and we have made it a lot more accepting. It was very limited, especially in the area of religion. Very, very strictly, you know? But I think we have made it more opening and welcoming to take account of children coming from abroad (Interview 1).

Notwithstanding this intervention and the staff's best efforts, due to the structural constraints imposed on the school by virtue of its denominational patronage, while the ethos is "more accepting" than it was previously, it continues to privilege Catholic students. Priority continues to be given to Catholic students at enrolment and the school provides religious education which exclusively serves the needs of Catholic students. The school's Ethos Statement states, "The school provides religious education for the pupils in accordance with the doctrines, practices and traditions of the Catholic Church and promotes the formation of pupils in the Catholic Faith." Similarly, the school's Enrolment Policy states,

Section 8 of the Education Act 1998 recognises the role of the patron and safeguards the rights of schools and religious denominations to give priority to children of their particular denomination over children of other

denominations. As Clarepark is a Catholic school under the patronage of the Archdiocese of . . . , priority will be given to children who are Catholic and resident within the Parish boundaries of . . . ’

Inclusion of non-Catholic students at the time of enrolment is contingent upon the availability of space in the school after all Catholic students have been accommodated. In this regard, inclusion at the school is contravened by the school’s Catholic ethos and students do not experience equitable treatment. However, given the constraints under which Clarepark must operate due to the prescribed ethos dictated by its Catholic patron, both the rhetoric of the school’s principal and the language of the school’s Ethos Statement clearly illustrate the school’s attempts to mediate the exclusive and exclusionary nature of its Catholic ethos. The Ethos Statement states,

We provide a pastoral caring approach to all our students regardless of religious belief and seek to develop a sense of community, manifesting itself in a family spirit, care for all, social awareness and an appreciation of the needs of others.

Similarly, the second part of the Ethos Statement seeks to place an emphasis on building a sense of community based on the diversity of students’ “life experiences” rather than their religious affiliations (or none). The Ethos Statement states, “We promote the values of respect, tolerance and understanding among the school community, and we strive to create an atmosphere and environment, where all can learn and benefit from each other’s life experiences.” Moreover, Ms. Healy acknowledges that the school needs to do more to ensure that it is as inclusive and welcoming as possible. She states,

We would mention about inclusion in our SEN [Special Educational Needs] Policy and our admissions policy. But it's not spelled out with regards to newcomer children and again you know it's something that we do have to look at and it has to be looked at. . . But as I said again, we do need to do more.

As previously noted, while the NCCA (2005) states that schools should make “alternative arrangements for those who do not wish to avail of the particular religious education it offers” (p.86) so that “the beliefs and sensibilities of each child are respected” (NCCA, 1999, p.58), no additional resources nor guidance have been provided by the DES. This makes such an endeavour extremely difficult for schools, particularly with regards to student supervision. It is particularly difficult for primary schools specifically at second and sixth class levels, as significant periods of time are needed to prepare students for the Catholic sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation. In Clarepark, non-Catholic students remain in the classroom and complete other written work, while Catholic students receive religious education. In this regard, non-Catholic students receive no ethical, moral or religious education in school. This situation is symptomatic of the failure of the wider education system (including the NCCA) to define and support the implementation of “alternative provision” and/or indeed to persist with a denominational governance structure in the first place. The consequence of these structural constraints is the promotion of somewhat contradictory policies and rhetoric in the school, as it concurrently promotes inclusionary and exclusionary philosophies and practices.

#### ***6.4.1 Vision Statement – Promoting a Traditional Disciplinary School Culture?***

The school seeks to provide its predominantly disadvantaged student body with the highest standard of education possible. It seeks to do so by holding high expectations for its students but also by promoting a more traditional disciplinary school culture which prioritises regulation and hard work. This ethic is clearly illustrated in the opening sentence of the school's Vision Statement, which states, "The highest standards of behaviour, work and effort are expected from each of our pupils." As will be explored in subsequent sections, it is also evident in teacher discourse and school and classroom practice. The dominance of a traditional disciplinary discourse has important implications for pedagogical and curricular practice at the school as dominant discourses influence and are influenced by teachers' practices and teachers have the capacity to exercise considerable power and control over these areas of curriculum and pedagogy. It has similar implications for teacher-student relations. Devine (2000) notes that teacher discourses pertaining to children and childhood "feed into educational practice through the control which is exercised over children's time and space (Pedagogical and Curricular practices), their interaction (Social relations) and their life chances (Evaluation systems)" (p.26). In this context, the following sections explore the influence and implications of a traditional disciplinary discourse on social relations at the school and on students' educational experiences.



## 6.5 School Leadership

According to Blair (2002) “Leadership may not be the sole answer to making schools in general more effective. However, it was found to be the most crucial element in the multi-ethnic context” (p.190). Recent Irish research has documented the unprecedented demands placed on principals in Irish primary schools as they struggle to deal with their ever increasing administrative and organisational workload (Devine, 2011; O’Gorman & Sugrue, 2007; Smyth et al., 2009). Research suggests that these demands are even greater in schools with high numbers of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and students with special educational needs (Leo & Barton, 2006; Devine, 2011). Smyth et al. (2009) and Devine (2011) note that such schools are also considerably more likely to enrol students from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Despite these pressures, student welfare, particularly the welfare of the most vulnerable and marginalised students in the school, remains the priority of Clarepark’s principal, Ms. Healy. She states,

I felt that I could make a difference. When I went to college I was always very interested in disadvantage and that was my elective and what I worked in for 20 years. I suppose I always wanted to help kids who were having it tough.

Prior to taking over as principal of Clarepark ten years ago, Ms. Healy worked with “at risk” students in a socio-economically disadvantaged inner-city area. She asserts,

I was, what was known as a support teacher, not learning support. The role of the support teacher was to work with children who were extremely

marginalised and who were at risk and who were presenting with Emotional and Behavioural Disorders.

She is particularly dedicated to meeting the needs of students who are underprivileged and socio-economically disadvantaged. She is an advocate for the students in the school and works tirelessly to attain resources for and improve the life chances of the students who attend the school. The students are important to her and she makes it her business to know their names, interests and what is going on in their lives outside of school. Every two months, in an effort to encourage higher attendance rates, she organises trips to the cinema for students with full attendance. Ms. Healy's commitment to the students and concern for their wellbeing is noted by Ms. Clarke. She states,

She's aware of what they're interested in and she'll ask them questions about it. . . She'd know the children very well and she'd know what's going on in their lives a lot and, you know, if a child was in trouble, she'd know the background and what was going on behind it. Like, there isn't a sort of blanket "if you do this, this is going to happen to you." She understands that something is going on at home or something else is going on. She's quite fair in the way that she would interact with the children (Interview 2).

#### ***6.5.1 Principal-Teacher Relations - A lack of Personal and Professional Trust?***

Dialogue and reciprocal, co-operative non-hierarchical relationships characterised by professional and personal trust, openness and respect are essential

features of effective principal-teacher relations (Printy, Marks, & Bowers, 2009; Blase & Blase, 1999; Shields, 2004; Blair, 2002). Ms. Healy indicates that she promotes a democratic approach to decision making and policy development in the school. Most teachers acknowledge the collaborative nature of these processes. Ms. Healy states that staff members “are involved in everything - consultation, policy, procedure. They have an input into everything and everything is run by them before it’s circulated” (Interview 2). Many teachers support Ms. Healy’s assertions, for example, Ms. Scott states, “Any policies that are made are done collaboratively; they are. I suppose at a staff meeting people can voice their opinions. You know people are listened to. The structures are there.” Similarly, Ms. Clarke asserts, “It is quite collaborative.” In-school management team meetings take place once a month. In this regard, Ms. Dowling states, “She [the principal] would use the in-school management team. There are five of us. . . and we would meet monthly to discuss school issues and then that would be brought to a staff meeting” (Interview 2). However, some teachers did articulate the view that while the process is collaborative, it is not a “team approach.” Ms. Phelan asserts, “Again on paper, it looks like it would be a team approach, but I don’t think it is” (Interview 2). Similarly, Ms. Scott states, “I suppose at staff meetings, decisions are made, things are changed but it’s not a place where people work as a team. On paper it might, but it doesn’t actually work” (Interview 2). In the same vein, Ms. Dowling’s selection of the word “use” when referring to the principal’s meetings with the in-school management team may suggest a hierarchical relationship and a lack of meaningful collaborative engagement. There is also a sense amongst staff members that Ms. Healy is “involved” to the extent that she accords staff members very little professional freedom. Ms. Dowling states,

She likes to be very well informed about every area. You know like, she likes in a way to micromanage, as in, to be part of everything. Like when she delegates something, she'll be very much involved in what would go on. So she would be very involved I suppose, a very involved principal (Interview 2).

Supporting this assertion, Ms. Clarke asserts, "She's very involved. She likes to sort of know what's going on at every level of the school. . . She knows everything that's going on and she gets involved in everything that's going on" (Interview 2).

Fault lines between democratic rhetoric and democratic practice are evident. In general, the teachers suggest that principal-teacher relations are characterised by a lack of personal and professional trust. This lack of trust may partly explain the principal's desire to be "involved in" but also according to some teachers to control "everything that's going on" in the school. As will be explored in the following section, principal-teacher relations and the culture which such relations engender have a significant impact on teacher-student relations. While complex and at times contradictory, Ms. Healy leadership approach has undoubtedly contributed to the culture in Clarepark. This culture is characterised by discipline, control and regulation and in this regard is an approach congruent with more traditional disciplinarian approaches.

This research draws on a Foucauldian interpretation of power. Power is conceptualised as 'a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity' rather than as a commodity that can be possessed by an individual, group or institution etc (Foucault, 1979, p.26). In this context, all members of the school community have the capacity to exercise power. While some teachers comply with the culture of

control and regulation which permeates the school and actively reproduce it in their classrooms (mainstream teachers: Ms. Dowling, Ms. Clarke, Mr. Goodwin & Mr. Murphy), other teachers actively resist it (Special Educational Needs Team: Ms. Phelan & Ms. Scott). Similarly, as will become evident throughout this chapter both groups of teachers hold radically different views about schooling, about students' rights and about the most appropriate ways of engaging with and interacting with students. In the same vein, the students are not powerless in the face of such control and regulation; rather, they too can exercise power. They do so in a range of ways including the employment of "counter-tactics", which they employ to resist the arguably excessive power which is exercised over them by the some of the teachers in the school (Gallagher, 2008a). Counter-tactics observed during data collection include: talking when the teacher is not looking, not concentrating, flicking water during science experiments, coming late to school, not doing homework etc. Foucault (1984) states: "There always remains the possibilities of resistance, disobedience and oppositional groupings" (as cited in Gallagher, 2008a, p.145). In this context, the following section explores teacher-student relations in the school.

### ***6.5.2 Teacher-Student Relations – A Model of Democratic or Hierarchical Power Relations?***

. . . this "shh shh shh" and this fingers on lips and things like that, it's coming from there [from the principal] (Ms. Phelan, Interview 1).

Reflecting Devine's (2011) contention that principals play an important role in mediating teacher-student interactions and school culture, observations and teacher rhetoric suggest that Ms. Healy's "thinking, talking and doing" (Schmeichel,

2012, p.212) have an important impact on pedagogical relations in the school. While the hierarchical arrangement of most school systems enables teachers to exercise high levels of power and control over students, teachers have the capacity to exercise agency, and, therefore can choose to either emphasise or downplay this power differential (Read, 2008). The gathered data suggests that many teachers in Clarepark elect to emphasise this differential. This emphasis on hierarchical authority and control is evident in teachers' classroom management strategies, pedagogical and language practices, as is demonstrated in the following Field Note and interview abstracts.

Ms. Clarke said to one child who appeared not to be listening "Turn around and listen to the person who is talking. Otherwise get your bag, ring your parents and tell them to take you home." This seems to be a large over-reaction to a child who was not listening. She then threatened the child by saying that if he didn't listen, he couldn't make his First Holy Communion (Field Notes, second Class).

Work is completed in silence and any utterance from a student is followed by a verbal warning. The teacher frequently utters phrases such as: "I can see what you're doing and I'm not impressed", "I'm watching you and you don't seem sick" and "This is your warning, next it will be a yellow card" (Field Notes, fifth class).

Receiving a "Yellow Card" has significant implications for students. It is recorded in the school's "Incident Book" and parents are notified of the incident in writing (Code of Behaviour Policy). The Code of Behaviour Policy notes that "The

child will understand the significance of this card as it will have been explained to her/him at the start of the school year.” Classroom observations are supported by teachers’ assertions. Ms. Scott highlights the culture of silence and regulation which permeates the school, “That bothers me, you know, the silence. . . .going along with the fingers on the lips” (Interview 1). In a related issue, Ms. Phelan, the EAL teacher, suggests that some teachers have a tendency to jump to conclusions and presume students have misbehaved without first giving the students’ the opportunity to explain incidences. She states,

Today I brought back my third class group to Mr. Goodwin and Ralph and Patrik ran up and they were pushing each other and suddenly he’s lambasting seven of them. I said “Mr. Goodwin, I actually asked Ralph and Patrik to come back and they didn’t come back. The other five worked like little Trojans today” (Ms. Phelan).

Similarly, according to Ms. Scott and Ms. Phelan (members of the Special Education Needs Team), the Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) also play a very prominent role in disciplining students. Referencing the way in which students are “directed all the time”, Ms. Scott states, “The role of the ancillary staff in the class I would question, you know, kind of shouting at the kids a lot and ordering them around, telling them what to do” (Interview 1). Similarly, Ms. Phelan states “The way they speak to the children is awful” (Interview 1).

The preservation of this disciplinarian culture requires teachers to exercise high levels of control over students’ time and space and provides little opportunity

for student participation or autonomy (Alderson, 1999; Devine, 2002).<sup>60</sup> In the same vein, students are not given the opportunity to engage in dialogue or explain things from their own perspectives. Despite assertions in the Code of Discipline that students should not be cautioned in front of their peers, classroom observations suggest that students are publicly sanctioned, threats are personalised and students are not afforded due process. Moreover, some teachers report that students' names are arbitrarily entered into the school's "Yard Books" without any effort to engage students in dialogue post school yard incidents. Ms. Phelan states,

No issues are discussed. Issues are not dealt with here at all. Say for example if there is an incident in the yard. They are put in the yard books and they get a rollicking. But there's no talking. There's no getting the two together and saying "okay what happened? What do you want to happen after this?" Just the whole thing of getting them to say, "I want you to stop it." . . . "Now what has he asked you to do? And are you willing to do that?" There's no. . . . Things aren't worked out here. They're not worked out (Ms. Phelan, Interview I).

Ms. Phelan's assertions raise questions about the extent to which some of the teachers in the school demonstrate respect for the students and the extent to which they promote and preserve students' dignity. Ms. Phelan contrasts the way students are treated in Clarepark with the school she formerly worked in. She asserts,

In. . . where I used to work the ethos there was just a whole different way of doing things, because kids talked, kids discussed things. Kids would say,

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<sup>60</sup> This issue will be explored in more detail in section 6.7 Pedagogy: 'In this school it's 90-95% teacher dominated talk.'



“Teacher, I don’t think you were fair there”, you know? What’s wrong with somebody saying that? You know, they should challenge that because that’s what you want them to do in life. Not to sit back and be fools, you know? (Ms. Phelan, Interview 1).

In the same vein, Ms Scott states, “We don’t empower children. . . we don’t empower them to think, to actually question if they think that you’re wrong, that they have the right to say, ‘no I don’t agree, I think you’re actually wrong teacher” (Interview 2). However, not all of the mainstream teachers who participated speak to the students in the same manner. The atmosphere in the Junior Infant classroom is more relaxed than in the other observed classrooms. The teacher, Mr. Murphy, is extremely kind to the students and has a very good rapport with them. In this regard, Ms. Phelan states,

Did you hear about Aaliah? Seemingly, one little boy hit her. But he hit her so hard that she really, really cried. And nobody had seen her crying. And Mr. Murphy and Sarah [the SNA] were very angry and they dealt with it and they said about her not having English and not being able to stand up for herself and. . . all that kind of thing. And the next thing, little Eli said “put her over here, I’ll look after her”. But really, it was lovely. Sometimes, they’ll take her hand and they’ll bring her places. But that’s encouraged in *that* room. It is encouraged in *that* room (Interview 1).

However, while Mr. Murphy has created a warm and welcoming classroom environment, he still exercises a high degree of control over the students. This issue will be discussed in more detail in section 6.7 Pedagogy: “In this school it’s 90-95% teacher dominated talk.”

Student regulation and hierarchical teacher-student relations are features of every school (although the extent to which both are exercised varies considerably). Moreover, many schools fail to institutionalise students' rights to voice and participation. Indeed, Osler and Starkey (2005) contend that most schools "remain essentially authoritarian in their structures and organisation" (p.137). However, it is arguable that in Clarepark the threshold for what is considered behaviour which challenges teacher authority is very low (Read, 2008). Moreover, control and regulation are exercised to the extent that they seriously undermine students' rights.

## **6.6 Section Two: Approach to Intercultural Education**

According to Ms. Healy "Inclusion. . . is not spelled out with regards to newcomer children. . ." (Interview 1). Similarly, Ms. Clarke states "I think there's no sort of 'we going to focus on the children from wherever'" (Interview 1). At present, the school does not have a specific policy which addresses cultural diversity. According to the teachers in the school, this is due to the lack of engagement by the NCCA with primary schools when the IEGs were circulated in 2005. Teachers received no in-service training and schools were neither provided with additional resources nor were they mandated to devise or implement intercultural policies. As a result, other issues perceived to be more important to the school and student body were prioritised with cultural diversity receiving little or no attention. The school's current approach to cultural diversity must be interpreted within this structural context. With regards to the official State policy of Intercultural Education, Ms. Healy asserts, "We don't have a policy on it [intercultural education] and it's not

something that I would have sat down and thought about, but I think it's something that we have to look at" (Interview 1).

With the exception of English language support, according to Ms. Healy, the collective needs of the ethnic minority students in the school have not been considered or reflected upon by the staff nor have ethnic minority students been considered as a group that may have additional needs to their non-migrant Irish peers. However, Ms. Healy acknowledges this oversight and highlights a number of questions which she feels the staff need to consider. She states,

And having that time to sit down and reflect on our practice and reflect on what we are doing for these children. You know, are they really part of the school community? Are they enough a part of the school community? That's, you know, where we should be heading and looking more in-depth (Interview 1).

This heretofore lack of consideration and reflection means that the vast majority of school structures and practices have not been considered from a cultural diversity perspective. In other words, most structures and practices have not been assessed to ascertain the extent to which they promote inclusion or exclusion, are equitable or inequitable or meet or overlook the pastoral and academic needs of ethnic minority students and their families. The lack of agreed procedures particularly in the area of ethnic minority student induction means that these students' initial needs are met "by pure chance" if the EAL teacher, Ms. Phelan happens to "spot" new arrivals.

You know if I was passing by the corridor and Ms. Healy saw me, she would say "Oh Ms. Phelan, there is a new child coming in tomorrow." You know, it

would be that incidental. I take on the role by pure chance that I spot that child. Nobody really informs me' (Ms. Phelan).

Ms. Phelan's assertion about the lack of supportive structures in the school is supported by Ms. Dowling and Mr. Murphy. Ms. Dowling states "There's no policy or set procedure that I know.... There's nothing set in stone" (Interview 1). Similarly, Mr. Murphy asserts, "I wouldn't say that there's any set procedures. There isn't really" (Interview 1).

However, Ms. Dowling does contend that she does "little incidental things" and presumes that the other teachers in school adopt a similar approach. She states,

I would definitely for the child's initial couple of weeks, I would make sure that they have a buddy in the yard so definitely in their first day, I would have a boy and girl to look after him in the yard and to sit them at a table where I would know that there are kids who would be very inclined to include them and help out. Other than little incidental things like that, I'm watching out. I'd say each individual teacher is doing little things like that (Interview 1).

Speaking of a new student that had started in the school the previous week, Ms. Phelan highlights the need for an agreed induction procedure to minimise students' and parents' fears and anxieties and to gain an initial tentative understanding of the students' academic and pastoral needs. Referring to a new Chinese student, she recalls,

Like I didn't know that that new little Chinese boy was coming in. What I would like is if I knew that a new child was coming in that maybe that morning if they could come in here first and I could say 'I'm the English teacher' (Ms. Phelan).

She elaborates,

I'm hyper about their name. I think it is the one thing that they have that we should know properly. . . Maybe ask, is the child reading in Chinese? Or all that kind of thing. You know, just to get a little bit of an inkling, but also to put the parents at ease, that we'll look after them. You know we will look after them.

Ms. Phelan highlights the shortcomings of staff members not having the opportunity to engage in discussion or devise an agreed induction procedure, citing a lack of consciousness with regards to what she perceives to be informed practice.

Now when I went in on Monday morning. . . I made it my business to meet the mom. . . But that was just, nobody knows that I've done that, or that that is the right thing to do, you know? You see. . . it's awful hard when you're new because you come in and you don't want to be seen as "she thinks she knows it all" either, you know. . . so many things are wrong here. Oh my God, you know, so many things are wrong.

In the same vein, there are no agreed procedures for dealing with racist incidents. When asked how incidents are dealt with Mr. Murphy states, "Well I suppose it would probably be brought to the principal" (Interview 1).

While the lack of agreed procedures for dealing with racist incidents and related issues is contrary to informed practice, it is likely that the lack of consideration given to these issues is a consequence of the NCCA's failure to engage with schools on issues pertaining to cultural diversity. As a result, a dialogue rooted in issues pertaining to cultural diversity and its implications for schools never

commenced nor gained momentum in many primary schools. As stated by the teachers, this appears to be the situation in Clarepark.

#### **6.7 Pedagogy: “In this school it’s 90-95% teacher dominated talk.”**

The aforementioned culture of control and regulation which permeates the wider school environment is also present in classroom procedures and practices. The high levels of control exercised by teachers restrict students’ capacity to exercise their rights to voice and participation and are counter to intercultural education principles (Osler & Starkey, 2005). Students are afforded little autonomy and little opportunity to participate and engage in a meaningful way in the classroom. The predominance of textbook based written work and teacher dominated talk means that space is not provided for students to voice their opinions or to draw on and share their prior knowledge and personal experiences. As a result, students are therefore provided with little opportunity to engage in dialogue, critical thinking or critical reflection – key features of intercultural education. Rather, they are expected to work in passive silence. In this regard, Ms. Scott states, “they shouldn’t have to be silent all the time.” This culture of silence can disproportionately affect migrant students with limited English proficiency as classrooms dominated by teacher talk as opposed to student talk are highly incompatible with the oral language rich environments deemed necessary for students’ language acquisition and fluency (NCCA, 1999, 2005).

