Assessing Students' Journeys From Theory To Practice In Intercultural Education[*]

Teresa Whitaker[†]
Martin Kenny[†]

[†]Hibernia College

Abstract

This paper reports on a Master's module on intercultural education. It explores current laws and policies on intercultural education. It examines the assessment of the module and presents three exemplar essays in which primary school teachers effectively implemented the intercultural guidelines in the classroom relating to ethnicity, religion and Traveller identity. The Intercultural Education Strategy recommends that teachers learn about intercultural education in order to promote a society based on values and principles so that human rights and democracy are safeguarded. The paper concludes that teachers internalised the key tenets of intercultural education, were reflective and reflexive practitioners and engaged in classroom strategies to educate young children on the importance of respecting diversity.

Keywords: Ireland, intercultural education, diversity, Travellers, ethnicity, religion, policy.

---

1. Introduction

In Ireland, the Celtic Tiger era saw an unprecedented influx of newcomers to Irish schools: by 2007, approximately ten per cent of primary-level pupils and six per cent of second-level students were newcomers (Smyth et al. 2009). This new ethnic and religious diversity in Irish society was highlighted in the 2011 census: the number of non-Irish nationals increased from 224,261 in 2002 to just over half a million (544,357) in 2011 – an increase of 143% (Central Statistics Office 2012) (CSO).

To respond to cultural and linguistic diversity the Irish government introduced a plethora of laws and policies to prevent discrimination, to promote equality and social inclusion in society and in schools. Intercultural education policies are based on the principles of social inclusion in terms of the multiple and intersecting identities that everybody possesses. The Intercultural Education Strategy (Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the Office of the Minister for Integration (2010) states that it is imperative that teachers in initial teacher education learn about intercultural education and that qualified teachers engage in modules on interculturalism through continuous professional development (CPD). The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) have developed intercultural guidelines for all levels of the education system (NCCA, 2005 [primary level]; 2006 [post-primary]; 2009 [Early Years]).

Studying for a post-graduate qualification, such as a master's degree, can be considered formal CPD. The Teaching Council has provided a draft national framework for teachers' learning called Cosán (pathway) in which it recommends that teachers become lifelong learners and avail of continuous professional development (The Teaching Council 2015). As part of a master's degree (Level 9 National Framework of Qualifications) (Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) 2012) 26 students (current teachers in early childhood education and care, primary and post-primary schools) undertook an Intercultural Education module that was

delivered over ten weeks. The authors of this paper designed, taught and assessed this module, which was rolled out over the five years of the programme validation with QQI. The assessment required students to write a critically reflective essay based on the literature, policies and laws on interculturalism. They were then required to reflect on diversity in their classroom, examine their current pedagogies, and design a small initiative to promote intercultural awareness in their classrooms. In this paper, three essays are examined, to assess how effective an instrument this process was for enabling formative and summative assessment of what the students have learned in the module. Two questions are addressed:

a) What do the essays reveal about the students' growth in the ability to be critically aware, analytical and reflective in their practice?

b) To what level are the knowledge, perspectives and nuances of current intercultural policies and of the taught intercultural module evident in the essay content?

This paper opens with the development of the module and the curriculum: this includes a short review of national and international law and policies and theoretical perspectives on inclusive education. This is followed by a brief outline of ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity and of the situation of Travellers in Irish society and education. This provides a context for the focus of the three sample essays, and is indicative of the rationale for development of this module. The assessment strategy is then presented. This is followed by the three classroom intervention exemplars, which focus on dimensions of ethnicity such as food, religion, language and Travellers' cultural identity. The final discussion and conclusion indicates that this assessment method did reveal both progress and challenges in student learning, but that overall, the module was successful as indicated by the positive feedback from students.

1.1 Intercultural Education Curriculum And Module Development

We developed the curriculum for the module by initially drawing from sociological theories of education, and how education systems can unwittingly reproduce existing societal inequalities ((Clancy 1995) (Share et al. 2009); (Meighan & Harber 2007). The introductory section of the module focused on structure and agency, conflict and consensus, power relationships, human rights, stigma, discrimination (Giddens 2009) and social class reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). The major block focused *inter alia* on the impact of age, gender, ethnicity/race, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, disability and Traveller identity on educational outcomes ((Murray & Urban 2012)(Lodge & Lynch 2004). Students were also required to examine national and international policies on intercultural education. National policy documents are based on the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (ratified by Ireland in1989). It highlights areas such as: non-discrimination, best interests of the child, the child's right and that the child's view must be taken into consideration (Children's rights alliance 2010).

