
The Future of SPHE: Problems & Possibilities

Proceedings from
SPHE Network Conference
29th September, 2012

Edited by: Carol O'Sullivan, Sharon Moynihan,
Bernie Collins, Geraldine Hayes, Aoife Titley



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Contents

	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
	INTRODUCTION	5
WELCOME	<i>Professor Michael A. Hayes, President, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.</i>	6
KEYNOTE ADDRESS	Beyond the Food Pyramid: Making the Case for the Social, Personal and Health Education Curriculum in Contemporary Irish Society <i>Carol O'Sullivan</i>	7
CHAPTER 1	Coping with Complexity and the Uncertainty of Modern School Life: Some Lessons Learned from Bees <i>Alanna O'Beirne</i>	16
CHAPTER 2	The Challenges of Implementing Social, Personal and Health Education in the Current Post-primary School System <i>Sharon Moynihan and Patricia Mannix McNamara</i>	24
CHAPTER 3	Breakfast Clubs – A Guide for Good Practice <i>Sarah Jane Flaherty</i>	31
CHAPTER 4	Giving Teachers a Voice in safefood's Education Resources <i>Victoria O'Dwyer and Emily Kelleher</i>	39
CHAPTER 5	Addressing the Barriers for Teaching Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Effectively in Primary Schools: Findings from an Intervention Project with Pre-service Teachers <i>Eva Devaney and Carol O' Sullivan</i>	45
CHAPTER 6	The Role of SPHE in Promoting Democratic Practice in Schools <i>Anne Marie Kavanagh</i>	55
CHAPTER 7	Empowering Children Through Circle Time: What's Happening in the Classroom? <i>Bernie Collins</i>	64
CHAPTER 8	Developing SPHE Lessons for the Interactive Whiteboard: Challenges and Opportunities <i>Suzanne Smith</i>	74
CHAPTER 9	Social-Emotional and Personal Influences: The Role of Self-Regulation in School Achievement <i>Mark Morgan</i>	81
CHAPTER 10	Supporting Pupils with Emotional and/or Behavioural Difficulties: Educational Structures and Pupil Trajectories <i>Zita Lysaght</i>	90
CHAPTER 11	SPHE: Rediscovering Meditation and its Benefits in the Primary School <i>Seán Ó hAonghusa</i>	99
CHAPTER 12	Cyber-bullying Among Irish Teenagers <i>Marion Flanagan</i>	109
RAPPORTEUR	Beyond the Jigsaw Approach: Problems and Possibilities for SPHE <i>Thérèse Hegarty</i>	118

Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to the following for their support of the SPHE Network 2012 conference and of this publication:

- The DICE project
- *Safefood*
- Patricia McNamara, Graphic Designer
- Organising committee of the SPHE Network 2012 conference
- Professor Michael A. Hayes, President, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick
- All contributors to this publication
- All participants at the SPHE Network 2012 conference

Introduction

It gives me great pleasure to present you with the proceedings from the inaugural conference of the SPHE Network which took place on 29th September 2012 in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. This conference, entitled “The Future of SPHE: Problems and Possibilities”, set out to explore the role and profile of Social, Personal and Health Education in the context of 21st century Ireland. This is a context wherein the rationale for SPHE is becoming increasingly evident as children are presented with many challenges to their health and wellbeing. However, there are still barriers to be surmounted in order to achieve optimal implementation of this curricular area. These barriers are identified in this publication along with the many possibilities which present themselves as facilitators of SPHE.

The SPHE Network was established in 2000 and has grown significantly since then with membership from a wide variety of groups. We address many different issues which relate to SPHE with a view to facilitating the ongoing development of SPHE as an integral part of both the primary and post-primary curricula. We look at national and international research in relation to SPHE and endeavour to augment the research undertaken in this area. We meet regularly to share ideas and the organisation of this conference was the product of one of our discussions.

The conference consisted of a variety of presentations and workshops and was divided into four main themes: Health Education/Promotion; Relationships and Sexuality Education; Global Education; and Social and Emotional Literacy. The many and diverse contributions in this publication endeavour to enhance your understanding of these key themes and to demonstrate how they can be reflected in your practice. It is also intended to highlight the key resources and supports for the implementation of SPHE.

The conference and this publication have benefitted significantly from the support of the DICE (Development and Intercultural Education) project. Development and Intercultural Education is viewed as an integral part of SPHE and the partnership between the SPHE Network and the DICE project has been, and continues to be, positive and productive.

I would like to acknowledge the work and commitment of the other members of the editorial team in bringing the publication process to fruition: Sharon Moynihan, Bernie Collins, Geraldine Hayes, and Aoife Titley.

