



**Submission to the Curriculum Development Unit of
the Department of Education and Science regarding
the Promotion of Anti-Racism and Interculturalism
at all levels of the Education System**



Introduction / Organisation's Background

In 2001, the Minister for Education and Science, Dr. Michael Woods, appointed the Dublin Institute of Technology and St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra to jointly undertake a project to develop and co-ordinate early childhood education in Ireland. This was in pursuance of the objectives of the White Paper 'Ready to Learn' (DES, 1999) and to advise the Department of Education and Science on policy issues in this area. As Dr. Woods stated;

“the Government recognises the value of early childhood education, particularly in tackling educational disadvantage. Research has shown that quality early education can have a highly significant impact on children's capacity to cope with the transition to formal schooling and provides lasting cognitive and social benefits that persist throughout adolescence and adulthood.”

The Colleges have established a Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) for the purposes of implementing this project. The CECDE is located within St Patrick's College, Drumcondra. The design of the programme also takes account of the requirement that the Centre will prepare the groundwork for the establishment of an Early Childhood Education Agency as envisaged by the White Paper.

Aims and Objectives of the CECDE

The main objectives of the project are to:

- Develop a quality framework for early childhood education;
- Formulate targeted interventions on a pilot basis for children who are educationally disadvantaged and children with special needs; and
- Prepare the groundwork for the establishment of an Early Childhood Education Agency as envisaged by the White Paper.

Within this context, the functions of the Centre will be to:

- Develop early education quality standards in relation to all aspects of early childhood education including equipment and material, staff qualifications, training, learning objectives, teaching methodologies, curriculum and related areas;
- Develop a support framework to encourage compliance with quality standards by early education providers;

- Co-ordinate and enhance early education provision, including parental involvement, with a particular focus on disadvantaged and special needs groups;
- Undertake and/or commission research and development through which best practice in curriculum, teaching methodology and parental involvement may be implemented and evaluated.

The CECDE will develop a practical framework in the following areas of early childhood education:

- Equipment and materials
- Staff qualifications and training
- Teaching and learning methods
- Curriculum
- Guidance for parents

Historical Overview: Early Childhood Education in Ireland

Introduction

There has been an awakening and acknowledgment of the need for reform in the area of early childhood education in Ireland in recent years. Many of the recommendations of the White Paper on Early Childhood Education, *Ready to Learn* (DES, 1999), are now being implemented, with consequent effects on the existing system, which had developed on a somewhat ad-hoc basis. The distinction between pre-schools, nurseries and child-care is not always clear at present. Much of the current private provision for children includes pre-school education but this is difficult to quantify or evaluate. The role of the primary school system in Ireland is also significant for the age group that other EU countries might call pre-school. Although children are not obliged to attend schools until age six, in excess of 50% of all four-year olds and almost all five year olds, are enrolled in infant classes in the primary schools. *The Revised Curriculum* (DES, 1999a) at infant level takes some cognisance of current methodologies and pedagogy in relation to Early Childhood Education and forms part of the reforms in this area.

Targeted Intervention

In 1969 a number of playgroups were opened in areas of social disadvantage. Among these was the Rutland Street Project in Dublin, the first pre-primary school service to be funded by the Department of Education. Set up to cater for children living in a disadvantaged inner-city area, the Rutland Street Project was aimed at preparing children for primary school. The pilot project was evaluated in 1977 and again in 1993 for the Department of Education by the Educational Research Centre, with both positive short-term results for certain aspects of development and impressive longitudinal results. The Rutland Street pre-school continues to operate in 2002, catering for 95 pupils aged 3-5. There is also a *Break the Cycle* Scheme in operation in primary schools in areas of extreme disadvantage, for pupils from junior infants to second class. This provides enhanced capitulation, improved resources and reduced pupil-teacher ratios in contexts of extreme

disadvantage. In excess of 50 Traveller pre-schools cater for approximately 550 pupils, in a segregated environment.

While there is no national provision for early childhood education in Ireland at the moment, the fact that primary schools accept children on or after their fourth birthday is a form of provision. In addition, the Minister for Education and Science's '*Early Start*' scheme for early years pupils from 3 to 4 years of age in designated areas of disadvantage provides early childhood education for approximately 1,600 pupils. In 1998, A National Forum on Early Childhood Education was held in Dublin to bring together for the first time the diverse groups and institutions involved in the provision of early childhood education. The Report on the National Forum for Early Childhood Education (1998) made recommendations that informed the formulation of the White Paper on Early Childhood Education, *Ready to Learn* (DES, 1999).

Legislation and Policy Documents

In 1985 the Minister for Health established standards and legal requirements for day-care facilities for young children. The Child Care Act, 1991, defined the status of pre-school children as those under age 6, the age of compulsory education unless they are enrolled in a primary school. In 1996, regulations for pre-schools based on the 1991 Act were introduced and cater for inspection on mainly health and safety issues. This means that a five year old who attends a primary school is not deemed to be a pre-school child. The Green Paper on Education (DES, 1992), the subsequent White Paper (DES, 1995), the Education Act (DES, 1998) and the White Paper on Early Childhood Education (DES, 1999) highlight the importance of early childhood education. A Review Body is currently revisiting the 1996 Childcare Regulations.