The module included a critical review of legislation that pertains to education such as the Education Act (1998) (Government of Ireland 1998) which enshrines respect for diversity; and the Equal Status Acts (2000-2004) (Government of Ireland 2000b) which covers education. Students reviewed the relevance to their professional conduct, of the grounds on which discrimination is prohibited – gender, marital status, family status, age, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability and membership of the Traveller Community. Over one million students participate in the education system in Ireland and over 40,000 people are employed in it, therefore at all levels of the education system there is a need to ensure that these grounds are included (Lodge & Lynch 2004). Principals, teachers and others in positions of responsibility in a school cannot harass, victimise, or discriminate against anyone on any of the nine grounds; and they must not permit anyone with a right to be in the school, such as students or parents, to do so. The Equality Authority is mandated to promote equality of opportunity and to combat discrimination in all areas of society including formal education. It provides guidance to teachers on how to put policy into practice. The inclusive school

'respects, values and accommodates diversity across all nine grounds in the equality legislation' (Lodge & Lynch, 2004, p. *x*).

Other legislation includes the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, 2004 (Government of Ireland 2004) that establishes the principle of inclusive education for children with special educational needs as a legal requirement. The Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 (Government of Ireland 2000a) requires schools to prepare codes of behaviour; these codes must recognise diversity of culture and needs. The Children Act, 2001 (Government of Ireland 2001) addresses issues relating to the care, protection and control of children, juvenile offenders, and child care proceedings; it protects the education rights of children who come under its remit. The law functions as shield and sword; it protects rights and enforces recognition of those rights. The vision informing the law is often more fully stated in policies; however, these Acts contain clear and precise statements of elements of that vision.

1.2   The intercultural guidelines

The European Council emphasises the importance of intercultural competence and dialogue, exchange and education in building a common European future based on values and principles, so that human rights and democracy are safeguarded (Huber, 2012). The Council of Europe further argue that there is a great need for education so that intercultural competence can be developed, learned and maintained throughout life. There has been substantial investment, internationally (UNESCO 2005)(Huber 2012) and nationally, into drawing up comprehensive inclusion policy documents. The NCCA publishes a wide range of diversity-related documents, to support inclusive teaching in primary (NCCA 2007, p.200) and secondary (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2006) school sectors, and in Early Years education (NCCA, 2009) . The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (2004) also published intercultural guidelines for primary schools (Irish National Teachers' Organisation 2004). Intercultural guidelines for the early childhood education and care sector are a fundamental aspect of *Aistear* (National

Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2009)and *Síolta* (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education 2006). The fundamental principle of intercultural education is that it celebrates and embraces the richness of diversity; it acknowledges that people have 'developed a range of different ways of life, customs and worldview and that this breadth of human life enriches all of us' and 'promotes equality and human rights, challenges unfair discrimination, and promotes the values upon which equality is built' (NCCA, 2005, p.3). Schools as microcosms of society are entrusted to respect diversity and to ensure that children internalise the normality of diversity in their everyday lives. This respect permeates all aspects of the school culture and checklists are provided to ensure that schools comply with and promote diversity in lessons, in school displays and in policies. This respect for diversity is part of the hidden curriculum. 'In exploring the hidden curriculum it is important to note that what is absent can be as important as what is present' (NCCA, 2005, p.4).

1.3   Intercultural Education Strategy

Ireland launched its first *Intercultural Education Strategy* (IES) in 2010 (Department of Education and Skills and the Office of the Minister for Integration 2010). The IES strategy focuses exclusively on ethnicity; it acknowledges the increased immigration into Irish society which has resulted in much ethnic and religious diversity and counsels teachers of the dangers of racism, bullying and stereotyping. It recognises that many teachers may have qualified during a time when Irish society was relatively homogenous and they may not have received intercultural education. Therefore, it is necessary to 'build the capacity of service providers at all levels' (p.50). Teacher education should incorporate awareness raising of the importance of diversity in Irish society and of providing immigrants with information about the Irish education system. Teachers should have the 'knowledge skills to teach in a diverse classroom' (p. 28). English may not be the first language of newcomers; therefore initial teacher education and CPD should ensure that teachers are trained in English as an Additional Language and 'cultural diversity principles and practice' (p.30) because they have a key role in developing the 'language competance of all learners' (p.39). Teachers should have 'high