I hope that you will view this publication as a key reference point in your future work in SPHE.

Carol O’Sullivan, Editor.

WELCOME

from Professor Michael A. Hayes,
President of Mary Immaculate College, Limerick
on the occasion of the inaugural conference of the SPHE Network
The Future of SPHE: Problems and Possibilities
Saturday 29th September 2012

Fáilte/ Welcome
Colleagues and Friends,

Good morning and welcome to Mary Immaculate College for this important conference which will look at the current and future situation of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). We are delighted to be hosting this conference here in Mary Immaculate College and to be reaching such a wide and diverse audience.

This first conference of the Social, Personal and Health Education Network 'The Future of SPHE: Problems and Possibilities' aims to explore the role and profile of Social, Personal and Health Education in the context of 21st century Ireland. Current SPHE content, methodology and implementation will be critically examined with a view to determining its ongoing relevance to a generation who has witnessed the social, economic and cultural impacts of both the Celtic Tiger and the subsequent recession. This critical lens will be applied to all aspects of the conference with participants invited to share their knowledge and experience of SPHE in a spirit of partnership and dialogue. National and international perspectives will be brought through the contributions of the keynote speakers, while subsequent papers, workshops and poster presentations will engage with specific issues and challenges relating to SPHE. Opportunities for future partnerships and research will also be presented throughout the conference.

As you are aware, SPHE was identified as a discrete curricular area and introduced into the primary curriculum in 1999 and into the post-primary curriculum (up to Junior Cert) in 2000. This was a new and innovative departure in education, particularly in light of the social, economic, demographic and cultural changes which were occurring in Irish society at that time.

At both primary and post-primary levels, SPHE aims at promoting the physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing of the child; fostering a sense of care and respect for themselves, others and the community; enabling the children to develop a framework for responsible decision-making and problem-solving; and providing them with opportunities for reflection and discussion.

SPHE includes many difficult and sometimes controversial issues such as Bereavement, Child Safety and Protection, Relationships and Sexuality Education, Mental Health, Development and Intercultural Education, among others. These issues are by their very nature sensitive and difficult to discuss and thus place many demands upon the capacity of teachers. Teachers may sometimes need to self-reflect and to explore their own attitudes and values on the various issues. Such self-reflection is crucial to addressing teachers' needs and I hope that this conference will act as a catalyst and facilitator in this regard.

One could argue that, in order for SPHE to be effective, it needs to be embedded in the broader context of the Health Promoting School. Much work has been done both in Ireland and abroad in this context, and, indeed, a number of presenters and participants here today have considerable experience in relation to the development of the Health Promoting School concept and will have much to add to the discussion.

One of the main challenges at the conclusion of a conference is how to sustain the momentum generated during the event. There will be many informal opportunities for you during the day to exchange details and ideas and to network among yourselves. There will also be more formal opportunities presented to you and I anticipate that this conference is only the beginning of many more events. The potential for future research will also become evident and engagement in a collaborative research project is an effective way of developing the discussion which will take place here today and of spreading the message.

I hope that you will leave this conference today as champions of SPHE and will endeavour to promote and spread the message in your schools and communities. In order that the potential of SPHE be maximised, the word needs to reach far beyond the walls of the classroom in a spirit of partnership and co-operation among all the stakeholders.

I hope that you will find this conference to be a rich and engaging experience.



Beyond the Food Pyramid: Making the Case for the Social, Personal and Health Education Curriculum in Contemporary Irish Society

Carol O'Sullivan, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

INTRODUCTION

There is a general consensus on the importance and value of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum. It is unlikely that the need to address issues such as childhood obesity, childhood mental health problems, or underage drinking will encounter a dissenting voice. Very often, the response to a critical incident or a critical question in relation to the health and wellbeing of our children and adolescents is to provide a new resource, with the assumption that the resource will be subsumed into the SPHE curriculum. It is contended in this article that this response overlooks the difference between the absolute and relative values accorded to SPHE. This is manifest in the gap between recognition and implementation. Much recent research indicates a less than satisfactory implementation of SPHE at both primary and post-primary level (NCCA 2008; DES 2009; Nic Gabhainn *et al.* 2010). This article seeks to explore the value placed upon SPHE in absolute and relative terms, to look at some of the key health concerns in relation to our children and young people, to present data on existing implementation, to explore SPHE as an agent of transformation and to make a set of recommendations in relation to maximising the potential of SPHE in the future.