In addition to the predominance of written activities, when “talk” does take place it is teacher focused: “It’s 90-95% teacher dominated talk” (Ms. Phelan, Interview 1). Writing in the context of democratic practice, Osler & Starkey (2005)

emphasise the importance of creating pedagogical spaces where students can “learn from one another” (p.142). However, the culture of passive listening which pervades most classrooms and the lack of opportunities provided to students to express their views means that this core democratic principle is not realised. The following vignette illustrates the predominance of teacher talk:

After maths, a student arrived in late. She said that she had seen on the news that two boys had killed two younger boys. The teacher cut her off and started to tell the story herself. Rather than taking the opportunity to discuss the issue, once again the teacher said “We’ll talk about it later”. She continued “I’m going to stop this conversation now as we’re way off track. We will continue this conversation later. We need to get back to our Gaeilge” (Field Notes, fifth class).

While there is nothing wrong with telling the students that she would return to the conversation later in the day, and perhaps she intended to continue the conversation in a more reflective forum, the teacher did not return to the issue that day or the next. While this vignette does suggest a predominance of teacher talk and a lack of student talk, it must also be interpreted in the context of severe curricular overload and a desire by the teacher to get through as much work as possible. It is arguable that the need that this teacher feels to postpone this conversation is reflective of wider structural constraints. Teachers are placed under enormous pressure to get the curriculum covered each year. They are also under increasing pressure to ensure that their students attain high marks in State mandated Standardised Tests. Neither of these factors create conditions which foster a dialogic pedagogical approach. Notwithstanding this, the junior infant teacher does not face

the same pressures as the fifth class teacher, yet he also dominates classroom discussion.

Mr. Murphy asked, “Has anyone any news from the weekend?” Any students who had not missed a day in November and December had been at a concert on Saturday night with the principal Ms. Healy. Mr. Gargan reported back to the students that he had been talking to Ms. Healy and that she had said that sixth class had been the best behaved class in the whole school. The children replied in unison “noooooooo!!!” Mr. Murphy replied “sorry, my mistake, she said it was fifth class”. Once again the children replied “noooooooo!!!” This continued until Mr. Gargan got all the way down to Junior Infants. The children were delighted with themselves and grinned from ear to ear. The children who had not been on the trip gave them a Bualadh Bos [clap]. Mr. Gargan said to them encouragingly that maybe everybody could go on the next trip. He explained that it was easy, as all they had to do was come into school every day. The “conversation” about the students’ news ended and the class moved on to maths. Mr. Murphy dominated the “discussion” and no child got to talk about what they did at the weekend (Field Notes, Junior Infants).

Both Ms. Scott and Ms. Phelan maintain that there is a lack of student participation in the school. “There’s not enough talking about. There’s not enough actually giving opinions, listening to opinions, discussing opinions or looking at issues” (Ms. Phelan). In this regard, Ms. Phelan mentions the dearth of encouragement and opportunities provided for students to engage with such issues, “Nobody here in the higher classes looks at a newspaper even. They haven’t a clue what’s going on in the world, what’s going on in Ireland even. There’s no idea about



things like that.” She elaborates, “You’ve got to open a child’s eyes to what’s going on in the world around them. I mean. . . filling in blanks on a worksheet, that’s not education, you know?”

While the relevance of many topics covered to students’ lives is questionable, the teachers assert that when devising their schemes of work, they do take some account of issues that are of interest to their pupils. Ms. Dowling states,

So we’ve decided in nearly every subject what we’re going to cover as a school each year. So I’d consult that mainly. Maybe, secondly, the interests of the children. . . a lot of the time I would follow the texts. . . But mainly the whole school plans (Interview 1).

Similarly, Ms. Clarke asserts, “The curriculum first off and then obviously the kids’ books as well and then if there’s something that particularly interests them or they show a particular interest in or if there’s something that I’m interested in” (Interview 1). Mr. Murphy reports,

Well I suppose first of all the main thing would be the curriculum, making sure that every element of the curriculum is covered. I suppose I work from that to what would be age appropriate for the children. Stuff that would interest them and stuff I suppose that would be hands-on (Mr. Murphy, Interview 1).

As highlighted by Mr. Murphy, and congruent with field notes, the students in junior infants engage in the most hands-on work, playing games and completing sorting activities. However, there is still a very significant emphasis placed on silent seatwork and the teacher’s voice dominates. In the other three classrooms, the games played by the students such as “Tables Champ” and “Sparkles” tend to be

competitive individualised knock-out games where students compete against one another, and the last person left is the winner. Such games which focus on the individual as competitor are counter to the co-operative collaborative approaches promoted by intercultural and human rights education. Teachers can exacerbate this as the following brief extract from field notes illustrates.

The children then played “Sparkles” which most appeared to enjoy. However, the teacher was not very encouraging. She said to one pupil in an irritated voice “you can’t hold up the game every time” as the pupil tried to remember the next letter of the word. The teacher didn’t praise or congratulate any student except the winner. The boy who came second looked deflated and upset as he retook his seat (Field Notes, Second Class).

All teachers engage in some pair work, but this pair work tends to be very controlled and focused. For example, students often work in pairs for a limited time during Irish and maths lessons but the content is textbook based and provides little opportunity for students to engage in the sharing of opinions etc. Similarly, the drama activities which took place during data collection were during Irish lessons and therefore the content was taken directly from the students’ textbooks. Opportunities for creativity and meaningful participation are therefore limited. Similarly, other opportunities for promoting active hands-on methodologies are overlooked in favour of written seatwork, as the following section illustrates.

In an effort to “celebrate” Chinese New Year, the second class teacher compiled a “China Workbook”. This workbook consisted of information on the Chinese calendar, Chinese New Year, a map of China, the Terracotta Warriors, the Chinese Flag, Ancient Chinese clothing, Chinese animals, focus on the Panda, art

work of dragons and Chinese design to be coloured in – all of which was presented in a black and white soft bound workbook. The tasks involved the students’ round robin reading a few pages each day followed by completion of simple activities including filling words and letters into gaps (Field Notes). During the interview process, Ms. Phelan questions Ms. Clarke’s choice of methodology and what she perceived to be Ms. Clarke’s privileging of her own knowledge of Chinese culture ahead of that of a Chinese student or parent. Ms. Phelan states,

You know, how can we talk about Chinese culture and Chinese New Year? None of us have ever been there, none of us have ever seen it. We read about it. *We have* Chinese children here, you know, and the kids, you know it would boost them to know “oh my dad is coming in.”

The privileging of teacher knowledge about other cultures and countries above that of students from those cultures and countries has been noted elsewhere in the Irish context by Bryan and Bracken (2011b). Drawing on her experience of working abroad and reflecting the literature Ms. Phelan highlights the shortcomings of an approach which trivialises, essentialises and reifies cultural groups, often leading to stereotyping and misrepresentations of these groups (Bryan, 2008, 2009b, Devine, 2009a, 2011). Ms. Phelan asserts,

I know that when I was abroad, a child came over to me one day, a beautiful little Pakistani child, on St. Patrick’s Day and pinched me very hard. A beautiful child and I said “Hasan, what are you doing?” “My teacher told me that if you don’t wear green on St. Patrick’s Day I can pinch you. That’s what everyone does in Ireland.” I said “Hasan, if you did that to someone in

Ireland, they'd probably give you a black eye." But that was an American talking about my culture (Interview 1).

The centrality of classroom discipline and the maintenance of control have created a climate which does not support student voice nor does it encourage students to take action. In this regard, Ms. Phelan asserts, "There's no empowerment of children, I think" (Interview 1). Similarly, Ms. Scott states, "we don't empower children. . . we don't empower them to think, to actually question. . . ." (Interview 2). With regards to social action, Ms. Phelan maintains, "We have no action in this school." Indeed, the following vignette highlights one teacher's resistance to student action.

As I unpacked my bag, the class were reciting their morning prayers. Ms. Dowling suggested that they say a prayer for the people in Haiti and she began telling the class about a survivor who was pulled from the rubble the previous night, over a fortnight after the earthquake. Many students tried to say something but the teacher cut them off and said 'We'll talk about it later'. She allowed a few children to speak briefly. One student stated that a neighbouring school had raised €500 and that suggested that the school should do something to help the people of Haiti. The teacher replied half-heartedly "maybe" and then changed the subject (Field Notes, fifth class).

Supporting Osler and Starkey's (2010) contention that student involvement in the making of decisions which affect them has "both symbolic and practical benefits" (p.56), Ms. Phelan, drawing on a children's rights perspective, highlights the importance of student voice and student participation in decision making process in the school. She states,

I think it's very important but it's not happening here. I think it's very important because it's respecting children's rights to make a decision. They have a right to be part of decision and also it's another perspective. We're coming from the controlling perspective and sort of the authority and that and I think it's good to get them into thinking about decisions and looking at different sides of a situation and I just think it's very, very important (Interview 2).

Similarly, Ms. Scott asserts,

They should have more of a say in the planning and I think they shouldn't have to be silent all the time. They should make noise. I'm not talking about being unruly but I think it should be more democratic. . . The children should be spoken to not at (Interview 2).

Conversely, while also agreeing that students should be involved in the decision making process, rather than to empower students and promote their democratic rights, Ms. Clarke asserts that their involvement would be beneficial in terms of enhancing student regulation and control. With regards to whether students should be involved in the decision making, she states,

Yes to a certain extent. Things like rules and sanctions and rewards and things. If they're involved in the decision making of how they work well then they're more likely to actually follow them than if it's something imposed on them. . . If they were involved in the decision about it then they are going to accept it more (Interview 2).

Similarly, Ms. Healy asserts, "Well we have our overall school rules right and at the start of the year, they are discussed and they can make their own of them within the

classroom” (Interview 1). In the same vein, at the junior end of the school, the “Ceannaire” [leader] is in charge of ensuring the students’ line is straight when they are queuing-up and that students do not engage in discussion or unacceptable behaviour while in the line. The students themselves are therefore recruited to maintain discipline, as is evident in the following extract from field notes.

After Mr. Murphy had changed the groups, he asked “What next?” Another child replied “You do the Ceannaire” [leader]. Mr. Murphy brought the new Ceannaire up to the top of the room and gave her a sticker. He then asked her to demonstrate how to be a good Ceannaire. She stood on the top of the line spot with one hand by her side and the other over her lips.

Both Ms. Clarke’s and Ms. Healy’s comments and the above abstract clearly demonstrate how the discourse of student voice can be (mis)appropriated as a disciplinary discourse which further regulates students rather than as a liberating discourse which facilitates student voice and authentic participation. While student involvement in the generation of classroom rules is a noteworthy democratic practice; students and indeed teachers should also engage in discussion on teachers’ responsibilities. Ms. Phelan states, “I feel at the beginning of the year, I feel we should be talking to kids, okay we all have responsibilities; I’m the teacher, what do you think my responsibilities are? You’re a student, what’s your responsibility?” (Interview 1).

Engagement in the type of pedagogy promoted by many of the teachers in Clarepark is not exceptional. Indeed, it reflects previous Irish research which suggests a predominance of didactic teaching methods involving direct teaching and independent seatwork (Waldron et al., 2009; Smyth et al., 2009; Varley et al., 2008).

However, the direct authoritative way in which teachers speak to students combined with the foregrounding of methodologies which seriously constrain students' actions and choices means that students' right to participation, freedom and dignity are seriously contravened (Osler & Starkey, 2005, pp.143-145). Osler and Starkey (2005) contend that, "Despite the CRC [Convention on the Rights of the Child], and the work of many educators committed to democratic learning, the entitlement of all children to an education where their views are taken into consideration (CRC Article 12) and which is based on democratic dialogue is not yet realised" (p.137). In this regard, practice at Clarepark is not an aberration; rather it is reflective of practice in many other schools both in the United Kingdom and in Ireland.

## **6.8 The Curriculum: Incidental Integration of Intercultural Content**

Before exploring the taught curriculum in Clarepark, it is necessary to gain an insight into teachers' understandings of intercultural education. In general, teachers hold the view that intercultural education involves learning about and increasing understanding of other cultures, teaching tolerance and acceptance of difference and increasing students' awareness of the wider world.

I suppose exploring other cultures, mainly through Geography and possibly through religion and maybe certain things like the Chinese New Year if you could work different cultures into different areas of the curriculum. I really think it's good for children, to broaden their minds (Ms. Dowling, Interview 1).

In the same vein, Mr. Murphy states, "It's a life skill really to learn what different people believe in. It's all about acceptance as well and being accepting of different

opinions and different beliefs” (Interview 1). Ms. Healy believes that it relates to the non-migrant student population, while Ms. Clarke believes that it also involves the presence and inclusion of ethnic minority students in the classroom. Ms. Healy asserts, “To me personally, it is about developing understanding among the indigenous population” (Interview 1). While Ms. Clarke maintains that,

It’s kind of two or three different things really. It’s kind of teaching with children from other cultures in the class. It kind of being aware of those cultures you know and incorporating them into the class and it’s teaching them about all different cultures and, kind of, teaching them acceptance and that things are different but that things are the same as well and, sort of seeing, that. It’s kind of to be aware that they are going to come across people that do things differently to them and that that’s perfectly okay (Interview 1).

In addition, the Special Educational Needs Team (SENT) teachers also emphasises the importance of students’ developing the values of empathy, inclusion, mutual respect and open-mindedness.

I would see intercultural education as educating children to be tolerant, to have empathy, to be open-minded and to be balanced in their views and to be able to accept differing views. I would see it as. . . opening kids’ minds and broadening their experiences and things like that. Anything that gets them to think about things that are outside their own box, outside their own experiences, are very important (Ms. Phelan, Interview 1).

It goes to the whole thing of inclusive education. Every child is valued for who they are, where they’re from, whatever they celebrate, how they dress,



how they speak even how their family life can be considered very different to what is considered the norm of family life. I think that it is just mutual respect and understanding and that within the educational system that they are catered for so that you are not doing solely religion like the Catholic religion (Ms. Scott, Interview 1).

While additive gestures such as intercultural content integration are critiqued in the literature for being tokenistic, misrepresenting other cultures, reinforcing ethnic minority groups' sense of otherness and for being ineffective at challenging racism (Bryan, 2008, 2009a; Bryan & Bracken, 2011b) research suggests that such approaches are commonplace in many Irish primary and post-primary schools (Bryan, 2009b, Bryan & Bracken, 2011a, 2011b; Devine, 2011). However, while popular in the Irish context, it is not an approach consciously adopted in Clarepark. Rather, most teachers maintain that they do not intentionally incorporate an intercultural dimension into their teaching and that its inclusion, when it happens is completely incidental. Reflecting this, Ms. Dowling suggests, "It has been incidental. . . I wouldn't regularly plan something" (Interview 1). While Mr. Murphy indicates that while he doesn't incorporate an intercultural dimension into his teaching at present, he is open to doing so. He states, "I don't really. . . it would be good to incorporate it more. I would like to incorporate it more. It's not to say that I haven't been given the opportunity but. . ." (Interview 1). Those who claim to consciously incorporate an intercultural dimension, such as Ms. Clarke states, "I try to incorporate it into English, history and geography. Obviously it's very easy to incorporate it in there, SPHE, kind of, drama as well" (Ms. Clarke, Interview 1).

Ms. Dowling believes that the lack of flexibility afforded to teachers due to the necessity to adhere to the agreed subject school plans may inhibit teachers' capacities to incorporate an intercultural dimension. She states,

Maybe our school planning is a little bit fixed so it doesn't allow as much flexibility. So maybe that could be relooked at. But no, I think if you worked around it, you definitely could and you could choose strand units from the various curricula, like to match up with what you'd like to do. So I think with just a little bit of work, you could adapt it (Interview 1).

As previously stated, the students in Clarepark work from textbooks for most subjects. While the use of textbooks may increase the incorporation of multicultural themes into the taught curriculum, there are many shortcomings to using textbooks, particularly if they are the only source of information provided to students. Recent Irish research suggests that both primary school principals and teachers feel that textbooks fail to reflect the diverse nature of Irish society, with those teaching in schools with higher number of ethnic minority students more likely to be critical than schools with low numbers (Smyth et al., 2009). Most of the teachers in Clarepark state that their students complete project work, drawing information from the internet. While on the one hand, this will provide students with multiple sources, there is no guarantee that the information provided is factually correct or unpartisan. Teachers need to ensure that they provide the students with primary sources where possible and direct them to reputable internet sites.

### ***6.8.1 Focusing on Similarities and Differences***

When discussing issues relating to diversity and difference during the focus group interviews with students, it became evident that teachers tend to frame students' similarities and differences positively. Finn suggests, "Well some people do treat them differently but we're all the same. Like when you look at someone in a different way but we're all the same" (FG1). Similarly, Lisa states, "Everybody is the same so there's no need to pick on people because they're all the same. Just because they're a different colour, they can't just do that cause it's real mean" (FG1). Vera indicates that these issues are discussed in SPHE lessons. She states, "Yeah we do in SPHE. Like when we did it she was like 'It doesn't matter if you're from another country or you have a different religion, everybody is the same'" (FG2). This focus on students' similarities and differences and the need to treat everyone with respect as a means of dealing with incidents of exclusion and racism is also evident in the interviews conducted with teachers. Ms. Clarke states,

And then we've sort of focused on what are the differences between people in the class in SPHE and what would be the things that are the same and that sort of thing. Very much focused on you know there's something the same about everybody. You'll always find something the same about somebody and bullying was something we touched on a lot.

Similar, Ms. Healy states that these issues are regularly discussed during assembly. She asserts,

And at assembly, we would talk about discipline matters, we would always refer to respect, to people's space, and you know that everybody has rights and we have to respect that and it applied to everybody. I mean just because

someone comes from a different culture, you know and teachers would always pick up on if there is any, you know any kind of [lowers voice] thing that could be termed racist behaviour, would pick up on it immediately and deal with it.

Both teachers and students see migrant students “as a resource...to enrich instruction” (Banks, 2007, p.101). Lisa and Finn, for example, state,

If we were studying Georgia and Miss couldn't find a load of information it's good to have Vera there because she could tell us. The same with Bruno out of our class, if we were doing Italy and Miss couldn't find information that she wanted to know about the Leaning Tower of Pisa or something, Bruno could tell us like. It's good having mixtures in the school (Lisa, FG 2).

Last year, Bruno made a project when we were doing Irish because he doesn't do Irish. He was doing a project on the computer and he like showed it to us and it told us all about their food, their traditions and their landmarks . . . it's nice to see other people's ways around different countries and not just our ways (Finn, FG 2).

Similarly, this approach is reflected by Ms. Healy and Mr. Goodwin as the following quotation illustrate.

I know it sounds terrible, but to use them [migrant students] as a resource and the parents as well and to make them more part of the school community. . . the child, or the parents should be brought in to talk about the education system, things that the children can relate to like what's school like in another country, food, what does a child do after school. There are huge huge possibilities to involve them in what's going on here. . . . I think we definitely

have to do that (Ms. Healy, Interview 1).

The main ones are that it gives the other so-called national children a different perspective on the world and that it's not just around their own locality. People from different cultures and countries bring an added sense of perspective and learning to others in their class. I can usually draw on their experience if I'm teaching a lesson that they might have some concrete words to say about where and what they're from. I find it helpful (Mr. Goodwin, Interview 1).

However, despite teachers' assertions, during data collection, only one teacher was observed drawing on the students' cultural knowledge or background.

### **6.8.2 Textbooks: Providing an Intercultural Dimension?**

The literature on intercultural education and related justice oriented fields of study such as democratic and global citizenship education are critical of many of the textbooks used in schools as it is argued that the seemingly neutral textbook privileges the perceived "high status knowledge" of the dominant culture (Beane & Apple, 1999, p.15) and "steers" students "towards certain interpretations, while steering them away from others" (Bryan & Bracken, 2011a, p.46). In this regard, an over-reliance on textbooks significantly restricts students' exposure to multiple knowledge sources and multiple narratives and unduly influences their interpretations of phenomena. Such exposure is an essential feature of intercultural education. According to Parekh (2006), exposure to multiple data sources is essential so that students can "appreciate the complexity of truth and the irreducible

diversity of interpretations without nervously seeking a final answer” (Parekh, 2006, p.229). While a brief analysis of the textbooks used by teachers in Clarepark offers evidence to support Beane and Apple’s and Bryan and Bracken’s assertions, teachers’ use of textbooks in Clarepark actually introduces an intercultural element into their teaching that would arguably be absent if textbooks were not used. However, previous research conducted in the area suggests that the benefits of incorporating a textbook based intercultural or development dimension are questionable (Bryan & Vavrus, 2005; Bryan & Bracken, 2011a, 2011b; Bryan, 2012). While some textbooks may have the capacity to foster critical enquiry, multiple perspectives, social activism and nuanced multilayered understandings of issues pertaining to social and global justice, research suggests that in the main, textbooks present stereotypical, over-simplified, apolitical, decontextualised accounts of these issues which can result in more entrenched feelings of superiority amongst dominant groups and more entrenched feelings of otherness amongst minority groups (Bryan & Vavrus, 2005; Bryan & Bracken, 2011a, 20011b; Bryan, 2012).

While it is beyond the scope of this research to provide a detailed analysis of the textbooks used in the school, a brief examination suggests that the following intercultural and wider development themes are present in the textbooks used by the participating teachers: Identity and Belonging (All about me, family, family tree, 2<sup>nd</sup> class, Poland, 2<sup>nd</sup> class); Similarity and Difference (Poland, 2<sup>nd</sup> class); Discrimination and Equality (Racism, Apartheid, Nelson Mandela, Aung San Suu Kyi, Rosa Parks, Countess Markievicz, 5<sup>th</sup> class); Human Rights and Responsibilities (famine, 3<sup>rd</sup> class; Nelson Mandela, Mary Robinson, Aung San Suu Kyi, Rosa Parks, Countess Markievicz, 5<sup>th</sup> class); Conflict and Conflict Resolution (Apartheid, 5<sup>th</sup> class); Trade and Development (The Banana Story, 5<sup>th</sup> class); Interdependence (Food from other

countries, 2<sup>nd</sup> class); Celebration of Cultural groups, festivals and belief systems (Chinese New Year, 2<sup>nd</sup> class; Christmas, Ramadan & Diwali, 3<sup>rd</sup> class); Exploration of other countries (Poland, The Story of Chocolate, 2<sup>nd</sup> class, Australia, 3<sup>rd</sup> class, The European Community, 5<sup>th</sup> class); Empathy (Hans Christian Anderson, 2<sup>nd</sup> class) etc.