expectations' for their students and migrants should be encouraged to become teachers (p.30). In order to deliver a successful intercultural ethos and practice in education the strategy outlines ten key components: 1)leadership', 2) mainstreaming of education provision, 3) rights and responsibilities, 4) high aspirations and expectations, 5) enhancing the quality of teaching, 6) knowledge of language(s) of instruction, 7) partnership and engagement, 8) effective communication, 9) data collection and research and finally actions such as 10) monitoring and evaluation (IES, 2010, p. 44).

1.4   Ethnic and religious diversity in Ireland

Three aspects of diversity are described as these were the focus of the exemplar essays: ethnic and religious diversity and Traveller identity. Irish society has become increasingly ethnically diverse. Census 2011 revealed that the number of non-Irish nationals has increased from 419,733 to 544,357 persons (+ 30%) since the 2006 census. Ethnic groups showing the largest increase were those already well established in Ireland. In the year preceding the 2011 census day, 53,267 persons immigrated into Ireland; the two leading immigrant groups were from the UK (4,549) and Poland (3,825). Polish nationals account for the greatest increase - from 63,276 to 122,585 (+93.7%). The fastest growing groups were Romanians (+110%), Indians (+91%), Polish (+83%), Latvians (+43%) and Lithuanians (+40%). That said the vast majority of the population are Irish. The total population in 2011 was 4,525, 281, of whom Irish people made up 86.8%. Newcomers only account for 13% of the total population (CSO, 2012). Ethnic diversity may also be accompanied by linguistic diversity English may not be the first language of newcomers which poses challenges for mainstream and resource teachers.

Ethnic diversity may be accompanied by religious diversity, and accommodating children of different religions or no religious beliefs at primary school can also be challenging. Historically, Ireland was a religiously homogenous country. In 1991, 92% of the population registered as Roman Catholic; it dropped to 89% by 2002, and to 84% by 2011. Listed affiliations rose from five to eight in 1981, and then to 21 in 1991 (CSO, 2012). People registering as having no religion have become the

next largest grouping after Catholics, and the number not registering any religion has also risen. The traditional major Christian churches remain significant, but Muslims and Orthodox Christians have entered the top six affiliations. It must be acknowledged that ethnicity is not entirely synonymous with adherance to a particular religious belief, for example many Irish people do not adhere to Catholicism, those from India may adhere to one of a number of religions. Over 60% of those who adhere to the Apostolic and Pentecostal population were of African ethnicity; Irish people make up 10% of those adhering to that religion and the rest are of 'Any other White background' (CSO, 2012). In addition, the majority (63%) of Ireland's Presbyterians were of Irish nationality in 2011. The profile of these ranked in order of size in the 2011 census was as follows:

Table 1. Percentage profile of religious affiliations in the national population

Affiliation	2011
Roman Catholic	84.2
No religion	5.9
Church of Ireland (including Protestant)	2.9
Not stated	1.6
Muslim (Islamic)	1.1
Orthodox	1
Presb	0.5

(Data source: CSO 2012)

Census 2011 lists fifteen smaller affiliations: Apostolic/Pentecostal (0.3%), Hindu, Buddhist and Methodist (0.2% each), Jehovah's Witness, Evangelical Lutheran, Atheist, Baptist and Agnostic (0.1% each). Finally, Jewish, Pantheist, Latter Day Saints, Quakers, Baha'I, and Brethren each comprised between 0.04 and 0.01% of the population, and the remaining 1.2% registered across a cluster of other unnamed but clearly very small affiliations. Children in some areas may not have a choice in relation to the school they attend. Their local primary school will most likely be a Catholic one, so it is important that children's religious beliefs are respected (Lodge & Lynch 2004).