The myriad of developments and reforms in the area of early childhood education since the early 1990's is reflective of the growing acknowledgment and realisation of the importance of this period of development. Ireland's adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1992) catalysed an era of reform in this area. This has resulted in an augmentation of the quantity and quality of formal policy formulation and implementation in the past decade. Reforms and advancements include a number of studies commissioned and published such as the Commission on the Family (1998), the Expert Working Group on Childcare (1999) and the National Children's Strategy - '*Our Children, Their Lives*' (Department of Health, 2000). This is further underpinned by direct educational reform and legislation, including the White Paper on Education (DES, 1995), the Education Act (DES, 1998), the White Paper on Early Childhood Education (DES, 1999), the introduction of the *Revised Curriculum* (DES, 1999a) and the Education (Welfare) Act (DES, 2000). An acknowledgment of the heightened awareness and increased importance afforded to early childhood development is evident from the appointment of a Junior Minister for State with direct responsibility for children. Such reforms have been crucial in changing and augmenting public consciousness in the area of early childhood development and education. While legislation is not a panacea for racist or discriminatory behaviour, it is important as a cornerstone on which to build and to influence individual and societal opinion that racism is neither legally nor morally acceptable.

[Eurydice Dossier, 2002]

Early Childhood Education: Contemporary Situation

State-funded pre-school provision at present is largely targeted at those affected by social disadvantage, distinct minority groups and those with special needs. In the area of disadvantage, existing provision for the early years provided by the Department of Education and Science comprises of the *Early Start* pilot pre-school project, The Rutland Street project and the Breaking the Cycle pilot programme. However, there seems to be no national strategy in operation to cope with the increasing number of ethnic minority children presenting in our education system.

Traveller Pre-schools

Traveller pre-schools have been in operation since 1984 and are funded by grant-aid from the Department of Education. In 2001, there were 52 Traveller pre-schools, catering for approximately 550 pupils. The preschools are staffed by temporary teachers and some schools are also provided with childcare assistants, depending on local FAS schemes, Community Employment Schemes and Health Boards. At primary level, there are 460 Resource teachers working with Traveller pupils on a withdrawal and full-time basis. The service is also assisted by 40 visiting teachers at primary and post-primary level. They provide a valuable early childhood education service and provide some preparation for the transition to the primary school.

Special pre-schools for Traveller children have a very positive role in introducing small children to a new environment and can act as a bridge in preparing these children for integration at primary level. Despite these positive developments, there remain many deficiencies in Traveller provision. While the DES funds such pre-schools, it does not involve itself in their organisation, management or curriculum. There is little in-career development or support for staff while conditions of employment are far inferior to their *Early Start* counterparts.

Traveller pre-schools are managed by a variety of individuals and voluntary committees, many of which have limited experience of early childhood education. These local management committees have overall responsibility for the nature and content of Traveller pre-school provision, including staffing, accommodation, programme content and delivery. This leads to inconsistencies in the provision, administration and methodologies used in Traveller pre-schools. The DES must accept a statutory responsibility for the service in order to ensure provision for Traveller pupils is consistent with that of pupils participating in the *Early Start* Programme.

The Report on the Task Force on the Traveller Community (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 1995), the Report on The National Forum for Early Childhood Education (DES, 1998) and the Monitoring Committee on the recommendations of the Task Force (2000) have emphasised the deficiencies of the Traveller pre-school service which include management of the service, funding, employment conditions, culturally appropriate provision, curriculum approach and parental involvement. There are no minimum standards of qualifications in the Traveller preschools for personnel, yet in the *Early Start* programme, these are clearly defined and enforced. The following table highlights the inferior nature of Traveller pre-school provision vis-à-vis provision for the *Early Start* programme.

TRAVELLER PRE-SCHOOLS AND EARLY START PROGRAMME

	Traveller Pre-Schools	Early Start Programme *
Teachers	98% funding of tuition at €26.08 per hour part-time rate.	Salary with full benefits, scale €22,208-€43,165.
Assistants	Funding/ appointments at discretion of Health Boards/ FAS schemes etc.	Salary €8.10 hourly €17,349 annually (permanent)
Capitation Grant	€50.80 per pupil for running costs of centre	€95.23 per pupil for running costs of centre.
Set-up Grant	No standard provision.	€5713.82
Equipment Grant	€508 annually	€1523.69 annually
Parental Involvement	No Provision	€952.30 annually to develop parental involvement
Premises	No provision.	Provided by Dept. of Education.
Transport	98% funded by Dept. of Education where necessary.	No Provision .