THE ABSOLUTE VALUE OF SPHE

Byrne *et al.* (2012) observe that there is a growing body of evidence to demonstrate the inter-relationship between positive health and education outcomes indicating that the quality of pupil health has a positive impact on educational outcomes and vice versa in many countries. The World Health Organisation (2012) states unequivocally that "an effective school health programme can be one of the most cost effective investments a nation can make to simultaneously improve education and health". The WHO promotes school health programmes "as a strategic means to prevent important health risks among youth and to engage the education sector in efforts to change the educational, social, economic and political conditions that affect risk" (www.who.int). Paulus (2005, p.56) outlines the concept of "a good and healthy school" which strives for improving educational outcomes through the implementation of specific health interventions. Research among children and young people in Ireland further substantiates the rationale for the provision and implementation of health education in our schools. A brief overview of some of the key health issues currently affecting our children and young people is presented below.

Mental Health Issues

Patel *et al.* (2007) observe that mental health disorders account for a large number of the disease burden in young people of all societies, and that most mental health problems begin between the ages of 12 and 24 years. In the Irish context, Illback *et al.* (2010) demonstrate that Irish young people exhibit high levels of psychological distress, but community-based services and supports are often unavailable or inaccessible. The National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) observes that the mortality rate from suicide among the 15-24 year age group is the 4th highest in Europe (NOSP 2010)

with the highest incidence occurring among young men aged 20-24 years. There is much research highlighting the negative impact of bullying on child mental health (Olweus 1993; Fitzgerald 1999; O'Moore 2000; McMahon *et al.* 2012) with substantial evidence to identify bullying as a risk factor for suicide among children and young people (Thompson *et al.* 2002; Mills *et al.* 2004). O'Moore (2012) highlights the emotional and behavioural problems caused by cyberbullying which has emerged in recent years as a cause of great concern to students, parents and teachers, and calls for urgent action to address this emergent societal problem. This issue is specifically addressed in one of the articles in this publication. It should be noted that the *National Action Plan on Bullying* (DES 2013) and the *Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention in Post-Primary School* (NEPS/ DES/DoH/HSE 2013) both highlight the role of SPHE in combatting bullying and in promoting good mental health.

Alcohol and Other Drugs

There are strong and definitive links between the misuse of alcohol and other drugs and mental health difficulties, with alcohol problems identified as one of the highest risk factors for suicide (WHO 2004; Mental Health Foundation UK 2006). The rate of alcohol consumption among 16 year olds in Ireland continues to be high, although the most recent European School Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) report acknowledges decreased trends (Hibell *et al.* 2012). Patton *et al.* (2002) reported that weekly or more frequent cannabis use in teenagers predicted an approximately twofold increase in risk for later depression and anxiety. Many SPHE resources focus on alcohol and other drugs, notably *On My Own Two Feet* (DES 1994) and *Walk Tall* (DES 1996).

Overweight and Obesity

The *Growing Up in Ireland* longitudinal research study provides extensive data on the lives of 9 and 13-year-olds in Ireland. Data from the first wave of research indicates that one in four 9-year-olds is overweight or obese. This means that one in every four 9-year-olds in Ireland has a raised Body Mass Index (BMI), which exposes them to increased risk of disease both now and into the future. Data from the second wave of research indicates little or no change at age 13 (ESRI/TCD 2009, 2011). Overweight and obesity have become a problem both nationally and internationally and thus the need for a concerted societal focus, to include the school, becomes evident.

Relationships and Sexuality

The average age for first sexual encounters has dropped significantly (Mayock *et al.* 2007; Kelly *et al.* 2012) indicating the need for the profile of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) to increase. The 2011 UNICEF *Changing the Future* Report demonstrates the lack of consistency in relation to the manner in which young people learn about sex, sexual health and sexual behaviour. The same report identifies the need for more education on this topic (UNICEF 2011). Reports from the NCCA (2008) the DES (2009) and *Dáil na nÓg* (Roe 2010) indicate ongoing inconsistencies in the implementation of RSE in schools.

Statistics don't tell the whole story!