Travellers are a distinct indigenous ethnic group in Irish society. The number of Irish Travellers enumerated in the 2011 census of population was 29,573 which was a 32 per cent increase from 2006 (22, 435). However, the number of Travellers enumerated in an all Ireland health study was 40, 129 (Pavee Point 2010). As a distinct indigenous ethnic group in Ireland Travellers have always fared poorly in the education system. Previously they were segregated educationally and socially excluded (Pavee Point 2005). Traveller organisations have continuously protested against the lack of interculturalism in the Irish curriculum. Traveller education is lower than any other ethnic group in Ireland. The number of Traveller children who leave school before the age of 15 years is 62% compared to 15% of the Irish population (Pavee Point 2010). Unfortunately Travellers continue to experience prejudice and discrimination in education and society in Ireland (Tormey & Gleeson 2012); they have a high (84%) unemployment rate (CSO 2012), have poorer health than the general population and higher levels of disability (Pavee Point 2010).

2. From Policy To Practice

Education policy implementation ultimately depends on teachers having the necessary knowledge, skills and competence to enact these policies, and to address the children's diverse potential and needs. To achieve best practice requires professional development that promotes awareness of wider social issues, and awareness of prevailing policy ethos and legal obligations (Lodge & Lynch 2004). A recent survey of 27 teachers indicated that the majority (15/25) of respondents were unaware of the intercultural guidelines; very few (3/27) said they knew about the IES; half of the sample said that their schools did not have an intercultural policy and that they needed further training in embracing cultural diversity (Watson 2012). For the past decade, Devine (2011) has conducted studies on ethnicity in Irish schools; this has enabled her to track changes in teacher's perceptions, observing consistent and persistent patterns in the period. Teachers may not be aware of their own racialised practices and may unwittingly have lower expectations for children of ethnic minorities because they are seen as 'other' or 'exotic' and are different to Irish children who are considered the norm in terms of culture (Devine 2011).

3. Assessment Strategy

Formative and summative assessment was used for this module. Formative feedback was provided through tutorials and online discussion forums and through a short module exercise (a 500-word project proposal). The summative assessment tool was a 3,000 word essay, comprising a reflective critical analysis of their designed classroom or school-based intervention, aimed to promote intercultural awareness and improve inclusion.

When all the essays had been assessed and feedback returned to students, they were asked if the essays could be collated and returned to them as an aspect of peer learning and whether they could be deposited in the library for other students to consult. They all gave permission for this (Whitaker 2013a). Ethical permission was also sought and granted from the three teachers for their permission for their essays to be used for a paper on intercultural education. Ethical approval was also sought and granted from the College Ethics Committee.

The full set of essays show that the teachers invoked a range of ways to design and implement inclusive practices; in some cases they used exemplars from the NCCA (2005; 2007) website and in other cases they came up with their own creative ideas and interventions. Essays were written on the following topics: race/ethnicity promoting awareness of intercultural guidelines, religion, Travellers, homosexuality, increasing parental involvement, conflict resolution, policy development, racism identity and promoting equal opportunities. It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe all the interventions, therefore, three essays were randomly chosen to illustrate aspects of ethnicity, religion, language, and the ethnic identity of Travellers. The authors, all primary school teachers are referred to as Teacher 1, Teacher 2 and Teacher 3. Other aspects of diversity: homosexuality (Whitaker 2013b) and disability(Whitaker 2014) have been discussed in other publications.

Below, analysis of this essay project as an assessment tool will begin with three vignettes of these students' submitted work; this is followed by critical discussion of what these projects revealed in relation to their authors' learning.

3.1   Class room interventions to promote intercultural education

3.2   Food, Religion and Ethnicity

The first teacher 1 teaches in an infant classroom in a Catholic primary school in which there are diverse religions namely: Catholic, Protestant, Baptist, Hindu and Jewish. She believed that this new religious diversity was being ignored rather than embraced. T1 developed an intervention to promote religious tolerance through play. Using the Aistear (NCCA, 2009) guidelines of 'identity and belonging' she promoted the principles of: the child's uniqueness, equality and diversity and children as citizens. T1 believed that the way people prepare and eat food can be an important dimension of ethnicity and religion. Over the course of a month she developed a make believe restaurant in a socio-dramatic play station in the classroom to demonstrate that there can be rituals attached to eating, which can have links to religion and ethnicity. The children took on the different roles of chef, waiter/waitress or customer. T1 intervened with questions such as: What kind of restaurant is this? What type of food is served here? Who visits this restaurant? What kind of food do you cook: Chinese, French, Italian, Japanese, Irish orIndian? What might you do before you eat?