While all textbooks contain some visual images which reflect the diverse nature of Irish society and the “developed” world, the images remain predominately of White people in Westernised clothing. Moreover, in chapters which represent diverse religions, the Catholic religion is privileged over other religions, which in turn are portrayed as exotic and as celebrated by people “different from us.” For example, while the story of “Santa Claus” and Christmas are given three pages at the start of a chapter in the third class history book, Diwali and Ramadan are given one paragraph each (History Quest 3). Moreover, the visual representation (a drawing) of Ramadan is of a group of supposed Muslims celebrating Ramadan in an exotic locale. The image depicts palm trees and an Onion Dome Mosque and suggests that Islam is a religion practised by the Other in other jurisdictions, not something that is practised in Ireland. Moreover, it presents a stereotypical view of Muslims as non-White and suggests that all Muslims wear traditional clothing such as salwar kameez, hijab, kufi etc. A more inclusive representation would include visual representation of Irish Muslims celebrating Ramadan in their own homes.

Visual representations of the “developing” world are presented exclusively in the context of famine, deprivation and suffering or as primitive and backward, for example, the photographs of people from the continent of Africa in the third class history book (History Quest 3). The images depict predominantly women and scantily clad children in make-shift tents, possibly at a refugee camp in one chapter; another chapter presents people getting water from a well. The lack of positive

imagery to balance this portrayal means that such representations present a one-dimensional account of the continent of Africa and suggests that such images epitomise and typify life on the continent. Similarly, the famine pictures are presented in the context of “powered milk” being “sent to places where there is famine or where there has been a disaster, such as an earthquake” (History Quest 3, p.17). However, there is no exploration of the structural reasons why such extremes of poverty exists in parts of these continents and why natural disasters have such catastrophic effects.

Similarly, another chapter in the third class geography book examines famine in “poor countries” (Geography Quest 3, p.23). It states “Most people in Ireland have enough food to eat. However, in some poor countries, people go hungry every day. A famine happens when there is a severe shortage of food” (Geography Quest 3, p.23). Rather than exploring why “some people in Ireland” don’t have enough to eat, the writers choose another country and present a shortage of food as a problem of the “developing” world. Similarly, one of the activities at the end of this chapter is to “Design a poster which will encourage people to donate what they can to the world’s poorest countries,” thereby presenting Irish people as altruistic and benevolent givers and the population of “developing” countries as “burdens for Westerners to carry or as victims in need of our salvation” (Bryan & Bracken, 2011a, p.17). Moreover as argued by Bryan and Bracken (2011a), it suggests that the problems of the “developing” world are one-dimensional and easily solved by charitable donations, and, as such it precludes critical engagement with the structural causes of poverty. Bryan and Bracken (2011a) state that “endorsing ‘quick-fix’ charitable solutions to global poverty, does little to open up any real debate about the very institutions, policies or systems which have created the ‘need’ for aid in the first



instance” (p.16).

In a similar vein, the chapter on Australia in the third class geography textbook presents a photograph of predominantly White people (one Black person and nine White people) in modern clothes while presenting an image of an Aboriginal man in traditional clothing holding a boomerang as if that is what modern day Aboriginal people wear (Geography Quest 3). The visual images and the attending information depict the Aboriginal people in a homogenised, stereotypical exoticised fashion. Moreover, the minimal text provided fails to explore the ramifications of the arrival of White Western settlers on the continent of Australia. While the text states, “At one stage, there were almost one million Aborigines – now there are less than 200 000” (Geography Quest 3, p.66), it fails to explore why there has been such a significant decrease in the Aboriginal population.

Another chapter in the third class geography book presents Columbus’ “discovery” of “a new continent” with no acknowledgement of the Native Indians who had lived on the continent for thousands of years. Similarly, activities involve exploring Columbus’ “discovery” from his perspective and that of his fellow sailors, with no attempt to help students to explore the “discovery” from the perspective of the Native Indians (Geography Quest 3). The chapter’s title is framed as “Christopher Columbus – The Explorer”. It is thus presented from a dominant European perspective only rather than a “New World” minority perspective or from dual perspectives. It could equally legitimately be framed from a minority perspective as “Christopher Columbus – The Invader” or from an enquiry perspective as “Christopher Columbus – Discoverer or Invader?”

### **6.8.3 Tackling Racism**

Reflecting the findings of existing Irish research (Devine, 2005, 2011; Bryan, 2009b, 2012), teachers understood racism to be acts perpetrated against individuals by individuals because of their perceived racial or ethnic differences. Similarly, teachers attributed acts of racism to individual students' ignorance of other cultures and reasoned that learning about cultural difference "could offset. . . some of those problems that may arise" (Ms Dowling, Interview 1). Ms. Dowling states,

I've just noticed some of the children are, through no fault of their own, are not aware of a lot of the differences between cultures and because of that it can just lead to, if you don't do it I think it could lead to problems, like racial problems. So I think if you embrace it in a positive way initially, it could offset you know some of those problems that may arise (Interview 1).

Congruent with dominant narratives in the Irish context, such an analysis locates racism at the level of the individual student and suggests that teaching students about cultural differences will prevent racist incidents (Bryan, 2012). The relegation of racism to the realm of the individual forecloses examination of the role of broader societal structures and related issues of power, privilege and domination (Devine, 2005, 2011; Bryan, 2009b, 2012; Gaine, 1995, Gillborn, 2008). Similar to other Irish and international research, teachers also have a tendency to downplay racism (Devine, 2005, 2011; Smyth et al., 2009; Aveling, 2007; Raby, 2004; King, 2004; Ryan, 2003; Gaine, 1995):

One year. . . a child came from another country, from Africa and there was a little bit of giggling and that kind of thing about him. Maybe I wouldn't use

the word racism. There was a little bit of negativity towards him because of his skin colour. . . (Ms. Dowling, Interview 1).

In addition and in keeping with other Irish research (Devine, 2005; Bryan, 2012) there is a tendency to attribute the cause of “slagging” and “smirking” to individual personalities rather than to racially motivated domination. Ms. Dowling asserts,

Like I haven't come across anything [racist incidents] this year now but there would be a little bit of slagging, well not slagging almost smirking around Aazim and that kind of thing but I don't think it's because of where he's from. It's just him (Interview 1).

Similarly, Ms. Clarke attributes incidents to a clash of personalities. Referring to one of the Polish students in her class, she states, “I'd say it was a personality thing; but there were comments thrown out so I had to kind of address them” (Interview 1). In the same vein, when referring to a Congolese student in her class, she asserts, “I think it's just him in particular, he just draws attention in the most irritating of ways but they're [the other children] very used to him. They've had him since junior infants” (Interview 1).

Previous Irish research conducted by Devine (2005, 2011) notes the tendency in Irish primary schools to implicitly allude to rather than explicitly name racism in Discipline and Anti-Bullying Policies. Similarly, Devine notes that when racism is mentioned it is in these policy documents rather than in separate Antiracism Statements. Reflecting this, racism is not explicitly mentioned in the teacher constructed sections of the school's Behaviour Policy. However, interestingly it is mentioned in the Pupil's Code of Behaviour. Devised by the pupils in third to sixth classes in 2003, the Code includes the identity markers of “colour” and “religion.”

We understand that each of us is different and that we should respect and tolerate those differences. We will not jeer, bully, leave someone out our [sic] hurt them because of their appearance, colour of their skin, religion or because they are different in any way.

The inclusion of colour and religion by the students highlights their awareness of racially motivated acts of exclusion and bullying, but also the salience of such issues in students' lives. Interestingly, this was not something the teachers felt the need to explicitly name, perhaps because of racism's often cited covert and subtle nature (Smyth et al., 2009; Devine et al., 2008; Henze et al., 2000; Connolly & Keenan, 2002). Indeed, the students assert that while there are few racially motivated incidents in the school, that migrant students are more likely "to get picked on" than non-migrant Irish students. This mirrors previous Irish research (Devine et al., 2008; Smyth, Darmody, McGinnity, & Byrne, 2004). The students cite fear of getting in trouble as the principal reason why there are few overt racist incidents in the school. Finn suggests, "They're [bullies] trying to be goody-goody-two-shoes in school by not slagging people but when they get home. . ." (FG1). Supporting this, Vera states,

They [bullies] might feel threatened because the teachers in the school and like the teachers would say "you're going to get detention or get expelled. That's not allowed an' all." But, like, outside of school, they can do whatever they want and they can just like be mean to them and not care what they're going to do (FG2).

Reflecting existing research, Lisa indicates that teachers are often unaware of this teasing and bullying, “They’re [migrant students] more likely to get picked on without the teacher knowing. . .”(FG2). Students attribute the reasons why migrant students are more likely to be “picked on” to their perceived strong work ethic and their desire to do well in school, as the following focus group dialogue illustrates.

**Vera**           Some people think that they’re goody two-shoes, they’re too perfect, too kind and they think they never get in trouble and they’re too good.

**Finn**           Like the teacher’s pet. Some people call them a teacher’s pet.

**Vera**           But you never know, outside of school they might be different.

**Lisa**           It’s not because they’re different. It’s ‘cause they want to concentrate in school and they don’t want to be in trouble.

**Vera**           They want to have a good experience, to have a good job.

**Finn**           A good knowledge. They want to work hard in school so that they can get a good job and do well in college.

**AM**           Is that not very sensible?

**Vera**           Yeah, but the people don’t understand that. They think that you’re not cool and you won’t get a job anyways if you do that [work hard].

**Lisa**           Aazim and Bruno are seven pages away from us in our maths book. They just concentrate all the time. They want the knowledge. They don’t want to be like some people in the class.

**Vera**           They want a good experience.

**Lisa**            They want a good experience. They need it for when they go to college and all that.

**Vera**            To get a job, to be a millionaire.

In addition to being downplayed, racially motivated incidents are sometimes ignored by teachers. Ms. Phelan recounts an incident which took place in one of the classrooms earlier in the day involving a new student from China and two non-migrant Irish students. She states, “The new little Chinese boy knew the answer and he put up his hand and Ms. Dunphy asked him and he pronounced “four” with a Chinese accent. And the little boy [non-migrant Irish] beside me said “four” in a mock Chinese accent, you know imitating him. And I just kind of looked and he knew by my body language that it wasn’t an acceptable thing to do. So then that went on. Now again, I feel the teacher heard that and didn’t you know do anything.” A more detailed account of this incident is available in Appendix W.

While racist incidents may be downplayed by teachers, there is an acknowledgment that the school needs to take more action than telling students to respect each other. Ms. Healy states that she is hoping that the peer mediation programme “SALT” [Stop, Ask, Listen, Talk] will be rolled out in most classes next year.

I think listening, mediation skills. I think the SALT Programme is very good and we are hoping to do it next year with most classes because things happen in the yard and comments are made. If children are given the language and the skills, not to let things escalate. It comes from a lack of respect and a lack of tolerance so I think teaching respect and teaching [inaudible] and hearing

what people are saying and how they feel and the ability to empathise with others (Ms. Healy).

The school's proactive approach in this regard is commendable.

## **6.9 Tackling Educational Disadvantage**

The school operates the *Delivering Equality of Opportunities in Schools* (DEIS) Programme and has done so for the past five years. The DEIS programme provides the school with additional funding, access to the Schools' Completion Programme, a Home-School-Community-Liaison co-ordinator, a lower teacher-student ratio and professional development opportunities for teachers in the teaching of numeracy and literacy. The school uses the additional funding to purchase resources and to help fund the school's Homework Club. Ms. Healy states,

There are kind of two elements to DEIS. There is a financial aspect to it and we get paid between €15,000 and €20,000 a year which is fantastic and we put that into buying resources for the children. . . So we have bought a huge amount of practical material in the area of maths, books. We have spent thousands on books. It has helped us to get Reading Recovery, our reading intervention programme. I just spent €500 on that.

The money is also used to pay for summer courses for students and to provide scholarships for "gifted students."

We have two teachers who run a two week summer course and target maybe 40 or 50 children who would meet the criteria under the DEIS and they would have their course paid for by the school. . . . Again if the child is gifted in

some way, during the summer we would put them, we would ensure that they are doing courses in art or in music or whatever.

Ms. Healy states that the school also has access to the Schools Completion Programme, which she asserts targets children who are “at risk.” She asserts, “So we have criteria for children who are at risk, for example, a child might be from a background of drug abuse, crime, single parents, financially struggling, or who have experienced a loss in the family and are not coping” (Interview 1). This money is used to put these students “into after school projects” such as Homework Club. Finally, the DEIS Programme provides the school with a Home-School-Community-Liaison co-ordinator. As part of the DEIS Programme, schools are required to take steps to build strong home-school links. Research shows that increased parental involvement correlates strongly with academic achievement and with the development of personal characteristics which support achievement such as self-regulation, improved school attendance, more positive attitudes towards school, improved behaviour and higher educational aspirations (Jeynes, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong, & Jones, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002; Zellman & Waterman, 1998). However, according to Ms. Healy, the school is having limited success in this area.

Now I know we have a Home-School-Community-Liaison person [long pause] - but it's not working. Okay. It's not working. And that would have been a resource that would have been absolutely fantastic. It should be used. To include people and make them feel more part of the school (Interview 1).

Similarly, Ms. Clarke reports that while the HSCL co-ordinator has organised a number of events, parental attendance has been lower than expected. She states, “I



know there was one meeting she called where like nobody showed up but that was when she first started. They're kind of getting into it. She does morning classes and groups and things. . . " (Interview 2). Supporting this Ms. Dowling asserts, "Parents are definitely asked on board in the school but I know we often don't get a good response" (Interview 2). Parental involvement is predominantly in the realm of fundraising and volunteering for field trips. Ms. Dowling states, "There's a good Parents Association here and they would organise fundraisers and that sort of thing. They would come in at Christmas and bring the kids to Santa and that kind of thing" (Interview 1). However, a number of parents are also involved more widely in initiatives such as "Maths for Fun" and Paired Reading. Ms. Dowling asserts,

I know that the Home-School-Community-Liaison Officer organises maths games. So for a course of six or eight weeks, parents would come in and do maths games. Then there's paired reading and that happens in senior infants. . . So there's little bits and pieces like that (Interview 1).

Similarly, Mr. Murphy states,

There is. Like there was a cinema trip at the weekend and parents would be. . . You know Ms. Healy went and four parents went with her. You know so they'd be involved in that way. Also parents come in for reading groups. They wouldn't really in junior infants but as they go up the school they'd be different opportunities for them to be involved (Interview 1).

At a structural level, there are no ethnic minority parents involved in the PA or the school's BOM. In this regards, Ms. Healy asserts,

But again, I really think that we are falling down and not doing enough to make the parents, you know, more part of the school community and what's

going on. They always come for meetings, you know, when we call them, they always support the school. And we have their backing one hundred percent. But I really feel, I mean I've said it and I've suggested it. But, I mean, I can't enforce it really, that the teachers would use them as resources. Yes to invite them in to talk about their country and their culture and their language, their school system, how things operate there, their music, food but it hasn't happened (Interview 2).

It may be useful for the school to audit its structures, policies and practices to ensure that they are democratic, equitable and inclusive. It is imperative that the school is a space where *all* parents feel welcome, where parents are given the opportunity to participate in an equal and meaningful way, and where meanings of what parental "involvement" entails are collaboratively constructed and clearly set out in a home-school relations' policy (Crozier & Davies, 2007).

## **6.10 Conclusion**

You know it is one quarter of our school population and we're not in our policies and our thinking, we really are not looking at their needs enough. . . I mean, you know, when you came in. . . it just really hit me. You know, this is an area that we are not reflecting on as part of our planning or you know, to make the lives of these children easier you know and more successful in the school (Ms. Healy, Interview 1).

Despite the diverse nature of the student body in Clarepark, cultural diversity and the educational experiences of ethnic minority students are issues which have received little attention at the school. This lack of recognition has a number of

implications for ethnic minority students. The school's failure to take cultural diversity into account during planning means that its capacity to meet ethnic minority students' pastoral and academic needs is seriously undermined, which in turn has serious implications for students' educational experiences at the school but also their future life chances. However, the school's inaction in this regard, can largely be attributed to wider structural failures, particularly on the part of the NCCA. When the IEGs were introduced by the NCCA in 2005, they were merely posted to schools. Teachers received no in-service training and were not alerted to the significance of the Guidelines or of the importance of promoting an intercultural approach. Teachers were not provided with the opportunity to collectively reflect upon whether the school's structures, policies and practices promote inclusion or exclusion, equity or inequity, silence and passivity or voice and participation. Moreover, they were not given the opportunity to reflect upon their own attitudes and prejudices and whether these attitudes and prejudices influence the ways in which they interact with students. In the same vein, they were not given the opportunity to explore whether their attitudes and prejudices result in the subconscious privileging of some groups of students at the expense of others and in doing so reproduce patterns of educational inequity in the school.

A traditional disciplinarian culture of control and regulation appears to permeate the whole school environment. This mediates and shapes principal-teacher relations and teacher-student relations and is in turn shaped by these relations. This culture is evident in teachers' classroom management strategies, pedagogical and language practices and has serious implications for students. Students are afforded little autonomy and little opportunity to express their opinions, engage in dialogue, co-operative learning or critical thinking and enquiry. Rather, a culture of didactic

teaching and textbook based written work pervades as is illustrated by Ms. Phelan, “I think there’s an ethos in the school of textbooks and today we’re on sixteen, tomorrow we’re on seventeen and the schemes of work are acceptable as that, and coicís a h-aon is textbook pages 6 to 12 and then if we’ve a snow day, there’s a panic because only six to ten was done” (Ms. Phelan, Interview 1). At present, the conditions which the school’s culture engenders are not conducive to the emergence of an effective intercultural approach. According to Ms. Healy, participation in this research study has raised her consciousness of the diverse nature of the student body and the need to revise school policy documents to take account of this diversity. She states,

It’s a wake-up call for me. I mean 25% of our school population are newcomers but yet there is nothing explicit in our policies, in any of our policies about them. . . . You know, are they really part of the school community? Are they enough a part of the school community? (Interview 1).

However, notwithstanding the positive impact that participation in the research project may engender, there is a possibility that an ideology of surface compliance might begin to emerge in the school as an appropriate response to cultural diversity. In this regard, there is a danger that a “weak” multicultural approach may become the schools’ new approach to diversity.

Adopting a Foucauldian perspective, Gallagher (2008b) states that “power manifests its purposes in its effects, not in the conscious intentions of those who exercise it” (p.403). While it may not be intentional, the effects of the principal’s and mainstream teachers’ exercise of power is to undermine and contravene many of

the rights afforded to students under the Convention on the Right of the Child (1989). Moreover, the effects of many of the institutionalised policies of the school, particularly the school's Ethos Statement, is to undermine and contravene the inclusion and equitable treatment of students. The pedagogical approaches and classroom management strategies adopted by teachers deprive students of the opportunity to experience democratic practice and values and realise their democratic rights to respect, dignity, voice and participation. In addition to reflecting on the diverse nature of the school population and the extent to which the school's policies and practices promote genuine recognition and respect for diversity, it may be useful for the school to reflect upon how it can model behaviour that enables students to exercise power and voice and that reflects the rights of students as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

## **Chapter Seven: Synthesis, Assertions and Alternatives**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a synthesis of the research study's most significant findings and advances a justice and rights' informed framework of critical intercultural education which foregrounds the principles of democracy, critical consciousness and equity. Drawing on data from the three case study schools, part one argues that the interrelated variables of power relations, patronage and ethos and school leadership are particularly salient factors in determining the models of intercultural education emerging in Irish primary schools.

Given the significant impact of macro education structures, such as the NCCA, on micro school processes, part two briefly explores the role of the NCCA as a political agency and seeks to present a possible explanation for why the NCCA's IEGs (2005) advance a model of weak multiculturalism. This section also highlights "fault lines" present in the Guidelines.

Drawing on data from the three case study schools, part three explores curricular manifestations of intercultural education. It explores whether teachers' endeavours to include "intercultural" content supports or undermines ethnic minority students' sense of belonging and feelings of inclusion. It also explores representations of the "developing" world.

Critical analysis of the three case study schools and the IEGs (2005) suggests that a re-conceptualisation of intercultural education is necessary in the Irish context if intercultural education is to realise its transformative potential. In this context, the final part of this chapter advances a critical intercultural framework which, if

employed, it will be argued, has the capacity to transform inequitable school power relations, organisational structures, policies and practices.

## **7.2 Part One: Micro School Processes**

The variables of power relations, patronage and ethos and school leadership emerged as particularly salient factors in determining the models of intercultural education emerging in the three case study schools. While all three factors are interrelated, each factor also has separate implications for intercultural education. Given this relationship, factors will be examined separately but also at their intersection in the following section.

While this section focuses on micro school processes, it is important to acknowledge the influence of wider macro structures on all three variables from the outset. Power relations within schools, for example, are undoubtedly influenced by legislation and wider educational discourses. In this regard, power relations in all three schools are influenced by the principal's capacity to exercise greater power than other staff members. Enshrined in legislation, Irish school principals have responsibility for the "direction of the teachers and other staff of the school" (Education Act, 1998, Part V, Section 23, 2a) and a mandate to "carry[ing] out his or her functions under this Act. . . [with] all such powers as are necessary or expedient in that regard" (Education Act, 1998, Part V, Section 23, 3) (Irish Statute Book, 2012). Similarly, all three schools are influenced, for example, by wider educational discourses around parent-school relations. However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore these issues in detail. As a consequence, the following section

focuses specifically on the influence of internal factors on the model of intercultural education emerging in the three case study schools.

### **7.2.1. Power Relations**

The nature of the power relationships which permeate the three case study schools is critical in determining the models of intercultural education emerging in each school as it has important implications for school culture, pedagogy, curriculum and assessment procedures. Foucault (1979) conceptualises power as operating like a network of capillaries, circulating throughout society rather than as a possession of individuals or groups. Conceptualising power as relational, he argues that it is “constantly in tension, in activity” and that human beings are constantly negotiating power relations with each other (1979, p.26). Power operates through discourses or “domains of truth” with all members of the school community contributing to and reproducing them through their everyday practice and interactions (Foucault, 1979). In this regard, when taken up by groups of individuals (e.g. school principals, teachers etc.), discourses have the capacity to become very powerful as they promote and legitimise certain practices (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2009).