***Funding cited per half unit (15 pupils) in each school**

Support for Pupils from a Different Cultural and Ethnic Background

The DES has been slow to respond to the needs of the growing numbers of children presenting in the Irish education system from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. In 2000, in excess of 5,000 asylum-seeking children arrived in Ireland, the majority of whom had minimal competency in the English language (Fanning, Veale and O'Connor, 2001). There is no early years educational provision for this large cohort of pupils, who are in great need of intervention at this vital stage of formation and development. Provision in the infant years lacks intensity and targeting and fails to address their needs either in the acquisition of the English language or in increasing their proficiency in their mother tongue.

Research has shown that it is of paramount importance for such pupils to develop their proficiency in their first language, as this language provides a basis for further language acquisition (Baker, 1993; Corson, 1993; ETUCE, 1997; Corson, 1998). The INTO (1998) propose the employment of bilingual assistants to facilitate this, as well as provide valuable services in relation to home-school communication and the facilitation of phased introduction to the English language.

The Integrate Ireland Language and Training Unit was established by the DES in 1999 (previously known as the Refugee Language Support Unit). It provides in-career development at centres nationally and resource materials, such as a European Language Portfolio, a Teacher Handbook and a Training Manual. The Unit also maintains a database regarding the language acquisition of non-nationals, develops benchmarks of English competence at various levels and advises the DES on English language provision as requested

Current Curriculum

At present, there is no national curriculum for early childhood education, thus there is great inconsistency in the quality and nature of provision. The *Revised Curriculum* in primary schools, which informs the curriculum and methodology in the infant classes;

“aims to develop a respect for culture and human diversity in the world and an appreciation for the democratic way of life... they {children} are encouraged to learn about their own traditions and culture and are given opportunities to compare and contrast these with other ethnic or cultural groups in society” (DES, 1999a: 17).

This aim is far from providing a comprehensive intercultural or anti-bias curriculum and does not provide a context to challenge prejudices and discrimination in our society.

The White Paper on Early Childhood Education (DES, 1999) falls short in its response to the recommendations presented in the reports and the consultation process preceding its publication. While all previous reports cited the importance of incorporating an intercultural approach into early years training, there is no mention of interculturalism, anti-discrimination, anti-bias or anti-racist policies in the White Paper. The omission of the need for diversity education is of major concern at this crucial stage of development of the child. It is essential for the

White Paper to reflect and acknowledge the changing reality of Irish society (Murray and O’Doherty, 2001). The INTO (1998:50) in its pamphlet, *The Challenge of Diversity: Education Support for Ethnic Minority Children*, illustrate the need for a more intercultural approach to the curriculum;

“the integration of intercultural education into the curriculum is at the core of the development of all policy and practice regarding the integration of ethnic minority children in Irish primary schools.”

Racism and Discrimination in Ireland

Pavee Point focus attention on a number of different forms of racism that are evident in the Irish context

- The racism experienced by the Traveller community based on their distinct culture, and nomadic identity.
- The racism experienced by refugees and asylum seekers, accentuated by an alarmist response to an increase in the numbers of people seeking asylum in Ireland.
- The experience of racism of Irish migrants abroad has been well documented.
- Minority ethnic groups whatever their legal status both EU and non-EU citizens experience racism on the basis of skin colour and their ethnicity.
- Ireland’s links to the ‘third world’ in particular through trade, development education and bilateral aid have the potential to have racist outcomes.

Ireland has traditionally been a country of emigration as opposed to one of immigration. The absence of large numbers of culturally and ethnically diverse people in Ireland sheltered the Irish populace from confronting issues of diversity. The advent of the Tiger Economy in Ireland has led to the return of many emigrants and has also led to an increase in the immigration of non-EU ethnic minority communities such as refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants. We are now exposed to a myriad of contexts in which to witness foreign cultures, including the powerful influence of the mass media. This development has shaken Irish society and thrown up uncomfortable questions in relation to racism, prejudice, social values, diversity and identity issues. Racism occurs in this context as a collection of inherent prejudices and the societal power and influence of the majority population. Even if children have never seen a Traveller or person of ethnic minority, prejudice is often learned in the home, community and from the prevailing attitudes of society. The INTO (1998) highlighted the discrimination faced by non-national pupils in relation to educational provisions, while many faced racist abuse in the form “*name-calling, bullying, taunting and teasing from other children*” (INTO 1998: 35). Diversity has become an issue in Irish society that has led to the necessity for change in legislation, planning and state provision.

Racism in Ireland is not new but it has become more visible in the past few years. We have been slow to acknowledge that racism is a majority issue that has to be challenged and changed for the future generations to ensure a tolerant Ireland. Murray and O'Doherty (2001:61) provide a definition as:

“Racism involves oppression based on a power imbalance between groups, on the basis of skin colour, cultural difference or imagined physical difference.”

The quest for a more intercultural curriculum has not been high on the educational agenda due to the widespread perception of Ireland as a largely homogeneous society. The reality is that there are a variety of individuals and groups who all along were actually experiencing racism in Ireland, including Travellers, Jewish, Black and Muslim people.

Too young to Notice?