The children enjoyed the exercise and it was noted that one little boy of Indian origin and Hindu religion who was normally quiet and reserved entered into the play with enthusiasm and shared information about what his mother cooks at home. They ate vegetarian food because they believe that it is wrong to kill animals. Similarly, a young Nigerian girl who is usually shy shared her experiences of being a Baptist and how they celebrate with food after every service. T1 researched culture-specific cookbooks to source the types of foods eaten in other countries and cultures. When a child served a meal, the class reflected on the culture, for example, if it was a Japanese restaurant, the customers would eat at a low table while sitting on cushions. The children learned that in Japan, you say "itadakimasu"

("I gratefully receive") before eating, and "gochisosama (deshita)" ("Thank you for the meal") after finishing the meal. If it was an Indian restaurant, they would use only the right hand for eating and passing the food around because in Indian culture, the left hand is considered unclean. Jewish cuisine and the laws of keeping kosher (eating only the foods allowed by Jewish law) opened their eyes to very different traditions. In Islam, Muslims must comply with Halal practices in relation to what food can be eaten; pork is prohibited so Muslims would not eat pork sausages or any pork dishes. Pupils cooked, served and tried food from other cultures and on St. Patrick's Day the children shared green jelly and ice-cream.

3.3   Ethnicity and language

The second teacher (T2) was a senior language support teacher in a primary school in a DEIS Band Two catchment and focused on the promotion of intercultural education in terms of social integration and language support for newcomer children whose first language is not English. Almost one third of her school population comprised of pupils from different countries: Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia, reflecting immigration into the industrialised town in which the school is located. Initially T2 took field notes of stressful episodes in relation to newcomer pupils. She works in three classes of twenty five pupils and facilitates language development both in a withdrawal- group setting and within the classroom through the Aistear curriculum (NCCA, 2009).

T2 used a time frame of one month to design, deliver and assess the intervention strategies. She started with an examination of the school procedures for newcomer children; she consulted with the management team, and they introduced new procedures involving a meeting with newcomer parents, the principal and language support teacher. This provided the opportunity to explain school procedures to parents and the new pupil in a warm and welcoming manner and to gather information about the newly-arriving child, their capacities and particular needs, anticipations and concerns. A checklist was devised from the NCCA Intercultural Guidelines (2005). Important information was gathered regarding the correct

pronunciation of the child's name, their language abilities and needs. Key words and phrases in the child's first language were requested. Information regarding the pupil's religion was obtained in addition to how it is practised and possible implications for school and classroom planning. To date, this checklist is proving beneficial to newcomer students and the teachers have reported a decrease in instances of cultural disconnect. Classroom routines are clearly explained enabling the newcomer children to settle in quickly.

Guided by the NCCA (2005, p.45) advice that people find it easier to 'develop complex thinking in their first language, it is important that student's first language is valued and affirmed within the classroom and the wider school context', T2 learnt key words and phrases such as greetings and simple instructions in the student's first language. On a regular and deliberate basis, she also communicated positive attitudes towards linguistic diversity and multi-lingual skills, for example: 'Maria speaks fluent Polish and she is improving her English every day.' Classmates were encouraged to help and support their peers, by repeating and re-phrasing statements. T2 also adopted role play strategies as a means of clarification and confirming comprehension. In small group settings she incorporated first languages such as Polish, Mandarin and Hungarian to scaffold learning both in oral language work and literacy activities. She compiled and sourced dual language books. Finally a classroom review checklist guided by the NCCA was devised and circulated to classrooms in which *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) and station teaching takes place. The checklist was completed jointly by the mainstream class teacher and language support teacher.

3.4 Travellers

The third teacher (T3) teaches children age six to seven in a primary school. She was concerned about a young Traveller child who complained because other children were bullying, teasing and excluding him from play. Other children also made comments that could be considered discriminatory towards Travellers; these were dealt with in accordance with the school's behaviour and discipline policy. She designed an intervention that would develop an understanding of the Travelling Community and hopefully prevent discrimination, particularly as recent research by

Tormey and Gleeson (2012) found that students in secondary schools held negative and discriminatory attitudes toward Travellers.