Power relationships within schools are influenced by the dominant discourses circulating within the schools. Internally, these discourses shape and are shaped by a range of factors including the patronage and ethos of the school, the personal characteristics and leadership styles of the school principal and the views and actions of teachers and students.



### **7.2.1.1      *Model of Power Relations within Schools***

It is important to acknowledge that the influence of discourses is not absolute. School principals, teachers and students have the capacity to exercise agency. While constrained by dominant discourses and other structures, members of each group individually or collectively can resist the influence of dominant discourses through deploying counter tactics, for example teachers deploying teaching strategies which are incompatible with certain discourses (Gallagher, 2008a). Notwithstanding this, dominant discourses play a key role in shaping power relations in schools and these power relations in turn have important implications for school practice, particularly pedagogical practices. Taking this assertion as a starting point, the following section analyses the exercise of power in the three case study schools, focusing specifically on the influence of dominant discourses and the mediating role of the various members of the school communities, particularly school principals.

The dominant discourses circulating in Rushgreen are reflective of its Educate Together ethos. Discourses of democratic participation, cultural pluralism, social justice, children as active agents and competent social actors, children as citizens and rights' holders pervade the school environment. Reflecting its conservative denominational ethos the dominant discourses circulating in Clarepark focus on control, regulation, the disciplining of students and maintenance of the status quo. Regarding children and childhood, students are constructed in opposition to adults and are conceptualised as being cognitively and emotionally immature and in need to protection (Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2009). This view of children and childhood is also evident in Seven Oaks. However, supported by the teaching staff, the mediating role of the school principal is evident in Seven Oaks. The school's denominational ethos is played down to the extent that it is not mentioned in any

school policy document, nor is it employed at the time of enrolment. Rather the school promotes a more liberal equal opportunities agenda. The key interpretive and mediating role played by the school principal is also evident in Clarepark and Rushgreen. In Rushgreen, the principal extends the liberal Educate Together ethos by endeavouring to promote a model of critical multiculturalism. In Clarepark, the principal adheres to the school's Catholic ethos and this is mentioned in almost all policy documents.

Influenced by the dominant discourses circulating within the schools, the following section examines the model of power relations which dominates in each of the three case study schools and explores the implications of these models for school practice, particularly pedagogy. The model of power relations is examined using the concepts of authority, control and freedom of expression.

Reflecting the dominant discourse of democratic participation which circulates in the school, priority is accorded to tackling undemocratic power relations in Rushgreen. Observations and teacher reports suggest a less hierarchical structure than is the norm in the Irish context, with one teacher stating that there is "no sense of hierarchy" in the school. The principal promotes a model of distributive leadership where teachers are granted provisional authority and professional freedom (May, 1994). The observed teachers in turn appear to reproduce this culture within their own classrooms. Students are actively encouraged to exercise their voice. This is facilitated by the dialogical pedagogical approach promoted by teachers but also through formal democratic organisational structures such as the Student Council.

In contrast, influenced by the dominant discourse of control, regulation and discipline, a more authoritarian model of power relations is evident in Clarepark.

The principal appears to play a key role in perpetuating this model. As one of the teachers asserts “. . . this ‘shh shh shh’ and this fingers on lips and things like that, it’s coming from there [from the principal]” (Ms. Phelan, Interview 1). There is a strong sense of hierarchy in the school and teachers are granted little professional freedom. Where duties are delegated, the principal continues to maintain a strong presence. This model is reflected in the mainstream teachers’ pedagogical approaches particularly their interactions with the students in their classes and the methodological approaches they foreground. Taking full advantage of their adult status, the mainstream teachers exert high levels of control over students’ time and space and provide little opportunity for student participation or autonomy. A more traditional didactic pedagogical approach is foregrounded and students are not given the opportunity to engage in dialogue, critical thinking or critical reflection.

Seven Oaks shares similarities with both Rushgreen and Clarepark with regards to the model of power relations which dominates in the school. Similar to Rushgreen, the principal promotes a model of distributive leadership and teachers are accorded professional freedom. However, understandings of children and childhood are similar to those held by the teachers in Clarepark. The implications for pedagogy include a predominance of didactic teaching methods and the avoidance of perceived “controversial” issues pertaining to social justice. A discourse of childhood immaturity is particularly strong in the school, which has important implications for the taught curriculum.

While in Rushgreen the students are viewed as citizens and competent social actors who possess viewpoints, perspectives and understandings that teachers can learn from, in Clarepark and Seven Oaks, students are predominantly viewed as incompetent “adults-in-the-making” (Waldron, 2006, p.86). In Clarepark and Seven

Oaks students wear a school uniform and address teachers formally as “sir” or “miss”. In contrast, in Rushgreen there is no school uniform and students address teachers by their first names. This is arguably symbolic of the power relations which exist between adults and students in the schools and the sometimes divergent values promoted by secular and religious patrons.

This research suggests that if the conditions which foster effective models of intercultural education are to emerge, democratic power relations are an essential prerequisite. The model of power relations which dominate in schools have far reaching consequences for pedagogy, curriculum and assessment procedures and therefore for all of the most importance process and practices in the school. It has a huge impact on students’ experience of schooling. Democratic power relations form the foundations upon which effective models of intercultural education must be built. Without democratic power relations, models of intercultural education are likely to be ineffective and to merely perpetuate the status quo.

### ***7.2.2 Patronage and Ethos***

The issues of ethos and denominationalism emerged as significant features in determining the model of intercultural education emerging in the three case study schools. As has been stated, school patronage and ethos influence the dominant discourses circulating in schools, which in turn impact the model of power relations which predominates. Democratic participation is one of four key pillars underpinning the ethos of Educate Together schools. It is therefore foregrounded in Rushgreen. This has important implications for the relationships between the various members of the school community in the school but also for pedagogy. A school

which is underpinned by an ethos which foregrounds democracy is more likely to foster democratic power relations and democratic pedagogical approaches.

While a Catholic ethos is not antidemocratic per se, historically, denominational schools have tended to promote more hierarchical models of power relations and more conservative cultures dominated by control, discipline and maintenance of the status quo (Lynch et al., 2012). This in turn has implications for pedagogy as such schools are more likely to promote didactic teaching approaches. More fundamental, however, is the extent to which a denominational ethos includes or excludes and others students who are of different faiths or none. Enshrined in Article 15(2)(d) of the Education Act 1998, schools (denominational and secular) have the right to protect their “characteristic spirit” (Irish Statute Book, 2012). This provision is placed on a statutory footing in section 7(3)(c) of the Equal Status Acts 2000-2008, which permit schools to afford preferential treatment to students who are of the same denomination of the school where “the objective of the school is to provide education in an environment which promotes certain religious values” (Irish Statute Book, 2012). School can therefore exclude students and teachers who are not of the denomination of the school if they can prove that “the refusal is essential to maintain the ethos of the school”. However, the provision in the Equal Status Acts 2000-2008 only applies to religious schools and therefore in itself discriminates against schools under secular patronage. These structural features are antithetical to an intercultural education philosophy. This research suggests that this legislative caveat poses a serious challenge for schools who wish to be inclusive of all students. While Clarepark has tried to make its enrolment policy more inclusive, it retains a Catholic first selection criterion and therefore discriminates against those of other faiths and none. Similarly, denominational schools provide religious instruction

solely in the religion of the denomination. While Seven Oaks does not apply Catholic first criteria at the time of enrolment, religious instruction is provided for Catholic students only. In Clarepark and Seven Oaks, Catholic students are therefore privileged. Their religion is both recognised and affirmed by school practices. This constitutes inequitable treatment and is therefore counter to intercultural ideology. It is therefore arguable that denominationalism is entirely incompatible with intercultural education.

While incompatible, as previously stated, at a micro level the structure of denominational patronage is open to resistance within schools and staff members can enact agency. Practice at Seven Oaks suggests that while some structures can be relatively easily circumvented by staff members - for example, enrolment structures - others can prove more challenging and require more covert resistance -for example, the mandated provision of daily religious education lessons. While constrained by having to provide a Catholic religious education programme, staff members can nonetheless exercise agency. While outwardly a Catholic religious education programme is provided at the school, observations suggests that teachers do not provide the prescribed thirty minutes of religious education a day. Indeed, only two religious education lessons in total were observed during data collection. In this regard, staff are deploying subtle counter-tactics, seizing agentive opportunities and actively resisting the regulatory power of the Catholic hierarchy and the NCCA.

### ***7.2.3 School Leadership***

School leaders play a critical role in shaping school culture. While undoubtedly influenced by the dominant discourses circulating in the school, indeed

the principal plays an important role in shaping these discourses, it is the principal who ultimately acts as mediator, negotiating and navigating the interface between ethos, policy and practice and creating the conditions in which members of the school community interact. The principal's key role in this regard is evident in all three schools. This research also suggests that the principal plays a key role in influencing teacher-student interactions and the pedagogical approaches adopted by teachers. For example, in Rushgreen, the principal promotes a democratic model of leadership, enabling teachers to exercise their voices and take leadership roles at various levels. This is reproduced at classroom level in both interactions between teachers and students and the pedagogical approaches adopted (student dominated dialogical). Similarly, in Clarepark, a climate of personal and professional mistrust and control dominates principal-teacher relations. This is replicated in the classroom in teacher-student interactions and in the pedagogical approach adopted (teacher dominated didactic).

This research also suggests that the personal interests of the principal dominate the educational agenda of each school. In Seven Oaks, the principal is committed to special educational needs and he himself states, "it is on the agenda at every staff meeting" (Interview 1). In Clarepark, the principal is particularly passionate about educational disadvantage and this is the prime concern of the school, with most professional development and funding funnelled into this area. Similarly, in Rushgreen, the need to promote a critical approach – a key desire of the school principal - pervades all school policy documents. However, while the principal plays a significant role here, his/her influence is not absolute and teachers can actively resist the culture and practices being promoted by school principals. As is evident in Clarepark, some teachers (SENT) resist the disciplinarian culture which

permeates the school and instead employ democratic participatory rights respecting pedagogical approaches.

This suggests that in order for an effective model of intercultural education to emerge, it needs to be an area that the principal is passionate about. In Rushgreen the principal is dedicated to promoting a critical multicultural approach. The literature suggests that achieving this requires a transformative leader. Oliver displays many of the characteristics of transformative leaders as will be demonstrated in the following paragraph.

In order to tackle unequal power relations in the school – an essential component of critical multicultural education (May, 1994) - Oliver has endeavoured to create a network of democratising structures. Recognising the relationship between the structures and processes of the school and wider societal structures, he promotes phronesis and praxis as central features of the school's approach to critical multicultural education and works to ensure that policies and practices facilitate equitable outcomes for all students. In the same vein, he promotes an inclusive student centred school culture which works to maximise students' participation, academic achievement and social, cultural and political capital. Taking advantage of the fact that he has "one foot in the dominant structures of power and authority," (Weiner, 2003, p.91), Oliver uses his position to advocate for the rights of marginalised students, to highlight inequity and to challenge the status quo. According to Brown (2004a) "Critical, transformative leaders enter and remain in education not to carry on business as usual but to work for social change and social justice" (p.96). As is evident above and in the manner in which the school is structured, Oliver demonstrates a remarkable commitment to equity and social justice. Rather than accepting the status quo, he actively seeks to change "the way



things are” (Freire, 1972, p.17) in order to enhance the life chances of the students in the school.

### **7.3 Part Two: Macro Education Structures**

Wider education structures have a significant impact on policy formulation and the operationalisation of policy and practice in schools. Constructed by the NCCA (2005), the IEGs are the State’s official policy response to cultural diversity. Given the importance of sociopolitical context, an analysis of the internal politics of the NCCA was presented in chapter one. This analysis highlighted the role of the NCCA as a political agency which operates to perpetuate the status quo rather than a culturally neutral and benign force in education policy generation. It also suggests that the consensualist partnership model promoted by the NCCA privileges sectoral interests and “quick fix” solutions over meaningful reform and structural change (Sugrue & Gleeson, 2004; Gleeson, 2004). It indicates that the steering committee that assisted the NCCA in constructing the Guidelines was dominated by teacher unions, school management representatives and the Church. Both the steering committee’s composition and the NCCA’s unsubstantial approach to reform reinforce existing power relations and maintain the status quo. The IEGs were constructed within this culture by the NCCA and this undoubtedly influenced their nature and scope. In this context, the following section critically explores the IEGs.

#### **7.3.1 *The Intercultural Education Guidelines (IEGs)***

The “minimalist approach” to educational reform evident in many other areas of education policy generation was reproduced in the IEGs. Rather than being

radical and transformative, the Guidelines are cautious and conservative and, as has been argued by others inadequate and detrimental to the cause of equality (Bryan, 2008, 2009a). Notwithstanding the case study schools' lack of engagement with the Guidelines, they represent the State's official policy response to cultural diversity and, in this context, they merit critical analysis. In this regard, the following section addresses the fault lines evident in the Guidelines.

The approach promoted by the IEGs is synonymous with weaker paradigms of multicultural education present in the literature as it privileges inclusion and celebrating diversity over systemic issues of social justice and equity. According to the NCCA (2005), "the key characteristics of intercultural education are derived from the Primary School Curriculum" (p.19). While the Primary School Curriculum promotes many principles compatible with intercultural education, the positioning of the Guidelines within this curricular framework rather than within a social justice framework, such as critical multiculturalism, greatly reduces the Guidelines' capacity to promote educational equity. It also accounts for the Guidelines' weak multicultural status.

Gleeson (2004) notes the lack of engagement with systemic issues in Irish curricular discourse. Unsurprisingly, in this context, the model of intercultural education promoted by the IEGs fails to address systemic issues of power and privilege and inequitable educational outcomes. Intercultural education is conceptualised as an extension of the existing curriculum, which is viewed to be neutral, fair and intercultural rather than "a political movement and process that attempts to secure social justice for historically and presently underserved students" (Gorski, 2006, p.164).

Following a critical analysis of a number of curriculum documents from the Primary School Curriculum (1999), Waldron (2004) concludes that the curriculum fails “to explicate its philosophical underpinnings beyond the superficial” and has “a tendency to ideological weakness” (p. 229). Similarly, the IEGs are ambiguous about key issues such as religious education and completely ignore the inequitable, de-legitimising and exclusionary nature of denominational patronage and its implications for school ethos and enrolment policy. The IEGs fail to give schools any guidance with regards to how schools can respect those who are not of the denomination of the school, for example, there is no mention of religious symbols or iconography or what students should do during religious instruction or morning prayer times etc. nor does it elaborate on the “alternative arrangements” they recommends for students who are not of the denomination of the school. In the same vein, the IEGs fail to advise schools on contentious issues which often require schools to take policy positions, for example, the wearing of veils and headscarves. The failure to address this particular issue was notably short-sighted in the context of the controversy it has engendered in other European countries, particularly France, and the practical challenges it poses for schools in Ireland.<sup>61</sup>

The Guidelines speak in couched terms and generalities about key issues such as tackling racist incidents (referred to as “inappropriate responses to diversity in the classroom”) and fail to delineate other key concepts (“intercultural competence” “an

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<sup>61</sup> This issue was eventually addressed in September 2008 when the then Minister for Education, Batt O’Keeffe T.D. and the then Minister for Integration, Conor Lenihan T.D. issued a joint statement on the matter. However, rather than locating it within a firm legislative framework, both Ministers advocated the continued location of the issue within the subjective parameters of each schools’ school uniform policy. However, they cautioned that the “wearing of clothing in the classroom which obscures a facial view” is not recommended as “such clothing hinders proper communication” (p.5). Maintaining that such a policy position is in breach of the Education Act 1998 and the Equal Status Acts 2000-2008, the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (2010) argues that this policy decision “indirectly discriminates against Muslim children on religious grounds” and “represents a clear example of multiple discrimination as it only affects young women” (p.9).

intercultural perspective” etc.). Teachers are encouraged to help students to “to think critically about the world in which they live” (p.23), but are given no guidance and advice as to how they can do this. Yet several pages are dedicated to relatively superficial issues such as multicultural notice boards and multicultural resources. For the most part, the language used in the Guidelines is overly tentative. For example, when discussing indirect and institutional racism, the Guidelines suggest that schools “may” be guilty of indirect or institutional racism if they engage in certain practices rather than definitively and emphatically stating that schools “are” in fact guilty of indirect or institutional racism. The Guidelines state “When a school prioritises the culture of one ethnic group to the detriment of others it may be guilty of institutional racism” (p.26).

While leadership emerged as one of the most important variables in determining the model of intercultural education emerging in the case study schools, the IEGs make no reference to leadership or the role of school principals in promoting an intercultural approach. Conceptualised as agents of change, school principals have a key role to play in tackling undemocratic power relations, creating systemic opportunities for reflection and dialogue, eliminating institutional barriers to access and equity, and formulating structures and processes which facilitate equitable outcomes for all students.

While the IEGs promote a number of practices compatible with multicultural theory, a failure to foreground social justice and equity and to critically analyse systems of power and privilege means that the model of intercultural education promoted in the IEGs is more likely to maintain than contest educational inequities, as previously suggested by Bryan (2008, 2009a). By failing to engage in sociopolitical critical analysis and thereby failing to challenge the status quo, the

Guidelines function as a hegemonic tool which preserves the dominance of dominant social groups.

#### **7.4 Part Three: Curricular Manifestations of Intercultural Education – A Liberating or Subjugating Force?**

This research raises serious questions about the practice of intercultural education in the Irish context and whether schools' and textbook publishers' endeavours to be more "intercultural" are in fact counterproductive and detrimental to the causes of inclusion, equality and social justice. Moreover, it questions the efficacy of these approaches in supporting ethnic minority students' sense of belonging and inclusion and all students' understandings of the "developing" world. It seeks to explore whether a traditional Irish-Euro-centric curricular approach may in fact be preferable to the weak additive curricular approaches which appear to be endemic in Irish primary schools.

There was evidence of a variety of curricular practices in schools, ranging from the inclusion of content "about" other cultures, to explicit teaching about human rights and social justice to an Irish-Euro-centric curricular approach. Although there is considerable divergence between the schools with regard to intercultural practice, a number of similar issues emerged, which will be addressed below.

#### ***7.4.1 The Role of Intercultural Education in Reinforcing Ethnic Minority Students' Sense of Otherness***

This research suggests that in the two Catholic schools, the specific way in which teachers explored intercultural issues, specifically the Irish-and/or-Catholic-centric narrative adopted had the effect of reinforcing ethnic minority students' sense of otherness. Teachers did so by portraying the Irish-and/or-Catholic way as the norm but also by unintentionally using exclusionary language and in doing so creating an us-them binary between migrant and non-migrant students and Catholic and non-Catholic students within classrooms. The study also indicates teachers' tendencies to privilege their own knowledge about other countries and cultures over the knowledge of the students in their classroom.

#### ***7.4.2 The Role of Intercultural Education in Reinforcing Myths Inimical to the Cause of Equality***

Research across all three schools suggests intercultural education as practised in the Irish context plays an important role in reinforcing myths which perpetuate the status quo, such as myths around the notions of meritocracy, sameness, objectivity and colour blindness. These myths are inimical to the cause of equality as they serve as a potent form of power, gender, class and racial erasure (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). This was particularly evident in Rusghreen. Educate Together's ethical curriculum, which promotes learning about heroes and heroines is particularly culpable in this regard. Sanitised accounts of human rights activists are presented and the notion that anyone can "make it" by working hard is frequently reinforced in

lessons. In all three schools, teachers foreground the notion of sameness and colour-blindness, giving little consideration to the power relationship which structure and stratify society. This results in a lack of critical questioning particularly with regards to structures in the school which perpetuate inequity, for example, organisational structures such as streaming and ability grouping.

#### ***7.4.3 The Role of Intercultural Education in Perpetuating Negative Stereotypes***

This is particularly salient with regards to portrayals of the countries of Africa. This research suggests that teacher narratives portray the continent of Africa as internally homogenous, rural, desolate and poverty stricken. While assisting students to respect and be empathetic towards other cultures is an important aspect of intercultural education, care needs to be taken to avoid overtly simplistic analysis of issues and biased accounts of events. Young (2010) stresses the importance of teachers being aware of “potential misunderstandings, generalisations and assumptions” when teaching about other peoples and places. She argues that “without an understanding of the issues involved, such work can lead to stereotyping of individuals or whole nations and actually serve to promote mistrust and intolerance” (p.220). Thus, well intentioned teachers can unwittingly generate new stereotypes and make students’ existing stereotypes even more entrenched, unless extreme care is taken.

#### ***7.4.4 The Role of Intercultural Education in Promoting Superficial Approaches to Diversity which Undermine Equity and Reinforce the Status Quo***

Perhaps the most detrimental feature of intercultural education as practised in the Irish context is its tendency to ignore the most important issues affecting migrant students, namely, institutionalised poverty and educational inequity. The apolitical decontextualised narrative of weak approaches which foreground positive interpersonal relationships and the promotion of recognition of, respect for and celebration of cultural diversity is detrimental to the causes of social justice and equality as it neglects these key issues. As previously suggested by Bryan (2008), it also forecloses consideration of more radical alternatives which could tackle systemic inequity.

#### ***7.4.5 Textbooks – An Intercultural Resource or Tool which Maintains the Hegemony of Dominant Cultural Groups?***

This research suggests that textbooks are a prominent feature of most lessons in the two Catholic schools which participated in this study. Previous research conducted in the area suggests that the benefits of incorporating a textbook based intercultural or development dimension are questionable (Bryan & Vavrus, 2005; Bryan & Bracken, 2011a, 2011b; Bryan, 2012). While some textbooks may have the capacity to foster critical enquiry, multiple perspectives, social activism and nuanced multilayered understandings of issues pertaining to social and global justice, research suggests that in the main, textbooks present stereotypical, oversimplified, apolitical, decontextualised accounts of these issues which can result in more entrenched feelings of superiority amongst dominant groups and more entrenched feelings of



“otherness” amongst minority groups (Bryan & Vavrus, 2005; Bryan & Bracken, 2011a, 20011b; Bryan, 2012).

This research supports previous research in this regard. It suggests that while textbook publishers have sought to include intercultural content, it is frequently stereotypical, negative, biased and oversimplified. Analysis of selected textbooks suggests a privileging of the identities and ways of life of White people and a privileging of Catholicism over other religions, which are portrayed as different and exotic. It also suggests a portrayal of the so-called “developing” world as either famine stricken and deprived or as primitive and backward. The textbooks tend to adopt over simplified narratives which fail to explore the structural reasons for social inequalities. In this regard, textbooks are not only ineffective as an intercultural resource but, they work to maintain the status quo and notion of White Western dominance and superiority.