It can be argued that the most telling evidence in relation to the value of SPHE comes from children and adolescents themselves. In a study undertaken by the Department of Education and Science (2009), the qualitative evidence gathered from the child participants demonstrated the importance of SPHE. One primary school child made the following observation:

SPHE is very important because it covers loads of subjects and it teaches you loads about life. We learn more about other people and what happens when we grow up. It allows us to be different. It helps us to have better relationships, better friends and to be yourself. It helps us to make decisions and realise the consequences. It helps us to take care of ourselves and to know what to do

(DES 2009, p.75)

At post-primary level, the same level of interest in, and affirmation of, SPHE is demonstrated. A report from research undertaken by Nic Gabhainn *et al.* (2007) produced the following comments from adolescents who felt that they were receiving little instruction on health matters:

I would like to know more about emotional health especially before my exams

I would like to learn more about stress and what happens

[SPHE] could be used to focus on making important decisions, for example, if you thought a classmate was unhappy...and how you would deal with this sort of situation

(Nic Gabhainn *et al.* 2007, p.29)

Quantitative and qualitative evidence from the *Dáil na nÓg* report (Roe 2010) also demonstrates the value that students place on SPHE and RSE. This report found that 78% of respondents consider SPHE to be important or very important, while 91% have the same perspectives in relation to RSE.

THE GAP BETWEEN ABSOLUTE AND RELATIVE VALUES

There is a significant difference between the absolute and relative values placed upon SPHE. In 1974, an influential document produced by the Scottish Education Department yielded some interesting insights about the status of Health Education in Scotland at that time. It observed that Health Education occupied “an indeterminate and ambivalent position”, as it was not yet accepted as part of “the fabric of education”, falling “into the no-man’s land between the school and the home, or within the school, to be everybody’s concern, but no one’s responsibility” (SED 1974, cited by Tones 1997, p.3). This statement was issued in a somewhat different context than the Irish one and over a generation ago. Nevertheless, it is worth exploring whether or not the comments are still relevant today in the Irish context.

Developments in SPHE

Undoubtedly there have been many significant developments in relation to SPHE since 1974, most notably in the 1990s and culminating with the introduction of the SPHE curriculum in 1999 (primary) and in 2000 (post-primary). Many worthwhile health education programmes were introduced during the 1990s (*Bí Folláin*, 1994; *The Health Promoting School*, 1994; *On My Own Two Feet*, 1994; *Relationships and Sexuality Education*, 1995; *Walk Tall*, 1996; *Stay Safe*, 1996). Yet at that time, there was no place to locate them within curriculum provision. This writer contends that this impacted negatively upon the various programmes and, in particular, on the introduction of RSE in 1996 as “an aspect of Social, personal and health education” (NCCA 1996, p.1) as, in 1996, SPHE did not exist as a discrete curricular area. The DES acknowledges that many health education initiatives “emerged in a haphazard way in response to particular social and educational concerns” (DES 2009, p.3). They state that one of the underlying purposes of the SPHE curriculum was “to provide a systematic and coherent framework for SPHE” (*ibid*). While these observations were made in the primary school context, they are also relevant to the post-primary school and, indeed, research by Nic Gabhainn *et al.* (2010) includes similar observations in the post-primary context.

Variation in Implementation

Despite the above-stated objective of introducing a systematic and coherent approach to SPHE in schools, there is considerable evidence available to indicate that implementation tends to vary. Evidence at primary level suggests that while many successes were identified, there is still room for improvement. Research undertaken by the NCCA (2008) demonstrated that some teachers (28% of the sample population) found the sensitive nature of some of the material to be a challenge. Some respondents stated that they felt unprepared to teach the material, citing their own inhibitions and confidence levels as a barrier. This research found that approximately one-third of the schools surveyed did not implement RSE effectively. Interestingly, this statistic is mirrored in research undertaken one year later by the DES (2009). Both reports also indicate variation with the implementation of the *Myself and the Wider World* Strand of SPHE. The DES (2009) research also indicates problems in

relation to planning for SPHE. Just over half of the schools surveyed had plans for SPHE which were considered to be of a good standard, and there was scope for development in one-third of the schools. Among the weaknesses identified were the absence of clear programmes of work for individual class levels and guidelines to inform teachers' individual planning and reporting. The DES considered that these deficits had a negative impact on continuity and progression for pupils' learning in SPHE. They also raise questions about the value accorded to SPHE relative to the other curricular areas. Current educational policy and discourse in relation to literacy and numeracy does not necessarily advance the cause or value of SPHE. A quote from the National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy illustrates this point: "...including a broader range of issues, topics and subjects in the curriculum runs the risk that the time available in schools for the acquisition and consolidation of critical core skills may be eroded" (DES 2011, p. 44). Such statements do not generate openness to the potential of SPHE in advancing literacy and numeracy skills through an integrated approach.