T3 chose three subjects Geography, History and English where children would have the opportunity to discover information about the Travellers. In Geography, she covered the topic of homes. According to the Primary School Geography Curriculum children in First Class should be enabled to recognise that people live in a variety of homes...farmhouses, cottages, apartments, flats, caravans, trailers, mobile homes, homes in shanty towns (NCCA 1999, p13).

This provided the context to explore the Travelling Community's tradition of living in a caravan or a trailer. The children were given the opportunity to draw their own homes and discuss them and what it is like to live in each. Children were able to share experiences of holidaying in mobile homes, and the child from the Travelling Community talked about how he goes travelling in a trailer around England each summer with his cousins; sometimes moved on by local police.

In 'History', the teacher explored the topic of when their grandparents were young because of the differences and similarities of experiences of settled people and Travellers. The children gathered stories from their grandparents about what school was like for them and compared it with school today. T3 worked in a disadvantaged area; many of the grandparents had similar negative memories of school or in some cases didn't attend school regularly.

For her daily read-aloud session in English, the teacher chose a book from the class library called *Mr. Ape* (King-Smith 1998) (King-Smith 1998), which features two gypsies that help Ape on his farm; these characters were presented in a positive light and helped to depict Travellers to all of the children in a positive way as well as to ensure that Travellers are represented in the class library.

4. Discussion

Religion is a significant part of many people's sense of ethnic, personal or cultural and national identity. When promoting religious tolerance in the infant classroom, T1 suggests that prevention (of intolerance) is better than cure. Nurturing equality and diversity at this impressionable age helps children to recognise, value and

accept themselves and others. Each child was supported to feel equal to everyone else and not excluded because of ethnicity, faith/no faith, culture, language, family background, special educational need, gender, physical appearance or ability. T1 endorsed diversity by welcoming and valuing individual differences and celebrating these differences as part of life. She suggested that the promotion of religious tolerance happened almost by default because each child learnt to respect his/her peers regardless of faith/no faith. However, this teacher might also have highlighted some of the prejudice that children or adults can have for those of different religious beliefs as evidenced by studies in Northern Ireland (Kenny & McLaughlin 2004).

Although, T2's intervention could not achieve the development of complex thinking in the child's mother tongue, the interventions proved beneficial in that children were comforted to hear the teacher speak in words and phrases in their first language. Pupils were eager to reply and continue conversing in their mother tongues. The interventions clearly increased their sense of inclusion and recognition in the classroom; pupils were highly motivated and increased in feelings of self worth. Dual language dictionaries are now in place in the language support room and in several classrooms; these are an effective pedagogical method for scaffolding learning.

T3 addressed the marginalisation of Travellers, by celebrating their nomadic traditions. However, Travellers today tend to have left behind a nomadic lifestyle which was constrained through legislation causing considerable hardship to families and forcing them into settled accommodation and breaking up their traditional extended family living arrangements (Murray & Urban 2012). Teaching about nomadic heritage must be accompanied by reflection with the pupils, on the discrimination that contributed substantially to its erosion. They could also explore the effect of changes in the economy, so that the skills and services provided by nomads were no longer relevant or needed. Also, members of nomadic communities may choose to take up occupations which can be better conducted if they settle, or may choose the settled lifestyle. It is essential to honour the heritage, but also to recognise discrimination, economic change, and Travellers' current cultural practices, and to celebrate the huge common ground between the life practices of the children they teach.

The policies on intercultural education and the accompanying website with exemplars are a useful resource for teachers to examine their pedagogical practices and incorporate intercultural education into their everyday teaching methodologies and environment. The NCCA checklists proved a useful tool for teachers to reflect on their classrooms and schools. However, pupils do not neatly fit into any one cultural category, they have multiple and intersecting identities and teachers must guard against reducing children to one category or dimension of identity. The intercultural guidelines can be criticised because of the lack of attention they give to the effect of poverty and material disadvantage and its intersection with other identities. For many years foreign students have come to boarding schools in Ireland to improve their English and also the children of diplomats whose parents are stationed in Ireland may place their children in Irish schools. These students' experiences may differ quite significantly from those children who live in impoverished conditions. (Devine 2011) suggests that although some immigrants may have higher levels of education than indigenous Irish parents, many immigrants may cluster in poorer areas where they can find low-rental or less expensive housing. The clustering of ethnic groups presents challenges for teachers who may have many children in their classroom whose first language is not English.