Children are not born racist or encoded with discriminatory tendencies. It is an acquired and learned process, largely from adult role models in the immediate environs. The early age at which children become aware of issues of difference and diversity have been highlighted in a number of recent research studies. In Northern Ireland, a study by Connolly, Smith and Kelly (2002), *“Too young to Notice? The Cultural and Political Awareness of 3-6 Year Olds in Northern Ireland”* elucidated the extent and depth of children’s awareness of difference at age 3-6.

Age	Protestant	Catholic
3	Twice as likely to say they don't like the police Twice as likely to prefer the Union Jack to the Tricolour 5-7% identifying with one of the communities	Twice as likely not to like Orange marches 51% able to demonstrate awareness of cultural/political significance of event or symbol 5-7% identifying with one of the communities
5	Differences in preferences for first names and colours 7% making sectarian comments	Differences in preferences for first names and colours 7% making sectarian comments
6	15% making sectarian statements 33% identifying with one of the communities	15% making sectarian statements 33% identifying with one of the communities

Thus, it is in these early years of development that the foundations for equality and respect must be laid. The authors of the report trace the growth of these attitudes to the influences of the home, family and community. The Report makes three age-appropriate recommendations to address the findings:

- Children aged 3+ are encouraged to explore and experience a range of different cultural practices, events and symbols and to appreciate and respect difference and cultural diversity.
- Children aged 5+ are encouraged to understand the negative effects of sectarian stereotypes and prejudices and be able to identify them in their own attitudes.
- To ensure success, early years educational settings have to find ways to engage and work closely with parents and the local community and to connect with Cultural Diversity Initiatives locally.

Home, Community and Societal Influences

The home is the most potent influence on the child at this age, therefore, societal campaigns in tandem with institutional education are necessary to ensure a comprehensive treatment of the issue. It is imperative to remember the potency of culture and its evolution and development over centuries, a development that cannot be comprehensively addressed by an anti-bias curriculum alone. Diversity education is an issue for the population as a whole and is a necessary life-skill to examine our own beliefs, values, attitudes and prejudices in an increasingly multicultural society. It is necessary to educate the majority and minority population in this situation to engage and challenge the issues comprehensively. (Murray and O'Doherty, 2001:44). As O'Doherty (2002:8) states:

“where young children are concerned, we know that prejudices develop, cultural norms are internalised and identities are built remarkably early in life.”

Racism comes in many different guises, yet all experiences of racism are equally devastating. Racism in Ireland affects all the people of Ireland. This is part of the massive public denial of racism as an issue. The changes Irish society is experiencing are challenging and irreversible and they have implications for early childhood education and training and the education system in general. Unless biases and negative stereotypes about aspects of human diversity are challenged at this early age, children will be ill-equipped to deal with the inherent issue of difference in society. Intervention must be implemented systematically and consistently so that pupils will not develop attitudes of superiority or inferiority depending on their outside educational and home experiences. Such attitudes must be challenged as an active process. Experiences leading to an attitude of superiority may lead to racist behaviour while pupils who develop views of their culture as inferior may exhibit behaviour such as concealed identity and low self-esteem.

For the purpose of this submission in relation to anti-racism and intercultural education, the CECDE concur with the Report on the Forum for Early Childhood Education (1998) in proposing three main categories that fall in this remit:

- Traveller children

- Immigrant children of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds
- Profoundly deaf children

Traveller Children:

The children of travellers can often suffer poverty and exclusion that inhibits early environmental stimulation. Their marginalisation on the fringes of society leads to low status and influence vis-à-vis the dominant groups. Traveller culture has not traditionally treated childhood as a distinct period of dependence and development, thus conflicting with the practices of the dominant culture. Entry to formal education often compounds the marginalisation of the Traveller child, as he/she is faced with a highly formal institution, where every aspect of its physical and psychological demeanour is alien to his/her culture. The current curriculum originates in the dominant culture and has little in common with the reality of the Traveller child. In such a context, the Traveller child will retreat to his/her dominant culture and thus heighten the isolation from the majority culture. As Murray (2002:46) states;

“The reality for a lively, bright, Traveller child, who enters the formal dominant society through school at age 4, can be an experience that is detrimental to the continuing development of self-esteem and pride in Traveller culture.”

Immigrants from a Different Cultural and Ethnic Background

At present, there is great diversity in the multitude of languages and ethnicities presenting within the education system. These originate from an increasing number of foreign professionals working in the Irish economy to children of asylum seekers and economic migrants. At present, there is no comprehensive early childhood care or education provision by statutory or voluntary agencies for this specific group, who are in great need of linguistic support in these crucial years of development.

The DES published an “*Information Booklet for Schools on Asylum Seekers*” in 1999 outlining the role of the DES in integrating and facilitating the education of non-nationals. The Refugee Support Service has been replaced by the provision of direct grants to primary schools catering for non-nationals in order to employ language tutors in English. This involves the provision of €6,348.69 for schools with 3-8 pupils with English language difficulty while schools with 9-13 non-national pupils experiencing difficulty in the English language receive €9523.04. In schools where the intake of such pupils is in excess of 14 pupils, an ex-quota teacher is allocated to provide tuition in English and a once-off set-up grant of €634.87 is provided. There are approximately 145 teachers working with in excess of 3,700 pupils in need of language tuition at present.