#### ***7.4.6 Lack of Criticality***

This research suggests a lack of attention to developing the critical capacities of students in all three schools irrespective of patronage or ethos. Analysis also suggests that in addition to failing to create learning experiences which would facilitate critical discussion, when opportunities do arise, teachers tend to deploy silencing strategies with the aim of curtailing critical discussion. These include telling students that an issue will be revisited later in the day (and then not revisiting it), changing the subject as students begin to express opinions or silencing students with assertions including “everyone is entitled to their own opinion” or “we must respect everyone’s opinion”. The data suggests that teachers often deploy these

strategies out of fear that engaging in critical debate would result in classroom discord or would upset or offend students. However, they also feared that they would not be able to address perceived controversial or “touchy subjects” in a sensitive way. More generally, the data suggests that for most participating teachers, engaging students in critical discussion or debate about topical or controversial issues simply was not considered an important or necessary part of the learning process.

The acritical culture which pervades many of the participating teachers’ classrooms is reflective of broader structural failures in this regard. The NCCA continues to focus on compartmentalised individual subjects rather than on the development of cross-curricular concepts, skills and attitudes, particularly skills in the domain of critical thinking and critical enquiry. This is reflected in teachers’ acritical teaching approaches in the case study schools.

Teachers’ acritical approach is also likely to be a legacy of the dominance of the Catholic Church and a very conservative education system where education was conceptualised as a conduit for transmitting religious beliefs and values rather than for critical enquiry and social transformation (Lynch et al., 2012). It is also the legacy of a wider Irish culture which was suspicious of “intellectual dissent” (Lynch et al., 2012, p.29). Indeed, Lynch et al. (2012) argue that “Irish students were trained to be intellectually acquiescent, especially in relation to social structures and institutions” (p.28). While the skills of criticality receive more attention now than in the past, at least at a rhetorical level, many of the teachers in primary schools are a product of a repressive anti-intellectual education system.

## **7.5 Part Four: Mapping A Way Forward**

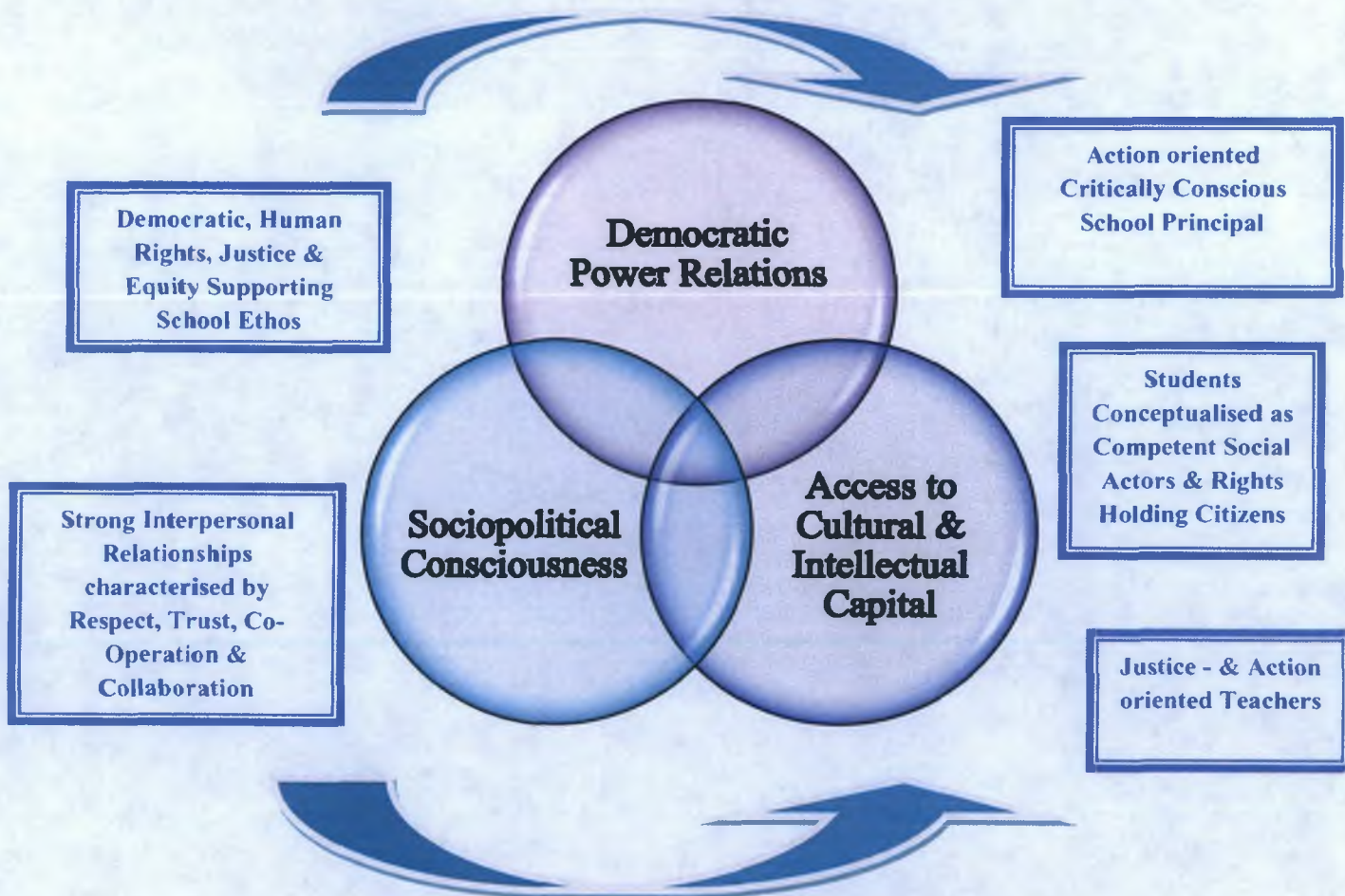
The way in which intercultural education is officially conceptualised in the Irish context is detrimental to the cause of equality and serves to maintain the inequitable status quo. Approaches in schools vary significantly from practices which challenge the way things are and promote equity to practices which oppress and reproduce the status quo and existing power relations.

Analysis of the three case study schools informed by critical multicultural theory suggests that a re-conceptualisation of intercultural education is necessary in the Irish context. The issue of power and power relations has emerged as one of the most important considerations. The literature suggests that a model which combines human agency with critical structural analysis is necessary in this regard. Taking this assertion as a starting point, the following diagram advances an alternative model of critical intercultural education which focuses on tackling asymmetric power relations, raising consciousness about the role of power relations in producing inequities and providing students with the opportunity to develop the cultural and intellectual capital necessary to be academically successful in school and in wider society.

However, a number of other important factors need to be in place if the model is to achieve its transformative potential. These include an ethos which foregrounds the principles of democracy, equity, human rights and social justice and conceptualises students as competent social actors and rights holders; a transformative critically conscious school principal motivated by a desire for social change and social justice; and, a teaching staff which has a strong relationship with the school principal and holds a justice oriented worldview and a commitment to

meeting the needs of all students. Finally, relations in schools need to be characterised by respect, personal and professional trust, co-operation and collaboration.

**Figure 3: A Framework of Critical Intercultural Education**



### 1. Democratic Power Relations

Democratic power relations are an essential prerequisite for the emergence of more critical models of intercultural education as they are necessary to tackle asymmetric power relations. All relationships within the school community – principal-teacher, principal-auxiliary staff, teacher-auxiliary staff, principal-student,

teacher-student, auxiliary staff-student, school-parent – need to be characterised by dialogue, partnership, openness, respect and personal and professional trust. Printy et al. (2009) emphasise the centrality of “reciprocal relationships as the basis of influence, rather than authority, power or exchange-based influence” (p.509). Those with the capacity to exercise the greatest power – school principals – need to model democratic practice and create structures that democratise.

In terms of Principal-teacher relations, the principal needs to promote a non-hierarchical and egalitarian approach to school management where the decision making process is collaborative and democratic and teachers can assume leadership roles in areas where they have interest and expertise. They need to be granted maximum autonomy and professional freedom. In terms of teacher-student relations, similarly, teachers need to promote a non-hierarchical and egalitarian approach to teaching and learning. Teachers need to know his/her students and to draw on his/her prior experience and historical location. An interactive dialogical approach where the teacher acts as a facilitator who constructs knowledge in partnership with students is necessary. Co-operative group work is a particularly effective methodological approach in this regard. However, a wide range of teaching methodologies is necessary to cater for the diversity of needs in the classroom. It is essential that space and opportunities are created which facilitate student voice. While formal organisational structures such as Student Councils are a useful form of participatory fora, it is imperative that rather than being tokenistic, student involvement centres on issues which have a direct impact on their school lives, namely, decisions pertaining to the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment procedures (Beane & Apple, 1999; Osler & Starkey, 2010; Wyness, 2009; Alderson, 1999; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000; Lodge, 2005; MacBeath et al., 2001). Moreover, effective

structured feedback mechanisms (e.g. whole class circle time sessions) are essential so that Student Councils do not become exclusive and exclusionary.

## **2. Sociopolitical Consciousness**

Teachers and students need to be given the opportunity to critically engage with and reflect upon the wider sociocultural, political and economic contexts of their lives. Spaces and opportunities need to be created for both groups to explore the role of power relations in producing inequities, to interrogate and deconstruct universalised mainstream knowledge and to take collective social action in the name of creating a more just society. Developing critical consciousness helps both groups to recognise the socially constructed and stratified nature of society and the oppressive structures and practices which result in differential outcomes for social groups depending on their social positioning. The issue of racism requires particular attention. Students need to be provided with the opportunity to explore the many guises of racism, particularly systemic racism, its ideological underpinnings and how it operates to privilege some while subordinating others. Moreover, spaces and opportunities need to be created where students, particular those from dominant groups, can explore their own perceptions, stereotypes and prejudices, but also their own complicity in the reproduction of racism (through racial apathy and indifference) (Bryan, 2012). Similarly, opportunities need to be provided for students to explore ways of challenging racism and collective action should be encouraged in this regard.

Rather than learning about other cultures, students need to be given the opportunity to explore the political nature of the knowledge construction process, to question whose interests are represented in the curriculum and to trouble the legitimacy of hegemonic knowledge and taken-for-granted universalised “truths”.

Students need to be exposed to multiple knowledge sources and multiple narratives and encouraged to explore all knowledge from multiple perspectives. According to Parekh (2006), exposure to multiple data sources is essential so that students can “appreciate the complexity of truth and the irreducible diversity of interpretations without nervously seeking a final answer” (Parekh, 2006, p.229).

A useful framework which teachers can apply includes the notion of students as critical thinkers and critical enquirers; as ethically committed and as reflective action oriented citizens.

**Table 4: Skills and Attitudes Framework**

Skills & Attitudes	Questions
<p><b>Critical Thinking</b> <i>(scepticism)</i></p>	<p>Is this accurate? Is the source reliable? Is the meaning clear? Does the evidence correspond with the facts?</p>
<p><b>Critical Enquiry</b> <i>(privilege – who benefits? Who misses out?)</i></p>	<p>Who benefits and who misses out if we interpret it in this way? Who benefits and who misses out if we adopt this approach? What are the motivations of the person promoting this view? Will this challenge the status quo?</p>
<p><b>Ethically Committed</b> <i>(dignity, solidarity &amp; empathy)</i></p>	<p>What other perspectives can we view this from? Does this decision respect everyone’s rights? Does this decision respect everyone’s dignity? Is everyone working together? How can we include everyone? Has everyone had the opportunity to contribute?</p>
<p><b>Action Oriented</b> <i>(collective action in the name of creating a more just society)</i></p>	<p>What is the best course of action? How can we try to ensure that this action results in equitable outcomes for all? How can we do things differently next</p>

This framework can also be more widely applied in other wider school initiatives such as policy development.

### **3. Access to Cultural and Intellectual Capital**

One of teachers' principal concerns should be to increase students' cultural and intellectual capital. Bourdieu (1993) describes cultural capital as "a form of knowledge, an internalized code or a cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts" (p.7). In this context, increasing students' cultural and intellectual capital involves having high expectations for students, avoiding inequitable practices such as streaming and ability grouping and providing all students with access to high status knowledge and an "intellectually rigorous curriculum" (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p.23). It is also important to expose students to a varied curriculum and to facilitate outings to important cultural institutions such as art galleries, theatres, museums etc.

### **7.6 Conclusion**

The interrelated variables of power relations, patronage and ethos and school leadership emerged as significant factors in determining the models of intercultural education emerging in the three case study schools. While informed practice was identified in all three schools, contradictory practices were also evident, with some



practice supporting democratic principles while others contravened them. Significantly, this research raises serious questions about the practice of intercultural education in the Irish context and whether schools' and textbook publishers' endeavours to be more "intercultural" are in fact counterproductive and detrimental to the causes of inclusion, equality and social justice. It also highlighted the lack of attention given to developing the critical capacities of students in all three schools irrespective of patronage or ethos. However, the findings from all three schools must be interpreted as being reflective of wider systemic inadequacies. Many are symptomatic of broader failures to legislate and to provide relevant support structures and frameworks which schools can employ so that they can ensure equitable treatment and equitable outcomes for all students.

In this regard, in an effort to address the research findings and the deficiencies of the existing weak model of intercultural education promoted by the State in the NCCA's IEGs (2005), an alternative model of critical intercultural education was presented. This model foregrounds the concepts of democratic power relations, critical consciousness and equity. Democratic power relations are an essential prerequisite for the emergence of more critical models of intercultural education as they are necessary to tackle asymmetric power relations between principal and teachers and teachers and students. Having high expectations for students and increasing their cultural and intellectual capital improves their life chances. Developing critical consciousness gives teachers an understanding of the stratified nature of society and the role of structures in privileging those from dominant groups. In this regard, teachers gain an understanding of the inequity perpetuated by organisational structures such as streaming and ability grouping. Such an understanding also gives teachers a sense that they have the capacity to

effect change and to challenge and transform inequitable school structures. Promoting a framework which foregrounds all three components offers the possibility of providing a more equitable education for all students and equipping them with the skills necessary to be active, informed, justice oriented democratic citizens.

## **Chapter Eight: Conclusion**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This chapter commences with an overview of the research study detailing the key concepts and issues explored in each chapter. This is followed by a return to the research questions as set out in chapter three. An account of the conceptual and theoretical contributions of the study to the field of intercultural education and related equality and justice-oriented fields is then provided. The remainder of the chapter focuses on the study's implications, recommendations and the strategies adopted to enhance the study's quality and reinforce reader confidence. This chapter concludes with an exploration of the study's limitations and makes recommendations for future research in the field.

### **8.2 Overview of the Research Study**

As delineated in chapter one, this research study sought to critically explore how intercultural education is conceptualised and practised by teachers and principals in three case study schools and to explore the dialectical relationship that exists between social structures and teacher and principal agency. It also sought to present a comprehensive and critical analysis of the intercultural policy and practice of three Irish primary schools and to identify the dominant models of intercultural education emerging in the case study schools. Adopting a whole school approach, it sought to explore the interplay of selected variables in mediating the model of ICE emerging in the three schools and to identify the variables which supported and/or undermined the principles of intercultural education, specifically models of critical

intercultural education. Finally, this study sought to inform theoretical and practical knowledge pertaining to intercultural education and advance a framework which may assist schools in promoting a justice and rights informed framework of critical intercultural education which foregrounds democracy, critical consciousness and equity.

Chapter one provided a contextual overview and justification for the study and presented my research questions, philosophical assumptions and theoretical orientations. It concluded by delineating my thesis plan, briefly outlining the structure and content of each chapter. Chapter two presented a critical overview of existing literature, commencing with a critical interrogation of interculturalism as a policy response to culturally diversity. It sought to operationalise and problematise the discourse and practice of intercultural education in general and more specifically, in the Irish context. In doing so, it critically interrogated the ideology and logic of multiculturalism and explored the extent to which models of weak multiculturalism challenge or indeed reinforce the status quo and associated hegemonic systems of power and privilege. Drawing on scholarship from critical pedagogy, antiracist education, critical multicultural theory, critical race theory and transformative leadership theory, it advanced a model of critical multiculturalism which sought to address the deficiencies of weaker approaches, namely their failure to address asymmetric power relations and systemic inequity. It operationalised and problematised this radical and transformative approach and explored its implications for schools, particularly school leadership and the pedagogic and organisational structures of the school.

Chapter three presented the methodological framework employed in answering the research questions. It commenced with a textual and diagrammatical

outline of the research questions, methods and participants. It then outlined the study's conceptual framework and provides a detailed account of the social theories which comprise the study's theoretical framework. This was followed by a detailed account of the research design. The rationale for the selection of interviews, observations, focus groups and document analysis as part of a case study methodology grounded in critical ethnography was discussed in detail. The chapter concluded with an examination of data analysis and data validation procedures.

The study's three case study schools were presented separately in chapters four, five and six. Each chapter commenced with a contextual overview of each school followed by the delineation, interrogation and analysis of policy and practice in the schools through various critical theoretical lenses. Fault lines between policy and practice in all three schools were critically explored.

Chapter seven presented a synthesis of this study's most significant findings and advanced a justice and rights informed framework of critical intercultural education. Findings indicate a predominance of weaker models of intercultural education underpinned by liberal ideology. However, elements of critical multicultural education underpinned by more radical ideologies are also evident. Analysis suggests that the interrelated variables of power relations, patronage and ethos, and school leadership are three of the most important factors in determining the models of intercultural education emerging in Irish primary schools. Findings also indicate that a traditional curricular approach may in fact be preferable to the weak additive curricular approaches which appear to be endemic in Irish primary schools. The data suggests that, while well intentioned, teachers' endeavours to include intercultural content in their lesson plans can sometimes do more to undermine than support migrant students' sense of belonging and feeling of inclusion

and non-migrant students' understandings of the "developing" world. Critical analysis of the IEGs (NCCA, 2005) suggests that while the Guidelines promote a number of practices compatible with liberal interpretations of multicultural theory, a failure to foreground social justice and equity and to critically analyse systems of power and privilege means that the model of intercultural education which the Guidelines promote is more likely to maintain than contest educational inequities, as previously suggested by Bryan (2008, 2009a). This critical analysis coupled with the findings from the three case study schools suggests that a re-conceptualisation of intercultural education is necessary in the Irish context if intercultural education is to realise its transformative potential. Chapter seven concluded by advancing a justice and rights informed framework of critical intercultural education which it is argued has the capacity to transform inequitable school power relations, organisational structures, policies and practices. This presented framework focuses on tackling asymmetric power relations, raising consciousness about the role of power relations in producing inequities and providing students with the opportunity to develop the cultural and intellectual capital necessary to be academically successful in school and in wider society.

An overview of this chapter (eight) was set out in the introductory paragraph.

### **8.3 A Return to the Research Questions**

The following section specifically addresses the research questions as set out in chapter three and summaries the study's key findings.

### ***8.3.1 How is intercultural education conceptualised and practised by teachers and principals?***

Despite the significant difference between policies and practices in the three case study schools, the data suggests that teachers' conceptualisations of intercultural education are broadly similar. In general, across all three schools, teachers conceptualise intercultural education as involving "teaching students about other cultures", "celebrating other cultures", "teaching students from different cultures together" and "teaching students respect for other cultures". In this context, teachers' understandings reflect more liberal conceptualisations of intercultural education, namely, the fostering of positive interpersonal relationships and the promotion of recognition of, respect for and the celebration of cultural diversity. These liberal understanding are also evident in many teachers' classroom practices. While more liberal interpretations promote many important values and practices, they fail to take account of structural inequities and power relations between dominant and subordinate groups and in this regard do little to improve students' future life chances. Moreover, the literature suggests that they frequently misrepresents minority groups' cultures and cultural identities and reinforces negative stereotypes (Bryan, 2008, 2009b, Devine, 2009a, 2011). While rare, however, more radical conceptualisations are also apparent. The principal of Rushgreen, Vincent Flynn adopts and seeks to operationalise a more critical interpretation of intercultural education. Vincent's interpretation focuses on tackling power asymmetries and structural inequities and promoting a praxis-oriented whole school approach to intercultural education. Given his pivotal role as principal, Vincent's interpretation of intercultural education has a significant impact on the school's policies and practices.

The following sections briefly summarise each school's approach to intercultural education.

### *Rushgreen*

Reflecting both the teachers' and the principal's conceptualisations of intercultural education, practice in Rushgreen can be viewed as an amalgam of elements from both liberal and critical interpretations of intercultural education. Congruent with the principal's interpretation of intercultural education, the school's policies and practices promote many elements congruent with critical multicultural theory, particularly at a structural level and in this regard a number of noteworthy informed practices are evident. Tackling undemocratic power relations (e.g. through the promotion of a dialogical approach & formal structures such as the Student Council), creating systemic opportunities for reflection and dialogue (e.g. a praxis-oriented approach to policy development, an internal WSE each year), eliminating institutional barriers to access and equity (e.g. streaming and ability grouping), and formulating structures and processes that promote equity and facilitate students' academic success in the school (e.g. team teaching, off-campus fieldwork) are cornerstones of the school's approach to critical multiculturalism. At classroom level, congruent with the teachers' views of intercultural education, both the taught curriculum (e.g. focus on the celebration of diversity, social justice, human rights and citizenship education) and observed pedagogical approaches promote practices (e.g. participative methodologies, a dialogical approach) and values central to liberal education: children's rights, citizenship, democracy, equality of opportunity and respect, open-mindedness and the celebration of diversity (Halstead, 2005, pp.112-118). With regards to the provision of religious and ethical education, all students receive instruction based on Educate Together's "Learn Together" ethical



curriculum. While the aforementioned classroom practices are important examples of informed practice, when analysed from a more critical perspective, a number of shortcomings are apparent. Counter to critical multiculturalism, knowledge in classrooms is accepted as neutral and apolitical and teachers do not seek to help students develop critical consciousness, nor do they seek to help students to understand how power influences their lives and shapes their identities or to question what social groups benefit from the propagation of current knowledge systems and the maintenance of the status quo. When analysed holistically, however, and within the context in which the school is operating, notwithstanding the need for a more critical approach with regards to aspects of its practice, the school promotes values central to intercultural education, democratic practice, children's rights, equity, social justice, critical reflection (at teacher level) and intercultural dialogue. It is a school "where participation is encouraged, where views can be expressed openly and discussed, where there is freedom of expression for pupils and teachers, where there is fairness and justice" (Council of Europe, 1985 as cited in Carter & Osler, 2000, p.339). Moreover, the data attests to the school's willingness to engage in critical reflection and to modify practice accordingly. In this context, the school has the capacity to continue to critically engage with its critical multicultural approach and to in time adopt more critical pedagogical and curricular approaches.