4.1   Student feedback

On completion of the module, evaluation was conducted through a survey. The general ratings for the module were all good to excellent in terms of: structure, content matched to the learning outcomes, academic content, suitability of assessment method, relevance of the module and overall rating. The tutors were rated as effective facilitators with excellent subject knowledge who were accessible during the duration of the module. Students' reported that the module was informative and insightful and that they had a deeper awareness and knowledge of issues to do with cultural values, gender issues, ethnicity and religion and that they now had a better understanding of how to promote intercultural awareness and improve inclusion in their educational contexts. The negative aspects of the module were that it was heavy with too much sociological theory and too many readings.

This negative feedback was taken on board, and the lesson content reduced for future students. In addition, five students carried out longer research projects (minor dissertations of 15,000 words) on intercultural education in the classroom and school and these projects were commended by the external examiner.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have described the development, curriculum and assessment of a module on intercultural education delivered to masters' level students who are teachers. We examined three examples of how teachers in primary school settings have interpreted and enacted intercultural policies in the classroom. The essays reveal students' growth in the ability to be critically aware, analytical and reflective of their practice and in a creative and innovative manner change their pedagogical practices by designing and implementing policies and procedures in order to create more inclusive classrooms. In terms of the internalisation of knowledge, perspectives and nuances of current intercultural policies and legislation, the teachers reflected deeply on their own practices and demonstrated that they were reflective and reflexive practitioners. They implemented policies and drew on theoretical insights in their creative practices. The essays also highlighted challenges for teachers. Schools and teachers have an important role to play in the socialisation of children and teachers should not underestimate their influence on shaping children's attitudes, opinions and beliefs.

6. References

Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J., 1977. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* 2nd Edition., London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Central Statistics Office, 2012. *Profile 7 Religion, Ethnicity and Irish Travellers*, Ireland. Available at:
http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011profile7/Profile,7, Education, Ethnicity,and,Irish,Traveller,entire,doc.pdf [Accessed January 4, 2015].

Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education, 2006. *Siolta The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*, Available at:
http://www.siolta.ie/media/pdfs/23746%20Full%20and%20Part%20Time%20Text.pdf [Accessed September 15, 2013].

Children's rights alliance, 2010. *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Available at:
http://www.childrensrights.ie/sites/default/files/submissions_reports/files/UNCRCEnglish_0.pdf [Accessed August 29, 2015].

Clancy, P., 1995. Education in the Republic of Ireland: The Project of Modernity? In *Sociological Perspectives*. Dublin, Ireland: Institute of Public Administration.

Department of Education and Skills and the Office of the Minister for Integration, 2010. *Intercultural Education Strategy, 2010-2015*, Available at:
http://www.pdst.ie/sites/default/files/Intercultural_education_strategy.pdf [Accessed September 8, 2013].

Devine, D., 2011. *Immigration and schooling in the Republic of Ireland Making a difference?* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Giddens, A., 2009. *Sociology* 6th edition., Cambridge: Polity Press.

Government of Ireland, 2001. *Children Act, 2001*, Available at:
http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2001/en/act/pub/0024/ [Accessed September 8, 2013].

Government of Ireland, 1998. *Education Act, 1998*, Available at:
http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1998/en/act/pub/0051/ [Accessed September 12, 2013].

Government of Ireland, 2004. *Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004*, Available at: http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/bills28/acts/2004/A3004.pdf [Accessed September 8, 2013].

Government of Ireland, 2000a. *Education (Welfare) Act 2000*, Available at: http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2000/en/act/pub/0022/ [Accessed September 8, 2013].

Government of Ireland, 2000b. *Equal Status Acts 2000 - 2004*, Available at: http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/EqualStatusActsConsldtd_00_04.pdf/Files/EqualStatusActsConsldtd_00_04.pdf [Accessed September 8, 2013].

Huber, J., 2012. *Intercultural competence for all, preparation for living in a heterogeneous world*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.

Irish National Teachers' Organisation, 2004. *Intercultural Education in the Primary School including Proceedings of the Consultative Conference on Education, Kilkenny, 2004.*, Dublin: INTO. Available at: http://www.into.ie/ROI/Publications/InterculturalEd.pdf [Accessed September 8, 2013].