There is currently no provision for language tuition in the pupil’s mother tongue, a necessity that research has shown vital for the acquisition of a second language as well as to maintain a sense of his/her cultural identity. Without the cognitive basis of a first language, second language acquisition becomes an arduous task. Parents are often unfamiliar with the workings of the early childhood education services and other educational services and of their entitlements within these systems. Schools and childcare services must become

more proactive in disseminating information in the mother tongue of non-national pupils and providing interpreters where necessary to facilitate communication. Consultation with parents is a prerequisite to success in the planning for early years educational settings to cater for their needs. All schools and early childhood education settings must formulate policies in order to establish guidelines for the successful integration of minorities.

Profoundly Deaf Children

The CECDE has included profoundly deaf pupils in this submission due to the distinct cultural profile for members of the deaf community. This is established by virtue of their use of Sign language and their shared experience of deafness (Report on the National Forum for Early Childhood Education, 1998). Corson (1998: 192) notes this in the American context also;

“These signing Deaf communities now consider themselves distinct minority cultural groups who possess all the solidarity and support structures that go with that sense of identity.”

The difficulty arises as only 10% of deaf children are born directly into the deaf culture i.e. born of deaf parents. Ireland’s attempt to integrate profoundly deaf children and promote their participation in spoken communication by providing predominantly oral language tuition was a failure. The Report on the National Forum for Early Childhood Education (1998) reveals that 80% of profoundly deaf children tutored in the oral system leave the education system with problems in literacy and numeracy.

Intervention must be provided much earlier as by the time the profoundly deaf pupil enters the education system, the crucial period of development for the acquisition of a first language has lapsed. This can lead to negative social, cognitive and personal development issues in later life. The Model School for Deaf People is the only preschool for deaf children, starting at 3 years of age until their transfer to an equivalent primary school for deaf pupils. Tuition at the Model School is provided in Irish Sign Language as the primary and natural language, while writing, reading and speech development follow as required. Research highlights that it is imperative for profoundly deaf pupils to receive a grounding in Sign language as a first language and use that as a cognitive basis for second language acquisition. Thus, the profoundly deaf pupil is equipped with linguistic and social skills to communicate effectively within his/her own distinct culture and within the dominant culture.

Legislative and Policy Issues

In Ireland there are a number of policy initiatives and legislation that have the potential to impact on racism. The most pertinent of these, those with specific consequences for Early Childhood Education are listed here:

- Articles 29 and 30 from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Ireland in 1992, incorporate the responsibilities of the education system in relation to the education of minority groups and cultures:

“the development of respect for the child’s parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living and for civilisations different from his or her own.”

However, the UN has expressed concern with Ireland’s commitment to provide and support minorities in their right to education, recommending Ireland;

“strengthen its efforts to ensure that children from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, including...refugee children benefit from positive measures aimed at facilitating access to education.” (UN, 1998:6)

- The Report of the Task force on the Travelling Community (1995) and the establishment of a Monitoring Committee (1998) to oversee its implementation.

- As part of the EU Resolution establishing the European Year Against Racism 1997, Member States appointed national co-ordinating committees to oversee activities for the year (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 1997).

- The Minister established a National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) in July 1998. The Committee is a partnership of non-governmental organisations, state agencies, social partners and Government Departments. The objective of the NCCRI is to provide an ongoing structure to develop programmes and actions aimed at developing an integrated approach against racism and to advise the Government on matters relating to racism and interculturalism. The Committee is also endeavouring to promote a more participative and intercultural society that is inclusive of persons such as refugees, Travellers and minority ethnic groups in Ireland.

- The rights of minorities in the Irish education system was given legislative power in the Education Act (1998), when it assured the system;

“respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society”

- The enactment of the Employment Equality Act (1998) and the introduction of the Equal Status Act (2000) which seeks to prevent

discrimination on a range of grounds including race, colour, ethnic or national origin or membership of the Travelling Community.

Discrimination is described in the Act as the treatment of a person in a less favourable way than another person is, has been or would be treated on any of the above grounds. The Equality Authority and the Office of the Director for Equality have been established to oversee and monitor the implementation of the legislation.

- The ratification by the government of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination is a positive development in this area.

- The commitment in Partnership 2000 to equality proofing of government policies and procedures is now largely completed.

- The Human Rights Commission Act, 2000 has established a Commission that will be a powerful new independent body charged with the task of keeping under review the adequacy and effectiveness of our laws in relation to the protection of Human Rights in their widest sense.

- Specific educational initiatives include the revision of educational curricula and the designation of a day in March for all schools to focus on the issues of racism and Interculturalism.

- The Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities was ratified by Ireland on 1 May 1999.

- The Government established a Reception and Integration Agency in April 2000 to replace the Directorate for Asylum Support Services. The new Agency's functions include planning and coordinating the provision of services to both asylum seekers and refugees.

- On 4th November 2000, Ireland signed Protocol No. 12 to the European Convention on Human Rights. Protocol No. 12 is a measure intended to take further steps to promote the equality of all persons through the collective enforcement of a general prohibition of discrimination.