### *Seven Oaks*

Policy and practice at Seven Oaks reflects a more liberal interpretation of intercultural education. Respecting and celebrating diversity and promoting inclusion, intercultural understanding and equality of educational opportunity are key aspects of the school's intercultural education policy. The school's annual

Intercultural Day (believed to celebrate and demonstrate respect for diversity) and parental involvement initiatives (believed to promote inclusion and intercultural understanding) are key features of the school's intercultural approach. The school has also devised an intercultural education policy and has an intercultural post-holder. The IC post-holder liaises with and supports both ethnic minority students and their parents. She also organises the school's annual Intercultural Day. The school promotes a "human relations" approach to intercultural education (Grant & Sleeter, 1994). This approach prioritises student welfare and inclusion. The school promotes a number of initiatives to try to include parents and to increase their involvement in their children's education. These initiatives include Adult Education courses, a "Parents' Suggestion Box", a Parents' Notice Board and a Parents' Room. It also promotes an open door policy and endeavours to involve parents in policy development. At classroom level, intercultural content is incorporated into the curriculum, predominantly in the form of learning about other cultures and countries.

Similar to Rushgreen, however, teachers' approaches are acritical and apolitical. With regards to the provision of religious and ethical education, Catholic students receive instruction based on the "Alive-O" religious education curriculum. However, due to lack of resources, there is no provision made for non-Catholic students. They engage in other work while the Alive-O programme is being taught to the Catholic students. Catholic students are therefore privileged. Despite its Catholic patronage, the school does not operate a Catholic-first enrolment policy. Rather it accepts all students and in this regard promotes equitable treatment for all of its prospective students. While the school's principal and the teaching staff work extremely hard and are dedicated to their students, the data indicates that there is a lack of meaningful discussion and debate around issues pertaining to cultural

diversity, particularly the area of structural inequity. As a consequence, the school's intercultural policy and practice only scratch the surface in terms of providing a meaningful whole school approach to intercultural education. In this regard, the school would greatly benefit from the provision of intercultural in-service training for staff members and from engaging in policy development which shows recognition of "a respect for difference beyond practical tolerance" (Blackmore, 2006, p.192). Notwithstanding the shortcomings of aspects of its approach, the school is making a concerted effort to include and show respect for its multicultural student population. Its endeavours to promote inclusion, particularly the inclusion of ethnic minority parents is particularly commendable.

### *Clarepark*

Clarepark seeks to provide its predominantly disadvantaged student body with the highest standard of education possible. Despite the diverse nature of its student body, however, intercultural education has heretofore received little attention at the school. While the principal's and teachers' understandings of intercultural education are similar to those held by the teachers in the other case study schools, unlike the other schools, these understanding have not been embedded in the school's policy documents or for the most part in teachers' classroom practices. Teachers state that they do not intentionally incorporate an intercultural dimension into their teaching. Rather they maintain that at a content level, its inclusion is incidental and forms part of the taught curriculum only when it appears in textbooks or following a yard or classroom incident when issues of respect or prejudice need to be addressed. Students are afforded little autonomy and little opportunity to express their opinions, engage in dialogue, co-operative learning or critical thinking and enquiry. Rather, a culture of didactic teaching and textbook based written work pervades. There is little

consideration of children's rights, particularly participation rights and children's right to be treated with dignity and respect is frequently undermined. With regards to the provision of religious and ethical education, similar to Seven Oaks, Catholic students receive instruction based on the "Alive-O" religious education curriculum and due to lack of resources, there is no provision made for non-Catholic students. However, unlike Seven Oaks, the school's enrolment policy gives priority to Catholic students. Such practice privileges Catholic students and therefore promotes inequity. Many of the structures and practices evident in the school are incompatible with the principles of intercultural education. Part of this may be a consequence of the school's lack of engagement with issues pertaining to cultural diversity and intercultural education. According to the school's principal, participation in this research study has raised her consciousness of the diverse nature of the student body and the need to revise school policy documents to take account of this diversity. In this regard, it is possible that in future the school's policies and practices will take account of and work towards respecting the diverse composition of the school's student population.

While teachers' understandings of intercultural education across the three schools are broadly similar, there is a significant divergence between these conceptualisations and practice on the ground in each school. This appears to be in part related to how intercultural education is conceptualised by each school's principal as there appears to be a correlation between how each principal conceptualises intercultural education and how it is manifested in policy and practice in each school. In Seven Oaks, for example, Mr. Lavelle conceptualisation of intercultural education focused on the need for inclusion and the need to celebrate

cultural diversity and this is reflected in the school's approach. Similarly, in Rushgreen, Oliver's critical understanding of intercultural education is reflected in the school's endeavours to promote a critical multicultural approach. In the same vein, in Clarepark, Ms. Healy's understanding of intercultural education focuses on the need for non-migrant students to develop tolerance and understanding of ethnic minority groups and this is reflected in the school's approach.

Analysis of all three schools indicates a predominance of weaker models of intercultural education underpinned by liberal ideology. These models focus on fostering positive interpersonal relationships, inclusion and the promotion of recognition of, respect for and celebration of cultural diversity. However, elements of critical multicultural education underpinned by more radical ideologies are also evident, particularly in Rushgreen. Rushgreen is a unique school and is to be commended for its efforts to tackle undemocratic power relations, to create systemic opportunities for reflection and dialogue, to eliminate institutional barriers to access and equity, and to formulate structures and processes that promote equity and facilitate students' academic success in the school. It provides a real life concrete example of both the challenges schools face when trying to translate critical multicultural theory into practice and for the most part, how these challenges can be mediated and overcome. However, it also raises important questions about the accessibility of critical multicultural theory to teachers and the practicalities of implementing a critical multicultural approach in real schools.

***8.3.2 To what extent do selected variables (leadership, ethos, culture, curricula, pedagogy, attitudes and relations) determine and support emerging models of intercultural education in the schools?***

While recognising the need to conceptualise intercultural education as a whole school process and schools themselves as holistic entities, some variables (primary variables) appear to be more significant than others (secondary variables) in determining the models of intercultural education emerging in the three case study schools. These primary variables include, power relations, patronage and ethos and school leadership. However, these primary variables are directly related to and have significant implications for secondary variables such as the curriculum and pedagogical approaches.

Analysis of all three schools indicates that the nature of the power relationships which permeate each school is critical in determining each school's model of intercultural education. This is in part due to the impact of power relationships on school culture, pedagogical approaches and the curriculum, as is evident in Rushgreen and Clarepark in particular. Rushgreen seeks to promote a model of power relations characterised by democratic participation. This is reflected in both the principal's (e.g. distributed leadership, provision authority, professional freedom for teachers) and teachers' practices (e.g. a dialogical pedagogical approach, Student Council). In contrast, Clarepark seeks to promote the importance of hierarchy, regulation and discipline. This is also reflected in both the principal's (e.g. a more authoritarian approach to school leadership, lack of professional freedom for teachers) and teachers' practices (e.g. didactic teacher-centred pedagogical approaches). There is a serious tension between such practice and the principles of intercultural education. The literature and data from this study suggests

that democratic power relations form the foundations upon which effective models of intercultural education must be built. Without democratic power relations, models of intercultural education are likely to be ineffective and to merely perpetuate the status quo.

While acknowledging that all members of the school community have the capacity to exercise power and enact agency, this research suggest that school principals play a very significant role in shaping the models of intercultural education in Irish primary schools. The research indicates that in addition to principals' passions dominating school agendas, principals' conceptualisations of intercultural education most closely reflect the models of intercultural education apparent in each school. It suggests that principals play a key role in influencing teacher-student interactions and the pedagogical approaches adopted by teachers. However, principals are not operating in a vacuum and although they can exercise agency, their actions are influenced and constrained by the school's patronage model and ethos.

The issue of patronage and ethos emerged as another significant feature in determining the model of intercultural education emerging in the three case study schools. As has been stated, school patronage and ethos influence the dominant discourses circulating in schools, which in turn impact the model of power relations and pedagogical approaches. However, patronage and ethos have important implications for enrolment policies and the taught curriculum. Legislation such as Article 15(2)(d) of the Education Act 1998 and section 7(3)(c) of the Equal Status Acts 2000-2008 permit schools to afford preferential treatment to students who are of the same denomination of the school where "the objective of the school is to provide education in an environment which promotes certain religious values" (Irish Statute

Book, 2012). School can therefore exclude students and teachers who are not of the denomination of the school if they can prove that “the refusal is essential to maintain the ethos of the school”. These structural features are antithetical to an intercultural education philosophy. These features facilitate the promotion of privilege and inequity and fail to respect the human rights and philosophical convictions of children and parents from secular or humanist perspectives. They therefore greatly undermine school’s endeavours to promote principles central to intercultural education, such as inclusion, equality, human rights and social justice.

All of the selected variables therefore play a role in determining and shaping the models of intercultural education emerging in each of the primary schools. However, wider structural issues relating to power relations, school leadership and patronage and ethos have the most significant impact. These key issues will be addressed in the recommendations section of this chapter.

#### **8.4 Contribution of the Study to the Field of Intercultural Education and Related Equality and Justice Oriented Fields**

This research study contributes to academic scholarship in a number of ways. It presents a critical analysis of how teachers and principals conceptualise and practise intercultural education on the ground by examining the whole school environments of three Irish primary schools. In so doing, it demonstrates the key role of power relations, school leadership, and ethos in determining the model of intercultural education emerging in the three case study schools. It underlines the consequences of failing to challenge taken for granted assumptions about perceived equitable and democratic process and practices and highlights the capacity of



teachers and principals to enact agency and effect transformative change. It provides theoretical and practical insights into the promotion of more critical approaches to intercultural education and presents an alternative model of critical multicultural education which foregrounds democratic power relations, critical consciousness and educational equity.

## **8.5 Implications and Recommendations**

The following section addresses the study's implications and recommendations.

### ***8.5.1 The Need to dismantle Inequitable Structures and to Provide Rights' Respecting Alternatives***

While denominational patronage and denominational education are a long-established features of the Irish education system, Coolahan et al. (2012) argue that there is "a mis-match between the inherited pattern of denominational school patronage and the rights of citizens in the much more culturally and religiously diverse contemporary Irish society" (p.1). Reflecting this, the current study indicates that there is a serious tension between denominational patronage and intercultural education as the former promotes privilege and inequity and fails to respect the human rights and philosophical convictions of children and parents from secular and humanist perspectives.

At a structural level, legislation, particularly Article 15(2)(d) of the Education Act 1998 and Article 7(3)(c) of the Equal Status Acts 2000-2008 permits schools to afford preferential treatment to students who are of the same denomination of the school where "the objective of the school is to provide education in an environment which promotes certain religious values" (Irish Statute Book, 2012). School can

therefore exclude students and teachers who are not of the denomination of the school if they can prove that “the refusal is essential to maintain the ethos of the school.” This legislation, if enforced by schools, means that students are not treated equally at the time of enrolment as students who share the denomination of the school receive preferential treatment. This practice is evident in Clarepark where Catholic students are accorded preferential treatment at the time of enrolment. It is not apparent in Seven Oaks however, which demonstrates that denominational schools can promote equitable practices at the time of enrolment.

As is apparent in Seven Oaks and Clarepark, denominational patronage also has implications for curricular provision. In both schools religious education is provided solely in the Catholic faith and no alternative provision is made for non-Catholic students. This therefore constitutes inequitable treatment and undermines students’ right to be provided with an ethical education. Students’ rights are further undermined by the content of Rule 68 *The Rules for National Schools* (1965). This rule affirms that religion is the most important curricular subject and that it should permeate the whole school day as part of an integrated curriculum. As a consequence, even if alternative provision is made for non-Catholic students during the teaching of the Alive-O programme, they may still experience aspects of religious education and instruction, for example the recitation of morning and evening prayers, during other parts of the school day.

While there is a general consensus that the current patronage system requires reform; there is considerable divergence regarding the nature and extent of the reform required, particularly between denominational and secular groups and individuals. While most denominational groups acknowledge the need for a greater plurality of patronage models, there is little appetite for structural reform within

denominational schools, for example, regarding ethos and enrolment policy. This is highly problematic because despite the current Minister for Education and Skills, R  air   Quinn T.D.'s aim to divest school patronage in areas of stable population in accordance with parents' wishes, it is likely that many schools will remain under denominational patronage as the vast majority of Irish people continue to identify themselves as Christians, most particularly as Catholic (84%) and Article 42 of the Irish Constitution gives parents significant control over their children's education. It is therefore likely that in many areas, non-Catholic students will still have to attend Catholic schools. Moreover, it is possible that as the number of denominational schools decreases nationally, the denominational hierarchies will place additional pressure on schools which retain their religious patronage to reinforce their religious credentials. Indeed, the Iona Institute argue that "a more diverse system will give denominational schools greater freedom to be true to their ethos" (IHRC, 2011, p.44). In this regard, the divesting of school patronage will have little impact on many students' experiences of schooling and in fact may increase and intensify the emphasis placed on religion in denominational schools.

In contrast to the position of denominational groups, many of those who adhere to secular or humanist philosophies argue that the State should assume sole responsibility for the provision of education, that religious education and instruction should be provided outside of school and that in line with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the curriculum should be taught in "an objective, critical and pluralist manner" (IHRC, 2011). Reflecting the principles of intercultural education, these groups request that their right to "education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions" as set down in the ECHR be respected. There is therefore considerable divergence regarding the

nature and extent of the reform required in meeting the needs of a more diverse Ireland.

Notwithstanding these divergences, the current study suggests that in the first instance the clauses in the Education Act 1998 and Equal Status Acts 2000-2008 which enable schools to refuse student entry if they can prove that “the refusal is essential to maintain the ethos of the school” need to be removed, so that all students are treated equitably at the time of enrolment. Secondly, as has been recommended by the *Forum on Patronage and Pluralism*, Rule 68 of *The Rules for National Schools* needs to be removed as it undermines students’ right to receive an education which reflects their own religious and philosophical convictions. Thirdly, all students need to be provided with the opportunity to study ethics and morality. All students’ right to this education is currently not being realised in denominational schools. This is an area, however, where some progress has been made at the level of teacher education and at the level of curricular policy. One of the largest colleges of initial teacher education in the State - St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra launched the first recognised postgraduate course for teachers specifically devoted to Ethical and Multi-denominational Education in Ireland in June 2012. Developed in conjunction with Educate Together and operationalised in October 2012, the course comprises four modules: Philosophies of Ethical and Multi-denominational Education; Democratic Values in Education; Curriculum and Pedagogy in Ethical Education; and Teacher as Ethical Leader. Moreover, all colleges which provide initial teacher education will be required to teach a mandatory course in ethics and ERB to all student-teachers from September 2013. In this regard, teachers should feel better prepared to teach students from diverse belief backgrounds in a sensitive and respectful way. With regards to the curriculum, the NCCA is currently in the

process of devising a curriculum in ethics and ERB. All students should be provided with access to this curriculum. While the aforementioned developments are very significant, in the context of an already overloaded curriculum and in the context of the continued provision of religious education in accordance with the patron of denominational schools, it is likely that the possible introduction of this new curriculum in ethics and ERB into denominational schools will be highly problematic. While all students would benefit from this course, it is unlikely to replace the current religious education programme in denominational schools. A possible compromise going forward may be to give parents whose children attend denominational schools the option of selecting either religious education or education in ethics and ERB for their children.

Within the Irish context, there are currently four patronage models which are viable: denominationalism, multi-denominationalism (e.g. Educate Together), multi-faith schools (VEC Community National Schools) and non-denominational schools.<sup>62</sup> Given the realities of the situation in Ireland and complex task of balancing the right to freedom of religion with the right to education in accordance with parental conscience, the additional provision of multi-denominational and multi-faith schools appears to be the most workable and practical alternative at present. However, given Ireland's size and demographics, it will not be possible to provide all students with access to these schools and in this regard it is likely that most schools will remain under religious denominational patronage. In this context,

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<sup>62</sup> The denominational schools provide an ethical education grounded in their particular faith perspective, the multi-denominational schools provide education in ethics and comparative religions, the multi-faith schools provide a combination of faith formation (20%) and ethics and comparative religions (80%), while the non-denominational schools promote a secular perspective and the see the provision of religious education as a matter for the community.

structural reform from within denominational schools is imperative if students, in line with critical intercultural education, are to receive equitable treatment in schools.

### ***8.5.2 The Need to Address Topical and Controversial Issues in Schools***

This research suggests that many of the participating teachers are reluctant to deal with topical and controversial issues. It suggests an amalgam of causal factors for this situation, including a perceived knowledge deficit amongst teachers, a perceived lack of confidence in their competence to address such issues sensitively, a fear of upsetting students by discussing such issues and an adherence to an ideology of childhood immaturity - a sense that students are too young and too cognitively and emotionally immature to deal with topical and controversial issues. A discourse of childhood immaturity takes little account of the significant impact of globalisation on children's experiences of childhood. The proliferation and pervasiveness of sophisticated technologies, increased worldwide interconnectedness through the forces of globalisation and the aggressive targeting of young children with items of popular culture suggest that discourses of childhood innocence and naivety are outdated (Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2009). Robinson and Jones Díaz (2009) argue that the above channels give children "access to adult information and 'adults' worlds" (p.55), maintaining that "as these technologies become more integrated into children's entertainment, popular culture and toys, the perceived dichotomy between children's worlds and adults' worlds is blurred" (p.172).

In this regard, it is socially irresponsible to neglect topical and perceived controversial issues such as racism, homosexuality, power relations. The State places significant and arguably unfair responsibility on schools and particularly on

teachers for addressing important social issues. However, there is little debate about exactly what teachers' roles should be in this regard. For example, should teachers remain neutral and mask their personal views or should they lead students in a certain direction? If so, what should this direction be? The neglect of wider educational debate is compounded by the DES' inaction in tackling this issue. In this regard, the DES is currently failing both teachers and students. Teachers need to be provided with opportunities to engage in professional development and provided with opportunities to critically reflect upon what their roles as educators should be in dealing with these issues. They should also be provided with opportunities to critically reflect on their own philosophical assumptions and their implications for how students are treated and inevitably students' life chances. On a more practical level, they need to be provided with information and appropriate methodologies for dealing with these issues sensitively.

Deprivation of human rights and notions of power, privilege and domination are at the heart of most social justice issues. In this regard, in addition to providing CPD opportunities for teachers, the NCCA needs to devise a comprehensive national framework which addresses all social justice issues, for example, racism, homophobia, sexism etc. As has been argued, critical multicultural education provides an appropriate and effective framework. Moreover, it is arguable that the consistency and clarity which such a framework would provide across the social justice spectrum would greatly assist teachers in addressing these issues.

### ***8.5.3 The Need to Further Democratisise School Power Relations***

While the introduction of senior management teams has made the running of schools more democratic, there is huge scope for the further democratisation of school relations particularly at teacher-student level. Rushgreen provides a very good example of how schools can successfully work to democratisise teacher-students relations, namely, through promoting democratic participatory pedagogical approaches and through facilitating the development of participatory formal organisational structures such as The Student Council and The Green Team. When assessed from a critical perspective, there are undoubtedly shortcomings related to aspects of the Student Council forum, for example, the lack of student participation in decisions which have a direct impact on their school lives, namely, decisions pertaining to the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment procedures. However, notwithstanding this, when assessed from a more liberal perspective, the Student Council is a democratic forum which provides students with the opportunity to exercise their voices, to engage in democratic participation and to realise their participatory rights. In this regard, all schools and students would benefit from the mandatory inclusion of student councils in all primary schools. As demonstrated in Rushgreen, they would similarly benefit from the promotion of a dialogical student centred approach which provides students with opportunities to express their views, to listen to multiple perspectives and to engage in critical dialogue with their peers and teacher.



#### ***8.5.4 The Need For a More Critical Interpretation of Intercultural Education***

The current weak model of intercultural education promoted by the Irish State needs to be reconceptualised and the issues of equity and criticality foregrounded. All schools should be required to have a policy on intercultural education which has structural equity as its core and requires schools to explain how they will promote it. Such a process would demand that the school first conduct an equity audit. This audit would examine the whole school environment, looking at each component in isolation and then collectively, whilst all the time asking the questions – Does this structure promote equity for all students? Does it privilege any particular groups of students at the expense of any other group? A recent initiative by The Equality Authority (2012) saw the piloting of a draft resource designed to assist schools in undertaking whole school internal equality audits. If mainstreamed, this resource has the capacity to serve as an important tool in assisting schools with equality reviews. However, before conducting equality audits, teachers need to be provided with opportunities to explore their understandings of structural equity to problematise it and to explore its implications for students' life chances. Practice at Rushgreen demonstrates the impact of a more critical approach to intercultural education. The tackling of undemocratic power relations (e.g. through the promotion of a dialogical approach & formal structures such as the Student Council), the creation of systemic opportunities for reflection and dialogue (e.g a praxis-oriented approach to policy development, professional development opportunities) and the elimination of institutional barriers to access and equity (e.g. streaming and ability grouping) means that students are provided with the opportunity to experience and enjoy their rights,

to reach their full potential and to develop the skills necessary for active informed just-oriented citizenship in the twenty-first century.

The current study demonstrates the critical role played by school principals in shaping school culture and in leading change initiatives. In this regard, CPD is critical for all school principals. Students need to be provided with opportunities to explore the political nature of the world, most specifically the issues of power relations and privilege.

## **8.6 Limitations and Future Research**

Limitations were evident in the following areas: sample size, case study methodology, time spent in the field and research participants.

This study involved three case study schools out of a possible sample of approximately 3,300 schools. This small sample size coupled with the selection of case study as methodology has limitations particularly with regards to the study's capacity to make generalisations and predictions. However, the focus of this research study is not to predict or generalise, but to provide an understanding of how intercultural education is conceptualised and practised by teachers and principals and to provide an understanding of the models of intercultural education emerging in three Irish primary schools. Similarly, while the time spent collecting data was substantial (16 weeks), the credibility of any study can be enhanced by spending a more prolonged period in the research field.

While I recognise that parents are an integral part of the school community, as the focus of this research is on the *school* variables that shape the models of

intercultural education in Irish primary schools, I did not believe their inclusion was necessary in this particular study. However, it is arguable that the study could have been enhanced by parental participation particularly with regards to their perceptions of each school's endeavours to include them and their children. Similarly, the study would have benefitted from a greater engagement with the students in the schools and members of the support and auxiliary staff.