At post-primary level, similar problems are in evidence. In a study undertaken by Nic Gabhainn *et al.* (2007), it was found that SPHE was included in the planning process of less than half of the schools in the study. While SPHE is compulsory in schools up to Junior Cert, provision tends to decrease by 3rd year (Geary and Mannix McNamara 2003; Roe 2010) with significant decrease in provision at Senior Cycle (Mayock *et al.* 2007; Roe 2010). Geary and Mannix McNamara (2003) suggest that the approach of exams may impact on the implementation of SPHE. Mayock *et al.* (2007) highlight the need to introduce SPHE/RSE at Senior Cycle. Problems in relation to teachers' capacity and confidence to deliver SPHE are also in evidence at post-primary level (Mayock *et al.* 2007; Nic Gabhainn *et al.* 2010). Mayock *et al.* (2007) indicate the tendency among some teachers to omit or ignore the RSE module within SPHE due to its challenging subject matter. Specific focus is accorded to RSE in a later chapter of this publication.

To Examine or Not to Examine?

The impact of exams at post-primary level emerges as a significant determinant of value accorded to subjects. Teachers are seen to be influenced by the points race and thus to overlook SPHE as it does not feature in this regard (Mayock *et al.* 2007, Moynihan and Mannix McNamara, this volume). However, making SPHE an examination subject is not necessarily the solution to raising its status. Nic Gabhainn *et al.* (2007, p. 32) observe that some teachers consider that SPHE benefits from being a non-examination subject without the stress that accompanies some of the "more academic" subjects. Interestingly, many research studies indicate that, in general, while some students may view SPHE as a 'doss', most see its importance (Mayock *et al.* 2007; Nic Gabhainn *et al.* 2010; Roe 2010; UNICEF Ireland 2011). Nic Gabhainn *et al.* (2010, p. 465) highlight the key role of the inspectorate in raising the status of SPHE, given that it is not an examination subject: "Inspection reports are key to increasing the perceived value and relevance of SPHE to students, parents and schools".

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

It should be borne in mind that problems associated with the implementation of SPHE are not confined to the Irish context. Fullan (2001) observes that in most education systems there has been relative neglect of curriculum innovations in this area when compared with more traditional academic education. Paulus (2005) states that debate in Germany in relation to policy and pedagogy in reforming and improving schools are notably lacking in references to health promotion. However, he argues that the overall target of health promoting schools is the improvement of educational quality. He concludes that health should not be seen as an additional theme that schools have to deal with. In France, studies have found that schools set a low priority on Health Education (Do and Alluin 2002, cited by Jourdan *et al.* 2011). Jourdan *et al.* (2011) observe that school participation in health promotion initiatives does not mean that all teachers will sign up to it. Therefore implementation becomes patchy. In the United States the Social Health Policies and Programs Study (SHPPS) demonstrated that

while positive changes in relation to health education were identified at state and district level, this did not necessarily translate into implementation (Kann *et al.* 2007). This goes back to the gap between absolute and relative values: while most people will agree with the idea of health education, this does not mean that it will always be implemented.

SPHE: AN AGENT OF TRANSFORMATION

SPHE should not be seen as an 'add-on' to the curriculum. It should, instead, be viewed as an agent of transformation, a facilitator of societal change, and of active citizenship. Ireland has witnessed the economic, social and cultural change wrought by the phenomenon of boom and bust. The impact of both excess and deprivation has been felt most keenly by the current generation and the need for skills to cope with the problems on this spectrum has become acute. SPHE is a skills-based curriculum with decision-making, problem-solving, self-reliance and resilience among the key skills addressed therein. It is of some concern that, at primary-school level, the strand which focuses most upon active citizenship tends to be least addressed by teachers¹ (NCCA 2008; DES 2009). Yet, many schools are now involved in projects such as the *Green Schools* environmental education and awareness initiative. The *Green Schools* initiative is explored in detail in a later chapter in this publication. A more direct link may be needed between such initiatives and the SPHE curriculum. The active engagement of children in the school and local community renders them more aware of their role as active citizens and more willing to assume community responsibility. It can be argued that the notion of active citizenship is implicit in the methodology of SPHE but this needs to be made more explicit to both teachers and children. The methodology of SPHE is Freirean in its approach in that it poses problems to the children, inviting them to develop critical consciousness which, in turn, leads to taking action (Freire 1972).

This does not mean that topics such as the Food Pyramid have receded in importance. Evidence demonstrates that diet and nutrition are an ongoing concern. However, the Food Pyramid should not be confined to the individual. Its potential should be maximised so that children can see how issues of diet and nutrition extend beyond themselves. They can be encouraged to see how food waste and food poverty are linked. They can become more aware of how food is wasted, particularly in more affluent parts of the world. They can begin to problematize the issue of food waste and to provide solutions to this problem. They can see that diet and nutrition are global issues and that they can have a role in addressing this issue. This is how SPHE becomes an agent of transformation.