- The National Children's Strategy (2001) promotes equality and social inclusion for all children and addresses the needs of children with disabilities, Traveller children and children from ethnic minorities:

"Children will be educated and supported to value social and cultural diversity so that all children including Travellers and other marginalised groups achieve their full potential."

(National Children's Strategy, 2001: Objective k)

- EU Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000, implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, also known as the "*Race Directive*", will be transposed into Irish law by 2003.

Intercultural / Anti-bias Curriculum

The need for an anti-bias curriculum

Ireland has been slow to develop an intercultural approach to curricula and methodology and to date there is no formal intercultural approach being taught in any of the training colleges for the primary and early years sectors. This is increasingly necessary in a country where our largest ethnic minority, the Travellers, and a multitude of non-nationals, asylum seekers and economic migrants are attending our education system in growing numbers. Despite DES assertions that

"Traveller culture and traditions must be acknowledged and reflected in the educational system." (DES, 2002:10),

little has been initiated to ensure this aspiration becomes a reality. In this respect, education must provide;

- Traveller and minority pupils with the opportunity to develop a strong self-identity and group identity,
- Pupils from the dominant group in society the context in which to develop a positive self-identity, yet not resulting in an attitude of superiority.

The education system, and educational settings as institutions, must adapt and meet the needs of its clientele, rather than expect the denial and concealment of a culture by minorities. All children have a culture on arrival at an educational institution, a;

"package of customs, traditions, symbols, values, phrases and other forms of communication by which we can belong to a community..."

Culture is the way we learn to think, behave and do things." (Murray, 2002:55).

A platform must be provided to enable minority groups to celebrate their own culture and enable all to develop a respect for diversity. All pupils need to feel a sense of belonging and this is difficult if he/she are surrounded by images and a language that reflect an identity or culture alien to him/her. Unless pupils' individual and group identity is acknowledged and supported, through the provision of appropriate role models, curricula and methodology, expectations and assessment, schooling will become a negative rather than positive experience. As Murray and O'Doherty (2001:42) state;

“Children exposed to negative images about their home culture, language, background or ability, however subtle or unintentional, will be affected to the detriment of their self-image and group identity, with resulting conflicts of loyalty between home and the education setting.”

Many difficulties remain in the quest for a genuinely anti-bias curriculum. Recent legislation and policies, including the Education Act (DES, 1998) and the White Paper on Early Childhood Education (DES, 1999) have been weak in promoting the rights of minorities in our society. As Rowe (2001:69) states;

“the state has placed itself in the position where it is compelling the parents of a child who are a minority ethical persuasion to send their offspring to a school that is legally obliged to uphold a religious ethos that conflicts the child's and family's conscience.”

Opting out is not a realistic option due to the integration of subjects and the permeation of the ethos across all aspects of the curriculum at primary level, notwithstanding the social and emotional pressures of exclusion and isolation the decision to “opt out” entails.

Pupils who attend a predominantly mono cultural educational setting must also be challenged to explore their prejudices regarding minority groups as their images of such groups may be distorted through parents, peers, teachers, the local community, society at large and the mass media. As O'Doherty (2002:20) states;

“prejudice is learned and reinforced, although not explicitly taught, before becoming racism.”

All pupils will come into contact with minority groups in the course of their lives and an awareness and forum to prepare for this is best provided at this formative stage of development. Thus, educational settings must be proactive in providing opportunities to challenge prejudices, afford time and space to examine values, beliefs and attitudes, if the essence of racist behaviour is to be explored.

A Framework for the early years

Research continues to emphasise that prejudice and racism become instilled at an early age e.g. the aforementioned study in Northern Ireland *“Too young to Notice? The Cultural and Political Awareness of 3-6 Year Olds in Northern Ireland.”* This highlights the depth and extent to which prejudicial behaviour is instilled in the early years of life. In excess of 90% of a child's development is complete by the age of 3 (Purves, 1994) and 50% of intellectual growth occurs in the first 4 years

(Kellmer-Pringle, 1986) Therefore, it is imperative to introduce an anti-bias and intercultural dimension to pupils at this early age. If intervention is not instigated at this age, the opportunity has been lost and subsequent attempts will be slower and more problematic to implement.

Pupils at this age are constantly observing, classifying and categorizing objects and they assimilate everything around them based on their socialisation in order to make sense of the world around them and their place within it. As a result, parents and early years carers are of paramount importance in providing positive role models to empower children to challenge the inequalities inherent in our society. Children at this age construct an image of themselves, determined largely by those around them. As Murray and O'Doherty (2001:46) elucidate;

“children can develop positive and negative feelings about racial groups at an early age...children as young as three can demonstrate an awareness of racial hierarchy in line with current adult prejudices.”

Unless children are provided with the skills to counteract racist or discriminatory behaviour, they will not grow into adults who are willing to work and socially interact with others in a respectful way.