Kenny, M. & McLaughlin, H., 2004. *Diversity in Early Years Education, North and South: Implications for Teacher Education. A Report for the Centre for Cross Border Studies and the Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South*, Available at: http://www.crossborder.ie/pubs/diversityreport.pdf [Accessed October 15, 2015].

King-Smith, D., 1998. *Mr Ape*, London: Corgi Yearling.

Lodge, A. & Lynch, K., 2004. *Diversity at School*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration. Available at: http://integration.ie/website/omi/omiwebv6.nsf/page/AXBN-83GM8P16232912-en/$File/Diversity_at_School%5B1%5D.pdf [Accessed September 12, 2013].

Meighan, R. & Harber, C., 2007. *A sociology of educating* 5th ed., London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Murray, C. & Urban, M., 2012. *Diversity and Equality in Early Childhood: An Irish Perspective*, Dublin.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009. *Aistear The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*, Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. Available at:
http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Early_Childhood_Education/Framework_for_early_learning/ [Accessed September 12, 2013].

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2006. *Intercultural education in the post-primary school, enabling students to respect and celebrate diversity to promote equality and to challenge unfair discrimination*, Ireland: Government Publications. Available at: http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/publications/Interc%20Guide_Eng.pdf [Accessed June 14, 2016].

NCCA, 1999. *The Primary School Curriculum*, Dublin. Available at: http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/curriculum/intro_eng.pdf [Accessed December 16, 2014]. NCCA, 2007. *Toolkit for Diversity in the Primary School*, Dublin: NCCA. Available at: http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/Curriculum/inclusion/Assessment_Toolkit.pdf.

Pavee Point, 2010. *All Ireland Traveller Health Study Our Geels*, Available at: http://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/AITHS-Summary-of-Findings.pdf [Accessed August 29, 2015].

Pavee Point, 2005. *Assimilation Policies and Outcomes: Travellers' Experiences Report on a research project commissioned by Pavee Point Travellers' Centre*, Dublin: Pavee Point Travellers Centre. Available at: http://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/AssimilationPolicies.pdf [Accessed June 14, 2016].

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), 2012. The National Framework of Qualifications. Available at: http://www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/ [Accessed September 12, 2013].

Share, P., Tovey, H. & Corcoran, M., 2009. *A Sociology of Ireland* 3rd Edition., Dublin: Gill & Macmillan.

Smyth, E. et al., 2009. *Adapting to Diversity: Irish Schools and Newcomer Students*, Dublin: The Economic and Social Research Institute.

The Teaching Council, 2015. *Draft Framework Teachers' Learning Cosan For Consultation*, Dublin: Ireland. Available at: http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/_fileupload/Teacher %20Education/CPD/Cosán-%20Draft%20Framework%20for%20Teachers %27%20Learning,%20May%202015.pdf [Accessed June 11, 2015].

Tormey, R. & Gleeson, J., 2012. Irish post-primary students' attitudes towards ethnic minorities. *Irish Educational Studies*, (iFirst article), pp.1–17.

UNESCO, 2005. *UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education*, France: Education Sector. Available at: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001478/147878e.pdf [Accessed September 8, 2013].

Watson, K., 2012. *Cultural competency and cultural diversity in Irish post-primary schools - a quantitative research study*. Unpublished Master's thesis. Dublin: Hibernia College.

Whitaker, T., 2016. Achieving social inclusion for students with non-visible disabilities: a case study of a student studying for ITE with an anxiety related disorder in an online higher education institution. *Association for Higher Education Access & Disability*, 3, pp.94–108.

Whitaker, T., 2013a. *Essays on Intercultural education - From Policy to practice*, Dublin: Hibernia College.

Whitaker, T., 2013b. Reflective practice and praxis; what do they look like? Challenging homophobia in a post-primary school. In Hibernia Research Conference 2013 Sharing Knowledge: The Role of Research in Teaching and Learning. Alexander Hotel: Hibernia College.

Whitaker, T., 2014. Teaching Sociology of Education to Teachers in Tough Times. In *Teaching in Tough Times*. Teaching in Tough Times. Mayo Education Centre: Mayo ETC, pp. 15–25.