MAINTAINING THE PROFILE AND RELEVANCE OF SPHE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

It is the contention of this writer that there tends to be some complacency in relation to the profile and status of SPHE in schools. Yet, there are many ways in which SPHE can be foregrounded.

Appointment of SPHE Co-ordinators in Schools

First of all, research shows that schools with an SPHE co-ordinator are likely to be more successful in terms of implementation (DES 2009; Nic Gabhainn *et al.* 2010). The role of co-ordinator should encompass the efficient use and preservation of the time allocated to SPHE, the identification of possibilities for integration with other curricular areas, the promotion of a whole-school approach in the context of the Health Promoting School (to include school policy, physical and social environment of the school, home-school-community involvement and well as curriculum development), promotion of a reflective approach to SPHE, i.e. the interrogation of, rather than passive acceptance of, the SPHE curriculum; the placing of SPHE as an agenda item at staff meetings; a focus on SPHE as part of continuing professional development for all school staff; development of a library of SPHE resources for all staff; and a designated area for display of all SPHE related work.

¹ The situation at post-primary schools differs here, as citizenship education is addressed in a different subject area, that of Civic, Social and Political Education

Role of School Principal

In addition to the appointment of an SPHE co-ordinator, the effective implementation of SPHE is also dependent upon the leadership in the school. Research by Tjomsland *et al.* (2009) outlines the significant role of the school principal in implementing and sustaining health promotion practices. A later chapter in this publication also outlines the role of the principal in determining the status of SPHE in schools. Her/his approach to allocating SPHE duties is pivotal to its status with staff and ultimately with students. The potential of SPHE as a facilitator of the National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy needs to be acknowledged by the school principal and communicated to teachers, students and parents. The school principal also has a strong role in resisting the somewhat ad hoc approach to the teaching of SPHE at post-primary level and in advocating for mandatory qualifications for teachers of SPHE. She/he is also the facilitator of continuing professional development in this area.

Sharing Responsibility at Local and National Level

The responsibility for maintaining the profile of SPHE is not confined to local level. Schools should not be expected to assume this task without support. Indeed, as stated in the *Teacher Guidelines for SPHE* (DES 1999), SPHE is a shared responsibility. This responsibility needs to be assumed at national and governmental level. A primary issue is the need to recognise that the SPHE curriculum is not the sole panacea for societal ills. The introduction of initiatives at school level has very limited impact if they are not supported by implemented national policy and legislation. A key example here is the prevalence of underage drinking in Ireland. This continues to be a significant national problem despite legislation in relation to the serving of alcohol to minors. In addition, advertising of alcohol and sponsorship of major events continue to be controversial issues.

There needs to be a strong recognition at national level that the provision of resources does not equate with commitment to SPHE. This writer contends that the provision of resources alone is short-sighted and has little impact when the curricular area in which they are assumed to be implemented is struggling for time, recognition and status in many schools. In line with recommendations of many teachers (NCCA 2008; Nic Gabhainn *et al.* 2010), there needs to be more discrete time allocated to SPHE at primary and post-primary level. The nature of the material and methodology is such that 30-45 minutes of discrete time per week is inadequate. Dependence upon integration does not necessarily imply implementation. Also, instead of adding to an increasing list of resources, there needs to be a commitment at governmental level to the review and revision of the overall SPHE curriculum so that it reflects the needs of current society.

Achieving Real Change

Teachers' needs in relation to SPHE should get more acknowledgement and support. For example, concerns in relation to the challenging nature of some SPHE material need to be recognised and action provided at local and national level. It does not suffice to assume that all teachers are ready, willing and able to address this material. The reality is that some aspects of SPHE are being overlooked by teachers due to their challenging nature. The discourse of assumption does not necessarily lead to implementation. It could be argued at this point that the teacher's pivotal role as an agent of change was not sufficiently acknowledged when SPHE was introduced into schools. The advent of this curricular area was seen at the time to be innovative and progressive as it coincided with the social, economic, demographic and cultural changes occurring in Irish society from the mid-1990s onwards. Yet, as Gleeson (2004) observes, many educational reforms (such as the introduction of SPHE) tend to be characterised by content change rather than change in classroom practices. Gleeson presents educational reform on a continuum and only locates curriculum change at the end of this continuum as he contends that real change or 'deep change' must include the combination of change at three levels: changes in materials, in classroom practices and in practitioners' beliefs and values. Gleeson contends that if changes do not occur, educational reform remains at the stages of programme launches, experimentation (introduction of new programmes without consideration to sustainability) or curriculum development wherein syllabus and content change is presented without changes in practice.