As research into intercultural education in the Irish context is relatively limited, there is significant scope for future research in the area. Research is urgently needed in number of areas. These include: research into teachers' perceptions of the role of schools in fostering democratic cosmopolitan citizenship; research into how genuine democratic practices can be promoted in primary schools; research into students' views of existing democratic structures; research into teacher confidence and competence in dealing with topical and controversial issues; research into how teachers should approach the teaching of topical and controversial issues; and research into teachers' understandings of structural inequity and its implications for students life chances.

## **8.7 A Final Word**

The so-called Celtic Tiger period of economic expansion was characterised by an absence of debate and a largely unquestioning compliance with a discourse which championed wealth accumulation at the expense of social justice and equity. Dissent was not tolerated. A clear example of this was when, the then Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern T.D. questioned the right of commentators to repudiate the dominant narrative, dismissing them as moaners and wondering why they didn't commit

suicide: "Sitting on the sidelines, cribbing and moaning is a lost opportunity. I don't know how people who engage in that don't commit suicide because frankly the only thing that motivates me is being able to actively change something." (RTE News, July 4 2007). Critical multicultural education seeks to foster justice-oriented transformative citizens who are sociopolitically conscious and action oriented. Students are encouraged to question, deconstruct and critique the status quo and to work collectively towards creating a more just, inclusive society which serves all of its citizens. Its promotion has arguably never been more important. According to Baldwin (1985), "What society really, ideally, wants is a citizenry that will simply obey the rules of society." He continues "If a society succeeds in this, that society is about to perish" (as cited in Banks, 2011, p.64).

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## Appendix A

### Framework of Criteria for Interviews, Observations and Document Analysis

**Figure 4: Dimensions of Multicultural Education (Banks, 2007, pp. 132-137)**



The following table delineates how Banks' (2007) model was adapted and supplemented by concepts from other multicultural theorists.

**Table 5: Framework of Criteria for Interviews, Observations and Document Analysis**

	<b>Banks (2007)</b>	<b>Additional Concepts from Other Multicultural Theorists</b>
<b>Content Integration</b> (Curriculum)	Inclusion of content (examples, data & information) from a variety of cultures in teaching	Content drawn from current social issues (Sleeter & Grant, 1994)  Explore Social Justice issues (Sleeter & Grant, 1994)  Antiracism (May, 1994)  Content drawn from issues of interest to students (Sleeter & Grant, 1994; Nieto, 2004a; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

		Textbooks – presence of overt/covert stereotypical, prejudicial or ethnocentric representations – portrayal of the “other” (Portera, 2005, p.190)
<b>Knowledge Construction</b> (Pedagogy)	<p>Multiple perspective</p> <p>Critical thinking skills</p> <p>Values &amp; assumptions that underpin knowledge construction</p> <p>Personal/cultural knowledge</p> <p>Popular knowledge</p> <p>Mainstream academic knowledge</p> <p>Transformative knowledge</p> <p>School knowledge</p>	<p>Draws on students’ experiences (Sleeter &amp; Grant, 1994; Villegas &amp; Lucas, 2002)</p> <p>Asks students’ opinions (Sleeter &amp; Grant, 1994; Nieto, 2004a)</p> <p>Critical enquiry (Sleeter &amp; Grant, 1994)</p> <p>Critical Pedagogy (Nieto, 2004a; Villegas &amp; Lucas, 2002)</p>
<b>An Equity Pedagogy</b> (Pedagogy)	<p>A variety of teaching methodologies to facilitate academic achievement</p> <p>Active learning</p> <p>Educational equity</p>	
<b>An Empowering School Culture &amp; Social Structure</b>	<p>Grouping &amp; Streaming Procedures</p> <p>Education equality for all</p> <p>Sense of empowerment</p> <p>Assessment procedures</p> <p>High expectations among staff</p> <p>Positive attitudes towards students</p>	<p>Peer tutoring (Nieto, 2004a)</p> <p>Democratic decision making (Sleeter &amp; Grant, 1994)</p> <p>Social action skills (Sleeter &amp; Grant, 1994; Villegas &amp; Lucas, 2002)</p> <p>Discipline Policies (Nieto, 2004a)</p> <p>Parental Involvement (Nieto, 2004a; Sleeter &amp; Grant, 1994)</p> <p>Inclusive Admissions’ Policies (Nieto, 2004a)</p>

<p><b>Prejudice Reduction</b></p>	<p>Multicultural Teaching Materials, resources &amp; wall displays</p> <p>Strategies used to tackle discrimination</p> <p>Co-operative group work</p>	
		<p>School Leadership (May, 1994)</p> <p>Professional Development (May, 1994)</p>

## Appendix B

### Letter to Board of Management

Dear [REDACTED],

I am presently conducting research in the area of intercultural education as part of a PhD in Education at St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra with a view to identifying emerging models of intercultural education and the supports schools may need to implement existing guidelines.

I am seeking your permission to carry out one of the case studies at your school.

I understand that schools may be at very different stages of introducing the NCCA's *Intercultural Education Guidelines*, depending on their individual circumstances. Therefore, the case study would involve examining what measures - if any - your school has taken to implement intercultural education in terms of school policies, school practice and classroom practice. This analysis would be supplemented by short interviews with the principal, some teachers and a small number of pupils to discuss cultural diversity and intercultural education.

All schools, principals, teachers and students will all be assigned pseudonyms. The information gathered will be held in the strictest confidence.

This research will be of benefit to all primary schools as it will identify and disseminate exemplars of informed practice in relation to intercultural education. These exemplars can then be used to help schools to implement intercultural education in a practical way. It is hoped that this research will also lead to greater resources for schools as it will highlight the supports needed by schools so that they can successfully implement the recommendations made in the Government's Intercultural Guidelines.

I hope to speak with you in the coming days about this issue.

Thanking you in advance.

Yours sincerely

---

**Anne Marie Kavanagh**

## Appendix C

### Letter to Principal

Dear [REDACTED],

I greatly appreciate you considering permitting me to conduct my research in your school. Further to today's telephone conversation, please find enclosed a plain language statement and an informed consent form providing information about what the research is about and what participation would entail.

I understand that schools may be at very different stages of introducing the NCCA's *Intercultural Education Guidelines*, depending on their individual circumstances. Therefore, the case study would involve examining what measures - if any - your school has taken to implement intercultural education in terms of school policies, school practice and classroom practice. This analysis would be supplemented by short interviews with the principal, some teachers and a small number of pupils to discuss cultural diversity and intercultural education.

All schools, principals, teachers and students will all be assigned pseudonyms. The information gathered will be held in the strictest confidence. The research would take place over two phases lasting for 20 school days in total.

This research will be of benefit to all primary schools as it will identify and disseminate exemplars of informed practice in relation to intercultural education. These exemplars can then be used to help schools to implement intercultural education in a practical way. It is hoped that this research will also lead to greater resources for schools as it will highlight the supports needed by schools so that they can successfully implement the recommendations made in the Government's Intercultural Guidelines.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any queries.

Thanking you in advance.

Yours sincerely,

---

**Anne Marie Kavanagh**

## **Appendix D**

### **Plain Language Statement: Principals**

#### **Information on the study of Emergent Models of Intercultural Education in Irish Primary Schools**

##### **What is the research about?**

The research seeks to identify the models of intercultural education emerging in Irish primary schools. It endeavours to examine principals' and teachers' understandings of intercultural education and how they incorporate it into the school's policies and practice and their own classroom practice. Students' attitudes towards and experiences of intercultural education will also be analysed in an effort to ascertain how aspects of intercultural education are impacting on their school experiences.

##### **What will the research involve?**

This research will require observation of the whole school environment. It will require access to the school's policy documents. It will require participating principals and teachers to participate in an interview. It will require four participating teachers to permit the researcher to spend time in his/her classroom observing his/her practice and permitting the researcher to examine his/her schemes of work and textbooks. It will involve five students participating in a focus group session. All interviews and focus group sessions will be recorded using an audio-recording device. Notes taken during classroom observations and during analysis of policy documents, schemes of work and textbooks will be electronically recorded on a laptop computer.

##### **Who can take part? Why have I been asked?**

It will involve school principals, teachers and students. These groups have been selected as the researcher wants to get a detailed picture of what is happening in schools in relation to intercultural education.

##### **Do participants have to take part?**

Participation is completely voluntary. You are free to choose whether or not to take part. In completing the consent form you are indicating your willingness to take part in the study. If you wish to withdraw from the study at any time, you can do so by informing the researcher.

##### **Can participants be identified outside the Study?**

It will not be possible to identify participants or the participating school outside the study as pseudonyms will be used. A key which links the pseudonyms to the original names will be kept in a secure file accessible only to the researcher. All audio recordings, transcripts and field notes will be safely locked away in the researcher's office in St. Patrick's College and will be only accessible to the researcher. After four years, the data will be appropriately destroyed and disposed of.



**What are the benefits/risks of taking part?**

This research seeks to identify and disseminate exemplars of informed practice in relation to intercultural education which will benefit both the case study schools and schools in general.

There is no risk anticipated as a result of participation in this study.

**Researcher Contact Details:**

Ms. Anne Marie Kavanagh



Tel:

Email: [annemarie.kavanagh@spd.dcu.ie](mailto:annemarie.kavanagh@spd.dcu.ie)

**Administrator's Details:**

*If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:*

The Administrator,  
Office of the Dean of Research and Humanities,  
St Patrick's College,  
Drumcondra,  
Dublin 9.  
Tel 01-884 2149

## **Appendix E**

### **Informed Consent Form: Principal**

#### **I. Research study Title**

Emergent Models of Intercultural Education in Irish Primary Schools

#### **II. Purpose of the Research**

This research seeks to identify and disseminate exemplars of informed practice in relation to intercultural education which will benefit both the case study schools and schools in general.

#### **III. Requirements of Participation in Research study**

Participating principals will be asked to:

- Grant access to the whole school environment
- Participate in an interview

#### **IV. Confirmation that involvement in the Research study is voluntary**

I am aware that if I agree to take part in this study, I can withdraw from participation at any stage. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the Research study have been completed.

#### **V. Arrangements to protect confidentiality of data, including when raw data will be destroyed, noting that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.**

Every effort will be made to ensure that schools, teachers and students will not be identified in any documents which emerge from the research. The identity of any participant will not be disclosed by the researcher except in the case where the researcher comes across information which she is legally obliged to pass to someone in authority.

Participating schools, teachers and children will be given pseudonyms which will be used in all documents, published and unpublished, arising out of the research. A key which links the pseudonyms to the original names will be kept in a secure file accessible only to the researcher. The audio recordings of all conversations will be kept in a secure location for four years and then destroyed. This is in case the researcher would like to examine another aspect of the theme of the study at a later date.

**VI. Participant – Please complete the following:**

**(Circle Yes or No for each question)**

*Have you read or had read to you the Plain Language Statement? Yes / No*

*Do you understand the information provided? Yes / No*

*Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? Yes / No*

*Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? Yes / No*

**VII. Signature:**

I have read and understood the information in this form. The researcher has answered my questions and concerns, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name in Block Capitals:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Witness:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix F**

### **Plain Language Statement: Teachers**

#### **Information on the study of Emergent Models of Intercultural Education in Irish Primary Schools**

##### **What is the research about?**

The research seeks to identify the models of intercultural education emerging in Irish primary schools. It endeavours to examine principals' and teachers' understandings of intercultural education and how they incorporate it into the school's policies and practice and their own classroom practice. Students' attitudes towards and experiences of intercultural education will also be analysed in an effort to ascertain how aspects of intercultural education are impacting on their school experiences.

##### **What will the research involve?**

This research will require teachers to participate in an interview, to permit the researcher to spend time in his/her classroom observing his/her practice and permit the researcher to examine teachers' schemes of work and textbooks. It will involve five students participating in a focus group session. All interviews and focus group sessions will be recorded using an audio-recording device. Notes taken during classroom observations and during analysis of schemes of work and textbooks will be electronically recorded on a laptop computer.

##### **Who can take part? Why have I been asked?**

It will involve school principals, teachers and students. These groups have been selected as the researcher wants to get a detailed picture of what is happening in schools in relation to intercultural education.

##### **Do participants have to take part?**

Participation is completely voluntary. You are free to choose whether or not to take part. In completing the consent form you are indicating your willingness to take part in the study. If you wish to withdraw from the study at any time, you can do so by informing the researcher.

##### **Can participants be identified outside the Study?**

It will not be possible to identify participants or the participating school outside the study as pseudonyms will be used. A key which links the pseudonyms to the original names will be kept in a secure file accessible only to the researcher. All audio recordings, transcripts and field notes will be safely locked away in the researcher's office in St. Patrick's College and will be only accessible to the researcher. After four years, the data will be appropriately destroyed and disposed of.

##### **What are the benefits/risks of taking part?**

This research seeks to identify and disseminate exemplars of informed practice in relation to intercultural education which will benefit both the case study schools and schools in general.

There is no risk anticipated as a result of participation in this study.

**Researcher Contact Details:**

Ms. Anne Marie Kavanagh



Tel:

Email: [annemarie.kavanagh@spd.dcu.ie](mailto:annemarie.kavanagh@spd.dcu.ie)

**Administrator's Details:**

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Administrator,  
Office of the Dean of Research and Humanities,  
St Patrick's College,  
Drumcondra,  
Dublin 9.  
Tel 01-884 2149

## Appendix G

### Informed Consent Form: Teachers

#### I. Research study Title

Emergent Models of Intercultural Education in Irish Primary Schools

#### II. Purpose of the Research

This research seeks to identify and disseminate exemplars of informed practice in relation to intercultural education which will benefit both the case study schools and schools in general.

#### III. Requirements of Participation in Research study

Participating teachers will be asked to:

- Participate in an interview
- Permit the researcher to spend time in his/her classroom observing his/her practice
- Permit the researcher to examine schemes of work and textbooks

#### IV. Confirmation that involvement in the Research study is voluntary

I am aware that if I agree to take part in this study, I can withdraw from participation at any stage. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the Research study have been completed.

#### V. Arrangements to protect confidentiality of data, including when raw data will be destroyed, noting that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

Every effort will be made to ensure that schools, teachers and students will not be identified in any documents which emerge from the research. The identity of any participant will not be disclosed by the researcher except in the case where the researcher comes across information which she is legally obliged to pass to someone in authority.

Participating schools, teachers and children will be given pseudonyms which will be used in all documents, published and unpublished, arising out of the research. A key which links the pseudonyms to the original names will be kept in a secure file accessible only to the researcher. The audio recording of the conversations will be kept in a secure location for four years and then destroyed. This is in case the researcher would like to examine another aspect of the theme of the study at a later date.

**VI. Participant – Please complete the following:**

**(Circle Yes or No for each question).**

*Have you read or had read to you the Plain Language Statement? Yes / No*

*Do you understand the information provided? Yes / No*

*Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? Yes / No*

*Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? Yes / No*

**VII. Signature:**

I have read and understood the information in this form. The researcher has answered my questions and concerns, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name in Block Capitals:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Witness:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix H**

### **Plain Language Statement: Parents**

#### **Information on the study of Emergent Models of Intercultural Education in Irish Primary Schools**

##### **What is the research about?**

This research will look at what schools are doing to make sure that they meet the needs of students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. It will examine the attitudes of principals, teachers and students towards cultural diversity\* and education in this area.

*\* Cultural diversity refers to people from many different cultures living together in the same community.*

##### **What will the research involve?**

This research will require students to take part in one small group discussion with the researcher about the lessons and activities they do when learning about cultural diversity. The discussion will take place in the school building. It will last 45 minutes and the researcher and other students from your child's class will be present. The discussion will be recorded using an audio-recording device. Children's names will not be used.

##### **Who can take part? Why has my child been asked?**

School principals, teachers and students can take part in this research. Students have been asked to take part as they are a very important part of the school and the researcher feels the study would be incomplete if they did not take part.

##### **Do participants have to take part?**

You are free to choose whether or not to permit your child to take part. In completing the consent form you are indicating your willingness to permit your child to take part in the study. If your child wishes to withdraw from the study at any time, s/he can do so by informing the researcher or his/her teacher.

##### **Can participants be identified outside the study?**

It will not be possible to identify participants or schools outside the study as pseudonyms will be used in the research. A key which links the pseudonyms to the original names will be kept in a secure file accessible only to the researcher. All audio recordings, transcripts and field notes will be safely locked away in the researcher's office in St. Patrick's College and will be only accessible to the researcher. After four years, the data will be appropriately destroyed and disposed of.

##### **What are the benefits/risks of taking part?**



This research will provide schools with information on how best to meet the needs of students from different cultural backgrounds. This research will also highlight supports needed by schools so that they can meet the needs of all pupils.

There will be no risk to your child if s/he takes part in this study.

**Researcher Contact Details:**

Ms. Anne Marie Kavanagh



Tel:

Email: [annemarie.kavanagh@spd.dcu.ie](mailto:annemarie.kavanagh@spd.dcu.ie)

**Administrator's Details:**

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Administrator,  
Office of the Dean of Research and Humanities,  
St Patrick's College,  
Drumcondra,  
Dublin 9.  
Tel 01-884 2149

## Appendix I

### Informed Consent Form: Parents

#### I. Research Study Title

Emergent Models of Intercultural Education in Irish Primary Schools

#### II. Purpose of the Research

This research will look at how schools provide for students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. It will look at what schools should be doing to make sure that the needs of all students are met. The research will help schools to improve their practices if they need to by giving them information. This research will also highlight supports needed by schools so that they can meet the needs of all students.

#### III. Requirements of Participation in Research study

Participating children will be asked to:

- Take part in small group discussions with the researcher about the lessons and activities they do when learning about cultural diversity.

#### IV. Confirmation that involvement in the Research study is voluntary

I am aware that if I agree to let my child take part in this study, s/he can be withdrawn by me at any stage.

#### V. Arrangements to protect confidentiality of data, including when raw data will be destroyed, noting that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

Every effort will be made to ensure that schools, teachers and students will not be identified in any documents which emerge from the research. The identity of any participant will not be made known by the researcher except in the case where the researcher comes across information which she is legally obliged to pass to someone in authority.

Participating students' names will not be used in any documents arising out of the research. A key which links the different names to the original names will be kept in a secure file accessible only to the researcher. The audio recordings of the conversations will be kept in a secure location for four years and then destroyed. This is in case the researcher would like to examine another aspect of the theme of the study at a later date.

**VI. Parent of Participant – Please complete the following:**

**(Circle Yes or No for each question)**

*Have you read or had read to you the Plain Language Statement? Yes / No*

*Do you understand the information provided? Yes / No*

**VII. Signature:**

I have read and understood the information in this form. I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent for my child to take part in this research project.

**Parent's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name in Block Capitals:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Witness:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix J**

### **Plain Language Statement: Students**

#### **Information on the study of Emergent Models of Intercultural Education in Irish Primary Schools**

##### **What is the research about?**

This research will look at what your school does to make sure that all children are treated equally and feel that their culture (beliefs, values, religion, language, custom of food and dress etc.) is respected and valued by everyone in the school.

##### **What will the research involve?**

The person doing the research is called the researcher. This research will require children to talk to the researcher in small groups. Children will be asked about the lessons and activities they do in class when learning about different countries and cultures.

##### **Who can take part? Why have I been asked?**

School principals, teachers and children can take part in this research. Children have been asked to take part as they are a very important part of the school and the researcher feels the study will be better if children take part.

##### **Do I have to take part?**

You are free to choose whether or not to take part. In filling in the consent form you are writing that you are willing to take part in the research. If you want to stop taking part at any time, you can do so by telling the researcher or your teacher.

##### **Will anyone recognise me if I take part?**

It will not be possible to recognise you if you take part as the researcher will not use your name. She will give you a different name.

##### **What are the benefits of taking part?**

Your school will be able to make sure that it is doing a good job and you have to chance to discuss and share your opinions about having children from all over the world in your classroom.

**Researcher Contact Details:**

Ms. Anne Marie Kavanagh



Tel:

Email: [annemarie.kavanagh@spd.dcu.ie](mailto:annemarie.kavanagh@spd.dcu.ie)

**Administrator's Details:**

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Administrator,  
Office of the Dean of Research and Humanities,  
St Patrick's College,  
Drumcondra,  
Dublin 9.  
Tel 01-884 2149

## Appendix K

### Informed Consent Form: Students

#### **I. Research study Title**

Emergent Models of Intercultural Education in Irish Primary Schools

#### **II. Purpose of the Research**

This research will look at how schools provide for children from different cultural backgrounds. It will look at what schools should be doing to make sure that the needs of all children are met. The research will help schools to improve their practices if they need to by helping them to help children work better together no matter where they come from.

#### **III. Requirements of Participation in Research study**

Participating children will be asked to:

- Take part in a discussion with the researcher

#### **IV. Confirmation that involvement in the Research study is voluntary**

I am aware that if I agree to take part in this study, I can withdraw from taking part at any stage.

#### **V. Arrangements to protect confidentiality of data including when raw data will be destroyed, noting that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.**

The researcher will ensure that it is not possible to recognise any child who takes part. The researcher will not use the child's real name. She will give the child a different name. The child's name will only be made known by the researcher in the case where the researcher comes across information which she is legally obliged to pass to someone in authority. The researcher will make sure that all information is safely locked away in a secure press. All information gathered will be destroyed after four years.

**VI. Participant – Please complete the following:**

**(Circle Yes or No for each question)**

*Have you read or had read to you the Plain Language Statement? Yes / No*

*Do you understand the information provided? Yes / No*

*Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? Yes / No*

*Have you received answers that you are happy with to all your questions? Yes / No*

**VII. Signature:**

I have read and understood the information in this form. The researcher has answered my questions and concerns, and I have a copy of this consent form.

Therefore, I agree to take part in this research project.