As previously stated, there is little consistency in the curriculum taught in the early childhood education sector, in the absence of a national curriculum or framework in the area. It is a welcome development that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) are at an advanced stage of producing such a framework at present. At infant level of the primary school, the *Revised Curriculum* incorporates the latest methodologies and philosophies on early childhood education. However, it does not take cognisance of the diverse and multicultural society in which we live. At present the NCCA and the Refugee Reception and Integration Agency are producing guidelines to complement the *Revised Curriculum* (DES, 1999a) in order to adapt it to an intercultural context.

A form of institutional discrimination is perpetuated by the education system if it fails to cherish all pupils equally and fails to meet the needs of minority groups. This has been enacted in the past and even in the present by virtue of the absence of inclusion of Travellers or other ethnic minority groups in textbooks. All educational institutions must produce written policies for its services, including enrolment, equal opportunities recruitment, parental involvement, philosophy and ethos etc., based on equality and anti-bias principles. This must involve consultation with such minority groups to ensure favourable outcomes for all participants. In the Irish context to date:

- Procedures and practices often convey a lack of respect and value for minority cultures and allow little sharing and cherishing of cultures beyond the dominant culture.
- There is often segregated provision based on cultural backgrounds e.g. Traveller pre-schools.
- Where legislation, policy making and provision are developed without consultation of minority groups or respectful of minority culture, it is not

universally reflective and thus discriminates against those outside the dominant culture.

Role of Early Childcare Workers

Teachers and early childcare personnel must be prepared for the challenge of diversity in order to educate young children to grow with respect for difference and have respect for others. They are an important role model and must be equipped with the skills and expertise to deal with diversity, including the ability to examine their own prejudices and biases. They must convey the importance of all cultures in the classroom context and emphasise the fact that the dominant culture is not a superior culture. Teacher expectations can often lead to self-fulfilling prophecies so it is vital that children are treated as individuals rather than labeled by their cultural or ethnic origins. If positive role models are not provided, then children learn from and assimilate adult behaviour and build attitudes and values based on this. A curriculum must be developed that introduces procedures that help all children to accept and learn from difference and also understand how to overcome any inappropriate responses triggered by cultural diversity.

Contemporary Thinking

The evolution of research and thinking in the field of the education of minority cultures has progressed from an assimilationist approach, to an integrationist process, followed by a policy of cultural pluralism. The two initial approaches are completely inappropriate in the contemporary context while the latter fails to really tackle issues of power and racism. As O'Doherty (2002:21) highlights;

“mere exposure to diverse groups and glimpses of diverse cultures allows the other seven-eighths of the iceberg that become racism to remain concealed.”

On the other hand, an intercultural approach aims to develop understanding among people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, leading to mutual respect and appreciation. Consequently, the richness and diversity of cultures is appreciated, leading to the acquisition of a sympathetic and critical understanding of culture. It also fosters an ability to recognize and challenge inequality, injustice, racism, prejudice and bias in the school as an institution and in society as a whole.

An intercultural society means that each culture recognises and respects each other's culture but also learns from each other. Interculturalism contains the concept of adaptation for each group. This has consequent implications for the development of curriculum in pursuance of these objectives. A European Conference *"Intercultural Education in Europe"* hosted by the Department of Education in 1994 defines intercultural education as;

"a set of educational practices designed to encourage mutual respect and understanding among all pupils, regardless of their cultural, linguistic, ethnic or religious background. Without glossing over the differences or even conflicts between cultures, the approach aims at helping pupils, through the study of cultures to discover the factors that unite and differentiate humankind, to appreciate its richness and diversity, to develop

the capacity to discover their own humanity in any culture (their own as well as that of others), to gain a sympathetic and critical understanding of cultures and finally to learn, making their own informed choices."

Implementation of an anti-bias curriculum

The CECDE call for an anti-bias curriculum to be introduced at all levels of the education system. This transcends the capacity of an intercultural curriculum to incorporate cultural issues and broadens the remit to the areas of class, language, religion, gender, disability, etc. (Derman-Sparks, 1989; Corson, 1998). All areas of diversity are recognised and respected and skills are offered to help children deal with negativity. Such a curriculum has the capacity to address the source of inequality and discrimination, thus involving problem solving to address root causes.

The underlying intent of an anti-bias approach is to foster the development of children and adults to become critical thinkers and be active in building a more caring, just and diverse community and society for all. This is focused at both the majority and minority communities. For the majority, it involves the acquisition of skills to live in a multicultural society and to respect diversity. The aim for minority groups is to assist integration, while in tandem, promoting and advancing their ethnic identity and cultural values. To implement such a curriculum requires an investment from practitioners to adapt their current approaches and allow diversity to permeate all facets of the curriculum.

The four goals of an anti-bias approach are to:

- Nurture each child's construction of a knowledgeable, confident self-concept and group identity.
- Promote each child's comfortable, empathic interaction with people from diverse backgrounds.
- Foster each child's critical thinking about bias.
- Cultivate each child's ability to stand up for her/himself and for others in the face of bias/discrimination.