If SPHE is to be taken seriously, there needs to be a mandatory requirement of recognised qualifications for the teaching of SPHE at post-primary level. The fact that a teacher does not have sufficient hours is insufficient rationale for her/his appointment as a teacher of SPHE. There needs to be related investment in pre-service programmes for SPHE at post-primary level so that future teachers feel equipped to address the many and complex issues within this area.

The inclusion of SPHE as an exam subject at post-primary level is open to debate and is not necessarily the optimum route to increasing implementation. While designating it as an exam subject may increase its status among teachers, students seem to be cognisant of its importance without the need for formal examination. Teachers may need to engage in more reflection in relation to the relationship between their own identity and self-worth and examination points. Parents also have a key role to play here in affirming the value of a school subject that is not examined. As acknowledged by some of the researchers cited above, the fact that SPHE is not examined allows teachers more vision, scope and flexibility in terms of programme development and implementation.

FINAL WORD

It thus becomes apparent that vision and commitment at both local and national level is the ultimate determinant of implementation (or non-implementation) of SPHE. Schools have a key role to play but will have limited success if working in isolation from the other key stakeholders: parents, health professionals, community workers and, ultimately, the State. A concerted initiative on the part of the State to develop and sustain SPHE through review, revision and acknowledgement of national policy and legislation will render SPHE a significant and relevant component of 21st century education in Ireland and provide it with the status and visibility that it so richly deserves.

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Coping with Complexity and the Uncertainty of Modern School Life: Some Lessons Learned from Bees

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INTRODUCTION

One of the key characteristics of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum is the acknowledgement that SPHE is a shared responsibility. This implies that all those who come in contact with children (parents, teachers, health professionals and other members of the community) each have a responsibility for the child's social, personal and health development. The Primary School Curriculum for SPHE (DES 1999a) recognises that children's social, personal and health development is influenced significantly by everyday experiences and interactions in their home environment. SPHE in the school adopts a generic approach which is spiral in nature. This means that children are viewed holistically with the aim of developing a general set of skills and understandings which is appropriate for children's age and stage of development. The curriculum requires that children be engaged in activity-based learning and that SPHE be implemented in a combination of ways. That is, as a discrete subject, through integrated learning across the curriculum, and in the context of a supportive environment (ibid). One way of ensuring that a whole school approach to SPHE is implemented is to introduce the concept of becoming a Health Promoting School (HPS).

BRIEF OUTLINE OF HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOL CONCEPT

The World Health Organisation (1997) describes a HPS as one in which all members of the school community work together to provide integrated and positive experiences and structures that promote and protect health. Stated concisely, a HPS is about developing a special focus on health in a school. It encourages school staff, parents and pupils to look at how healthy lifestyles and environments may be built upon within the school. In developing as a HPS, a school works through a participative process that considers various aspects of the school. For example, a HPS is concerned with the school **environment**, (IUHPE, 2008) which is interpreted as having both a physical and social dimension. The overall aim is to create and sustain a safe, secure and stimulating place in which to work and learn. A HPS also focuses on **curriculum and learning** (IUHPE, 2008). In this context the role of SPHE as both a discrete and integrated element of the curriculum is significant. However a HPS also considers the informal or hidden curriculum and seeks to identify how alternative learning opportunities may be provided and supported to empower members of the school community to take more control over their health. A HPS emphasises the importance of **partnership** with home and building links with the community and various relevant agencies that can support the school's work on health (IUHPE 2008). The HPS process is underpinned by a collaborative approach which involves all members of the school community in the identification of priority areas for actions and subsequently the development and implementation of Action Plans specific to each school's needs. Many school **policies** influence health and wellbeing (IUHPE 2008). Consequently a HPS seeks to support and develop policies that build on what is already in place and help to embed structural changes in school processes and organisation so that the HPS emerges as a sustainable entity.

HOW A HPS DEVELOPS IN PRACTICE

In the mid-west of Ireland a Network of Health Promoting Schools was established in 2005. Each school in the network developed as a HPS by working through a number of steps. The initial stages involve introducing the HPS concept to the whole school community. Following this a school Working Group is formed which comprises representatives from staff, pupils and parents. The Working Group conducts an audit of the school's health promoting status and this, combined with information gathered during the earlier consultation process, helps to identify areas for action. The group then develops an Action Plan which, when fully implemented, incorporates activities to address each of the elements of a HPS (environment, curriculum, policy and partnership). The school Working Group is responsible for recording progress on their chosen Action Area (for example, Healthy Eating, Physical Activity, Mental Health etc.) and communicating with the whole school community during implementation. A cycle of HPS is completed once a school carries out some degree of review and self-assessment of their plan. Each year the efforts and achievements in relation to HPS are celebrated in some way within the school.