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name in Block Capitals:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Witness:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix L

**Table 6: Structured Daily Observation Sheet**

School: Date: Time:                    to: Class: Teacher: # Students: # Boys: # Girls:	Description of room:       Teacher-student Relations:	
Practices being observed	Frequency	Description/Comment
Students engage in co-operative learning		
Teacher uses a variety of methodologies		
Students peer tutor each other		
Students participate in democratic decision-making		
Students engage in active learning		
Teacher praises and encourages students		



<b>Teacher draws on children's experiences</b>		
<b>Teacher asks students' opinions</b>		
<b>Teacher and students examine multiple perspectives</b>		
<b>Teacher facilitates critical thinking</b>		
<b>Teacher facilitates social action and empowerment skills</b>		
<b>Teacher gives students responsibility in the classroom</b>		
<b>Teacher makes references to other cultures</b>		
<b>Teacher and students challenge stereotypes</b>		

## Appendix M

**Table 7: Template for Assessing Textbooks & Teachers' Schemes of Work**

<b>Intercultural Theme</b>	<b>History</b>	<b>Geography</b>	<b>SPHE</b>
	<b>Textbook:</b>	<b>Textbook:</b>	<b>Textbook:</b>
Systems of Oppression e.g. racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism etc.			
Human Rights & Responsibility			
Identity & Belonging			
Similarity & Differences			

<b>Democracy &amp; Democratic Practice</b>			
<b>Conflict &amp; Conflict Resolution</b>			

	<b>History</b>	<b>Geography</b>	<b>SPHE</b>
Are events/issues explored from more than one perspective?			
Do text books contain ethnic stereotypes?			
Do textbooks contain loaded words such as "savage", "primitive", "lazy", "backward"			

etc.?			
Are images tokenistic?			
Is there anything omitted from accounts provided?			
Do textbooks contain anything that would embarrass or offend a child whose culture is being portrayed?			
Is social action encouraged?			
Is critical thinking facilitated or encouraged?			

**Table 8: The Physical Environment of the Classroom: Visual Images**

What images are displayed?	
Are the images balanced in relation to age, gender, social class?	
Are the images stereotypical or do they reflect accurately people's daily lives?	
Does the classroom library contain multicultural resources such as books, magazines etc.? Does the library contain any multilingual literature?	
Are there multicultural learning resources in the classroom including computer software, resource packs etc.?	
Is a supportive environment created for second language learners?	
Do students of all ethnicities mix with each other in the classroom?	

## **Appendix N**

### **Semi-Structured Interview and Focus Group Questions**

#### **Semi- Structured Interview Questions – Principals**

1. In what ways has the profile of students who attend the school changed in recent years?
2. In what way have school policies and practices changed to accommodate this changing profile?
3. What is your understanding of intercultural education?
4. In what way does the school's ethos promote an intercultural approach?
5. What is your understanding of racism?
6. Do you have many racist incidents in the school?
7. How are they addressed?
8. What are your views on the Intercultural Education Guidelines?
9. Do you think the DES is doing enough to support and assist schools in implementing the Intercultural Education Guidelines? Why? Why not?
10. How do you ensure that the needs of students are met?
11. Do you think the education provided in this school provides students with the knowledge and skills necessary to function in a multicultural society? Why?
12. How do you think this school could improve the way in which it caters for students from minority ethnic groups?
13. What supports does the school need to be more effective in this area?
14. What characteristics of your leadership style make you effective in a multi-ethnic school context?
15. Do you think it's important for students to participate in decision making in the school? Why?
16. Are there any structures in place to facilitate student participation?
17. Is social action encouraged in the school?
18. Do you think it's important to discuss racism and other forms of discrimination with the students in the school? Why?

19. Have you any further comments or questions?

### **Semi-Structured Interview Questions – Teachers**

1. In what ways has the profile of students in your classroom changed in recent years?
2. What is your understanding of intercultural education?
3. How does intercultural education impact your daily teaching? Curriculum? Pedagogy? Assessment procedures?
4. Do you find it easy to incorporate intercultural content into the existing curriculum?
5. What subjects do you incorporate intercultural education into?
6. What is your understanding of the term racism?
7. Do you think it is important to discuss issues such as racism and other form of prejudice and discrimination with the children in your class? Why?
8. Do you feel confident and well informed enough to discuss issues such as racism?
9. Are there racist incidents in the school?
10. How are they dealt with?
11. Do you feel confident when talking to parents of students from ethnic or cultural minority backgrounds?
12. What are your views on the Intercultural Guidelines?
13. Do you think the DES is doing enough to support and assist schools in implementing the Intercultural Guidelines?
14. Do you think it's important for students to participate in decision making in the school? Why?
15. Are there any structures in place to facilitate student participation?
16. Is social action encouraged in the school?
17. How would you describe the principal?
18. And in terms of leadership what approach does she take?
19. Are teachers consulted on policies?
20. Have you any further comments or questions?

### **Focus Group Questions – Students**

I will engage in a broad discussion with the children about the ways in which people differ from one another. To get the discussion started, I will ask the children in the group to raise their hands if they like pizza, ice cream, football, High School Musical, broccoli, swimming, Spiderman, chips, chewing gum, maths, art, Manchester United, Hanna Montana etc. . .

1. Does everyone in this group like the same things?
2. Is it okay to like different things? Why?
3. Name one thing that you are good at.
4. Are all people good at the same things?
5. In what other ways are people different from each other?

I will then show the children a poster showing children from around the world holding balloons saying 'Welcome' in a multitude of different languages (Welcome Poster is from Oxfam <http://catalogue.oxfam.org.uk> ). I will ask the children:















1. Can you describe what you see on the poster?
2. Do you recognise any of the languages?
3. Do the children all look the same? (In the poster the children are wearing different clothes, are different ages and heights etc.)
4. Could these children all come from the same country? Why? Why not?
5. Could all these children all be living in Ireland? Why? Why not?
6. Is everyone in this school from the same country?
7. Have you learned about other countries in class?
8. What have you learned?
9. Do you ever learn songs about other cultures or from other countries?
10. Do you ever do art work influenced by other cultures or countries?
11. Have you ever had a day in school where you celebrated the music, food, clothes, or festivals of other countries?

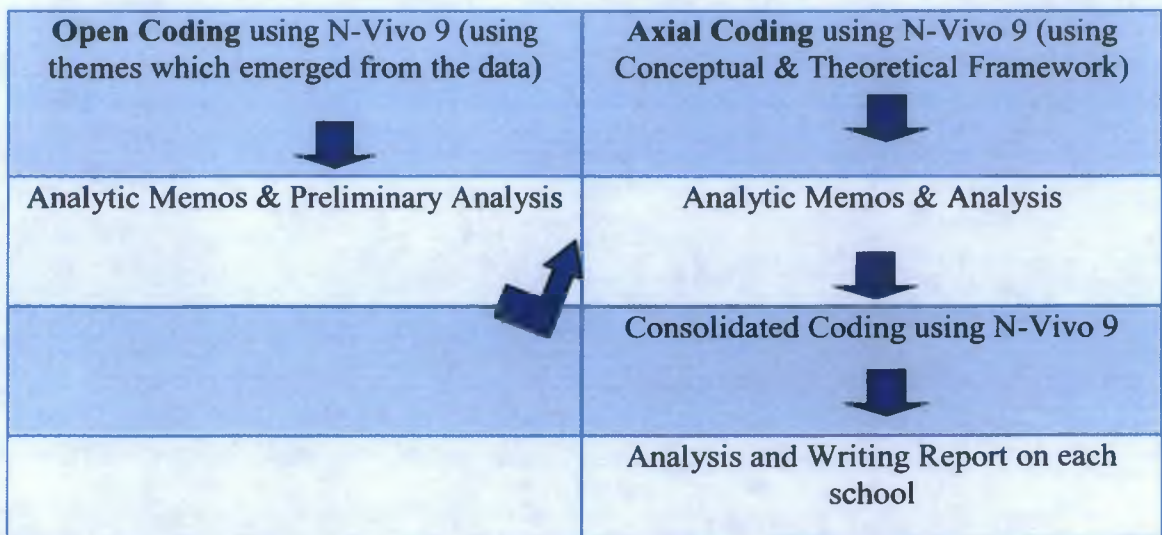


12. Do you enjoy learning about other countries and cultures? Why? Why not?
13. What else have you done or learned about in class?
14. Do you want to say anything else?
15. Do you have any questions?

## Appendix O

**Table 9: Phases of Data Collection and Analysis**

<b>Phase One</b>	<b>Phase Two</b>
<b>In School: 4 weeks per case study school</b> 	<b>In School: 1 week per case study school</b> 
<b>Teacher Observation</b> Four mainstream teachers from each school for 4 days each 	<b>Report of Preliminary Findings to Teachers and Principal (in person)</b> Member Checking with Students (in person) 
<b>Document Analysis</b> School Policy Documents Teachers' Schemes of Work Students' textbooks 	<b>Round 2 Interviews</b> All participants (principal – approx 45 minutes & six teachers – approx 30 minutes) 
<b>Round 1 Interviews</b> All participants (principal - approx 90 minutes & six teachers – approx 45 minutes) 	<b>Round 2 Focus Group</b> Five Students – approx 45 minutes 
<b>Focus Groups</b> Five Students from each school (approx 60 minutes) 	<b>Transcription of Round 2 Interviews &amp; Round 2 Focus Group</b> 
<b>Transcription of Round 1 Interviews and Round 1 Focus Group</b> 	<b>Member Checking with Teachers &amp; Principals (by email) &amp; students (in person)</b> 
<b>Member Checking with Teachers and Principals (by e-mail)</b> 	<b>Document Analysis</b> School Policy Documents Teachers' Schemes of Work Students' textbooks 



## Appendix P

**Table 10: Round 1 Codes for Case Study Schools**

<b>Round 1 Nodes</b>	<b>Properties</b>
<b>Intercultural Education</b>	Meaning Importance Policy
<b>Racism</b>	Meaning Incidents Dealing with Incidents Policy
<b>Pedagogy</b>	Teaching Methodologies Underlying Assumptions Grouping & Streaming Skill Promotion Democratic Practice Textbooks Policy
<b>Curriculum</b>	Themes Influences Policy
<b>Assessment</b>	Procedures Standardised
<b>School Leadership</b>	Personal Characteristics Leadership Style
<b>Staff Attitudes &amp; Beliefs</b>	Attitudes towards Students Attitudes towards Cultural Diversity
<b>Cultural Diversity</b>	Advantages Challenges

<b>Parents</b>	Attitudes Involvement Policy
<b>Religion</b>	Diversity Knowledge Provision
<b>Curriculum</b>	Formal Hidden
<b>School Culture</b>	Ethos Hidden Curriculum Admissions' Policy
<b>Physical Environment of School</b>	Displays Religious Iconography
<b>Educational Disadvantage</b>	DEIS Programme Additional Structures & Supports
<b>Students</b>	Intercultural Curriculum Racism Conceptualisations of Difference

## Appendix Q

**Table 11: Round 2 Codes from Rushgreen Primary School**

Round 2 Nodes	Sub-Nodes
<b>An Inclusive Democratic and Empowering School Culture</b>	Culture and Ethos Inclusion and Support of Parents Culture of Collaboration and Climate of Trust Communication
<b>A Community of Learners</b>	Curriculum Celebratory Multicultural Education Social Justice, Human Rights and Citizenship Education Antiracism Education Curricular Initiatives Global Perspectives Equity Pedagogy Professional Development Teachers' Attitudes to Teaching and Learning
<b>Power Relations</b>	Principal-Teacher Relations Teacher-Student Relations Teacher-Parent Relations
<b>Dominant Discourses</b>	Intercultural Education Racism Prejudice Equality Human Rights and Citizenship
<b>Transformative Leadership</b>	Personal Characteristics Leadership Style
<b>Critique, Reflection and Action</b>	Policy Documents and Policy Meetings Critical Reflection

	<p>Evaluation</p> <p>Phronesis and Praxis</p>
<p><b>Moral Courage, Advocacy and Activism</b></p>	<p>Challenging the Status Quo and Activism</p> <p>Students and Activism</p>
<p><b>Tackling Educational Disadvantage and Extended Learning Opportunities</b></p>	<p>DEIS Programme</p> <p>Other School Initiatives</p> <p>Professional Development</p>
<p><b>Enhancing Social and Cultural Capital</b></p>	

## Appendix R

**Table 12: Round 3 Codes from Rushgreen Primary School**

<b>Round 3 Nodes</b>	<b>Sub-Node</b>	<b>Sub-Node</b>
<b>Towards a Democratisation of School Relations: Leadership for Democracy and Social Justice</b>	Tackling Asymmetric Power Relations: Principal-Teacher Relations Tackling Asymmetric Power Relations: Teacher-student Relations  Tackling Asymmetric Power Relations: Parent-school Relations	An Interactive Pedagogical Approach Organisational Structures: The Student Council
<b>Institutionalising Antiracism</b>		
<b>Ensuring Equity in Institutionalised Practices</b>	Streaming and Grouping Assessment Procedures  Tackling Educational Disadvantage: Extended Learning Opportunities  Enrolment Policy	
<b>Critique, Reflection and Action</b>	Phronesis and Praxis  Evaluation Critical Reflection	School Policy Development  Democratic Practice or the 'Engineering of Consent'
<b>Mainstreaming a Multifaceted Curricular Approach</b>	Celebratory Multicultural Education  Antiracism Education  Social Justice, Human Rights and Citizenship Education	Misunderstanding the causes of Prejudice?  Current Affairs
<b>Moral Courage, Advocacy &amp; Activism</b>		



## **Appendix S**

### **Seven Oaks Primary School: Inclusive Initiatives**

A ‘Parents’ Suggestion Box’ which is monitored by Mr. Mulligan is located in front of the Parents’ Notice Board, which displays photographs of parents engaged in various school initiatives, information about supports for parents in the school and contact details for HSCL co-ordinator. Parents are invited to submit any concerns, worries or suggestions they might have with regards their children’s education or the running of the school in general by placing them in the “Suggestion Box”.

The school has a Parents’ Room, which, Mr. Mulligan describes as “a place where they [parents] feel safe and welcome in the school.” The Parents’ Room serves a number of functions. Mr. Mulligan describes it as “a place where the parents can come-in in the morning after dropping their kids and have a coffee, chat. . . a place where there is literature available on the walls. . . information about classes and courses”. It is a space in which parents can meet and get to know one another, where parents can read literature with regard to the various courses being run by the school and a space in which courses and classes are run throughout the year. Mr. Mulligan states “I’d have somebody from outside, a VEC tutor or some tutor that I’d employ myself and they’d run various classes and courses there as well.” Parents make regular use of the Parents’ Room and reported to the DEIS Inspector that they feel “very comfortable and welcome there” (DEIS Report).

In term of communication, the school operates an Open Door Policy. Parents can call to the school personally, telephone the principal or HSCL co-ordinator or drop a note into the Parents’ Suggestion Box. Mr. Lavelle has also cultivated a

strong relationship with the parents. The school endeavours to keep the lines of communication open by disseminating regular newsletters.

The HSCL co-ordinator regularly visits families and parents assist with school tours and extra-curricular sporting activities. Parents are also invited to participate in initiatives around literacy and numeracy which enable them to come into the classroom and work with the students. Parenting Courses that support parents in helping their children with their homework are also provided by the school. Mr. Mulligan also endeavours to involve parents in collaborative policy development and review. Mr. Mulligan prioritised the school's Homework Policy and Lunch Policy this year.<sup>63</sup>

The school invests a lot of time and energy in trying to ensure that students progress to secondary school and in this regard are involved in the 'Stepping Up' programme. This programme was designed in collaboration with Youth Work Ireland to improve the transitioning experience of primary school students to second level schooling. As part of this initiative, Mr. Mulligan visits the students' homes and makes school based presentations to students and parents to allay anxieties. The HSCL co-ordinator also implements a specific programme for students with special educational needs.

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<sup>63</sup> Starting with the school's Homework Policy, Mr. Mulligan commenced this process by first meeting with a teacher from each of the school's eight class-bands to discuss the current policy. In an effort to involve as many parents as possible, he sent out a questionnaire on Homework via the Parents Association to every family represented in the school. On the advice of the DEIS Cuiditheoir once the data has been collated by the Parents Association, Mr. Mulligan is going to meet with a small group of eight parents from each of the class bands to discuss the policy. Once this group has reached agreement on the policy, the group will meet with a group of teachers to discuss the policy.

## **Appendix T**

### **Seven Oaks: Intercultural Day**

The day itself began with a flag ceremony where a student from every country represented in the school carried the flag from their home country in a parade around the external environs of the school. Students were invited to wear their traditional clothing and every student in the school wore a badge which had their native flag and three words in their native tongue, "Hello, Goodbye and Thank You". The teachers put a slide show of images together from all the countries represented in the school which was displayed on a screen. Ms. Devlin states "There was a screen set up and we showed a piece from each country, like you would see at the beginning of the Eurovision." They also created "tables of interest" which contained artefacts such as "maps, money, newspaper pages and different things from all the different countries" (Ms. Molloy).

There was a dual-language puppet show that was performed in both Polish and English. Ms. Molloy states "One of the Polish parents brought in the puppets and we kind of worked together so it was said in Polish and then translated into English and it was about how to make these honey cakes, a kind of a little fairytale, Polish fairytale and then the Polish parents made biscuits and they handed them out to everybody." As the World Cup was taking place in South Africa, the fourth class students learned the Diski dance and performed it on the day. Each class in the school performed, for example, the Junior Infants performed "an African Song." The teachers created a map of all of the countries where students came from and using pins and red thread "joined all the countries so we could see that we are from all over the world here and we did a signpost that did distance to Ireland, the distance to Somalia, the distance to Uganda, the distance to Canada so they could see how far

everyone had come from.” The students made a recipe book which contained thirteen different recipes and students and parents were given one each on the day.

## **Appendix U**

### **Seven Oaks: Adult Education Initiatives**

Part of creating a welcoming school environment is getting the parents used to being in and to feel comfortable in the physical environment of the school. In this regard, between Seven Oaks itself and neighbouring Barrowglen College, the following courses were provided during the 2010/2011 academic year: Cookery, Basic Computers, Digital Storytelling: write a book with your Child, Supporting your Child at Primary School Maths, Parenting: 5-11 Year Olds, Parenting: 11-16 Year Olds, Keep Fit, Art for Parents and Children, Colour me Beautiful and Internet and e-mail.

While Mr. Mulligan acknowledges that it is “difficult to engage and involve the parents who would most benefit from involvement”, the school remains optimistic in terms of what it can achieve. The principal provides the school building free of charge to members of the Polish community after school and during school holidays for ‘Polish School’ and Polish summer camps. The principal asserts that such an endeavour is a ‘wonderful opportunity to forge strong cultural links in future’. The school is also currently developing an after-school’s programme for Polish children in the Polish language, geography and history (Field Notes).

He also plays an important role in making the physical environment of the school as welcoming as possible. The school promotes a number of inclusive initiatives including Adult Education courses, a “Parents’ Suggestion Box”, a Parents’ Notice Board, and a Parents’ Room. It also promotes an open door policy and endeavours to involve parents in policy development.

## **Appendix V**

### **Seven Oaks: Review of LS/RT**

In reviewing LS/RT in our school we will be using the evidenced based evaluation methodology **Claims, Concerns and Issues (CCIs)**. The framework originated from Guba and Lincoln's (1989) Fourth Generation Evaluation work.

- Claims are favourable assertions about the topic you are evaluating.
- Concerns are any unfavourable assertions about the topic and implementation.
- Issues are questions that any reasonable person might ask about the topic and its implementation and usually arise from concerns.

When considering the issues, 'how' and 'what' questions should be used to address the concern identified. The issues will then go on to inform an action plan for the development of LS/RT in our school.

For example, if there were concerns in relation to pupils' motivation and communication in LS/RT they could generate the following issues:

- What do we need to do to improve pupils' motivation in LS/RT?
- How can we improve communication in LS/RT?

We would then need to draw up an action plan to address the issues.

## **Thematic Analysis: Issues**

1. What do we need to do to develop more in-class support including team/co-teaching rather than withdrawal which may impact on pupils' self-esteem, helping to better integrate pupils and to reach more children in the classroom.
2. How can we most effectively and productively deploy personnel in LS/RT while also ensuring that when pupils are absent teachers' time is used meaningfully?
3. How do we move to having a greater emphasis on early intervention?
4. What factors can be considered in selecting and retaining pupils in LS/RT e.g. pupils above the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile, numeracy support for EAL pupils, considering factors other than tests, rotating children being taken and possibly dropping pupils with poor attendance?
5. What do we need to do to best build on DEIS initiatives – [Maths/Reading Recovery, Literacy Lift Off, Ready Set Go Maths]?
6. How and when do we consult and plan in June for LS/RT support for the coming year, in order to begin support early in the new school year?
7. How can we ensure the LS/RT programmes are suitable, effective, allowing for progression with linking between class teachers' support plan PPWs, ST plan and monthly report?
8. What strategies can we put in place to encourage parents to attend parent/teacher meetings as there has been very poor attendance to date?
9. How and where can resources be stored, catalogued and logged in and out for different levels of the school?

## Appendix W

### Clarepark: Tackling Racism

Ms. Phelan highlights the importance of empathy, dialogue and negotiation and a collectively agreed “do” rather than “do not” approach to maintaining harmony in the classroom. She states,

Ms. Dunphy was giving a class lesson before we went off into our group. The new little boy knew the answer and he put up his hand and Ms. Dunphy asked him and he pronounced ‘four’ with a Chinese accent. And the little boy beside me said ‘four’ in a mock Chinese accent, you know imitating him. And I just kind of looked and he knew by my body language that it wasn’t an acceptable thing to do. So then that went on. Now again, I feel the teacher heard that and didn’t you know do anything. But then the little boy gave another answer and then this boy looked at the other boy and started grinning. So I thought “I have to do something. It’s only going to go on and on if we don’t stop it now.” So then I put up my hand and I just said to the teacher: “I’m really really sad and I’m not going to look at this little boy because he’s new and I don’t want him to know that I’m talking about him. But he won’t know I’m talking about him if I don’t look because he has absolutely no English” and I said “I want everybody to close their eyes and imagine that you go to China and you go into a school and your mummy drops you off in the morning and you really want your mummy. And you’re saying to everyone I really want my mummy. I really want my mummy. I want to ask my mummy something. And nobody understands you and they are all shrugging their shoulders.”



Then the little boy beside me said “I didn’t think of that. I’m sorry.” And I said “I know, but sometimes we have to think. We’ve got to put ourselves in his shoes” and I explained what that meant. But again in a school where there’s a mixture of kids coming in, what’s stopping us doing the first week or having agreements about how we behave in the classroom and why that’s necessary? Okay, what do you do in your house when there’s a birthday? We all do different things. Is your thing wrong, is my thing right? And then how we behave, that we respect each other. If we make a mistake, but then we lead them to that. It should be a discussion. Not a list of rules up on the thing. It should be the kids. Now this is the way we want the classroom to be and kind of make essential agreements with the whole lot of them (Ms. Phelan, Interview 1).