(Derman-Sparks, 1989)

Therefore, an anti-bias curriculum is superior to that of an intercultural curriculum as it challenges all forms of bias and racist behaviour at all levels e.g. admission policy, parental involvement, recruitment, management, assessment and so on. The outcome of such an education is the possession of the skills, attitudes and knowledge to function in the multicultural society Ireland now is. It affirms difference and gives a platform for children to proudly assert their culture and individuality with confidence, while becoming aware and respecting the culture of others. Derman-Sparks (1989) identifies four identifiable phases in the introduction of an anti-bias curriculum:

- *Phase 1: Creating the Climate.* Teachers raise their own awareness around anti-bias issues, with the help of a support group. Pupil's attitudes in

relation to diversity are observed and the learning environment is evaluated and modified.

- Phase 2: *Nonsystematic Planning*. The teacher begins to explore the process of doing anti-bias activities, using ‘teachable moments’ as they arise. Parents are informed and educated in relation to the anti-bias curriculum.
- Phase 3: *Systematic Planning*. Teachers begin to integrate anti-bias goals and issues into all aspects of the curriculum and engage in long-term planning.
- Phase 4: *Ongoing Integration*. At this stage, the anti-bias system becomes the medium for all planning, implementation and interactions in the school environment.

A strategy for the implementation of an anti-bias curriculum in the Irish context has been proposed by Murray and O’Doherty (2001) and this can be adapted to meet the needs of individual contexts and institutions. They divide the implementation process in two, one area focuses on the Training Institutions and Organisations while the second considers the context for Early Years Settings, Organisation and Services. For further detail, please refer to Murray and O’Doherty (2001).

Training Institutions and Organisations:

- Management Policy Framework
- Staff Policy Framework
- Student Policy Framework
- Guidelines for Trainers in Implementing an Anti-bias/Equality Programme for Students.

Early Years Settings, Organisations and Services:

- Management and staff policy framework
- Principal Guidelines for Working with Children
- Guidelines for Parents and Guardians
- Staff Guidelines for Implementation of an Anti-bias Approach
- Curriculum Development and Resources

Recommendations

The CECDE would like to make the following recommendations based on the information and arguments contained in this submission:

Policy Issues

- The Department of Education should acknowledge in principle the need for an anti-bias curriculum for early childhood care and education. This must be then developed, resourced and implemented immediately to ensure all pupils of ethnic minorities have equal access to a fair and comprehensive curriculum.
- All Early Childhood Education training courses should recognise the cultural distinctiveness of Travellers and other minority groups and should include anti-bias education that permeates the entire curriculum taught.
- The formulation of an anti-bias curriculum is of urgent necessity and long overdue at this time. This curriculum must underpin all early educational activities and endeavours and inform the methodologies used. This curriculum is necessary in all settings, regardless of pupil intake, to develop life-long attitudes respecting and appreciating cultural diversity.
- Educational supports in the early years and in the infant classes for ethnic minorities are lamentable at present. This accentuates the isolation of such minorities and increases their vulnerability in the school context. Services must be expanded to meet the needs of all minorities nationally, not for selected groups, as is current practice.
- Provision of early childhood education for profoundly deaf children must be enhanced beyond provision in one school in Dublin. Tuition must be provided in their first language i.e. Irish Sign Language while other forms of oral communication can be developed subsequent to this.
- Early childhood education must be complemented by an overall societal education to challenge the prejudices and biases inherent in many adults. The home, and thus parents and the local community, are the most powerful influence on the child in the formative years so educational institutions cannot be a panacea for this societal ill.
- Delivery at all levels of early childhood education must be mainstreamed and the practice of segregated provision based on cultural difference, which can make sense in certain situations and contexts, should be phased out in favour of mainstream provision. However, choice must be afforded to minority groups to choose the context for their children's education.

School Organisation

- The overall culture and ethos of the educational setting must exude an anti-bias approach, from management through to the practitioner on the ground. The ethos must affirm the school's commitment and valuing of every member of the school community. This must include not only formal policies but permeate all aspects of the setting's life, including the hidden curriculum.

Curriculum and Teaching

- Resources and materials are needed to implement an anti-bias, intercultural curriculum. These must be representative of the backgrounds of all children,

- providing a diversity of ethnic and cultural images. Consequently, education can be conducted in a climate of tolerance and appreciation of minorities.
- Children, whose mother tongue is not English, are in urgent need of early intervention in the pre-school years to ensure they have the skills to express their own culture and to reduce their apartness from the dominant culture. Intensive provisions must become available in these early years and in the infant classes of the primary school to enhance ability in the mother tongue and in English language learning.

School Personnel and Parental Involvement

- The cultural diversity of childcare personnel should reflect the diversity of its clientele at all levels of delivery in the service. Quotas and positive discrimination could be utilised in the recruitment of such personnel.
- Pre-service and In-career development in anti-bias principles and approaches must be provided for all early school years practitioners on an on-going basis to ensure familiarity and compliance with the latest research and methodologies.
- Parental and community involvement are prerequisites of success at this stage of development and education. The system must embrace all cultures and backgrounds and respect and cherish them equally.

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