It is clear from the description above that in order for SPHE to be fully implemented and for the HPS process to emerge and develop in healthy and sustainable ways, intricate communication mechanisms will be required. For SPHE and the HPS process to work, schools will have to strengthen and exploit the dynamic and adaptable characteristics of its community members so as to ensure sustainability. The collaborative and democratic principles upon which SPHE and HPS are founded will mean that decision-making is likely to become more decentralised, with power and influence being more widely shared among the school community. Changes in structures and procedures can be challenging and may inevitably lead to tensions as schools today cope with ever increasing demands from both within and external to the school itself. While all of this may sound somewhat problematic, it largely reflects the context in which the HPS process unfolds in reality. The title of the conference where this paper originated recognised that the future of SPHE will involve problems and possibilities.

BACKGROUND CONTEXT TO MY PRESENTATION:

In my presentation at the inaugural SPHE Network conference I drew from research examining the supports and barriers to developing the Network of Health Promoting Schools in the mid-west region of Ireland. In this research I utilised a branch of Complexity Science - Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) - as the lens through which I view the Network. Simply put, a Complex Adaptive System (CAS) consists of a set of interacting elements where the behaviour of the total is an indirect, non-hierarchical consequence of the behaviour of the different parts. While a variety of CAS have been identified in the literature (Axelrod and Cohen 2000; Plesk and Greenhalgh 2001; Coquohoun 2005; Miller and Page 2007), Neshavarz *et al.* (2010) broadly categorised CAS into the following types:

- natural CAS, for example, beehives, ant colonies;
- artificial CAS, for example, purely mathematical or computer-based modelling systems;
- social CAS, which can comprise individuals and organisations.

VIEWING SCHOOLS AS COMPLEX ADAPTIVE SYSTEMS

Radford (2008:506) points out that:

Nobody would deny that schools are complicated but the concept of complexity brings a further dimension to the ways in which we see them functioning.

To see schools as Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) means that we recognise that they are complex in that they are made up of multiple inter-connected elements. Furthermore, schools are adaptive in that they have the capacity to change and evolve (by altering processes and structures) and learn from experience. This description of schools is in contrast to the much more common representation of these institutions as largely hierarchical entities incorporating linear and predictable procedures and organisational arrangements.

BEES IN A BEEHIVE AS AN EXAMPLE OF COMPLEX ADAPTIVE SYSTEMS

My interest in CAS was sparked by an encounter with a book about bees (Tautz 2008) that compared these tiny insects in their natural habitat to a 'super-organism'.

When one thinks of bees buzzing about one doesn't ordinarily conceive of them as a 'super-organism' as such. From this perspective, a honeybee colony is viewed as an indivisible whole, a single integrated living organism. Quite similar, that is, to how we might view human beings. Outlandish as it may seem, honeybees share many distinct criteria and novel features that define mammals:

- Honeybees like mammals have a very low rate of reproduction (a colony raises only a small number of reproductive females - two to three queens - each year).
- Female mammals and female honeybees produce specific nourishment for their offspring in special glands - in the case of mammals this is milk, with honeybees it is royal jelly.
- Developing offspring are afforded a precisely controlled environment in which to grow, the uterus in mammals, the brood comb in the bee colony.
- Mammals have body temperatures of approximately 36°C: honeybees maintain the temperature of the brood comb at 35°C.

Tautz (2008) contends that the comparison of features outlined above suggest more than 'superficial similarity' between bees and mammals. Shared characteristics would seem to imply, that somewhere on the evolutionary journey, (bees in their present form appeared about 30 million years ago), similar solutions to significant problems were found by different organisms. It was this possibility and the complexity of bee life that attracted me in the beginning as I sought to delve deeper into the complexity of school life and how this affects the development of a Network of Health Promoting Schools. Both mammals and honeybees have adapted to and can, to a considerable degree, control many of the contextual parameters which determine their survival thus conferring significant independence from prevailing environmental conditions. The effective application of available material and energy is brought about by the existence of a complex social and behavioural organisation. As I view schools as examples of CAS I felt that it may be useful to look at how bees cope with various demands and problems and see if their strategies could in some way be transferable to the school context.

CHARACTERISTICS OF COMPLEX ADAPTIVE SYSTEMS

Numerous commentators have pointed out that CAS exhibit many common characteristics (Colquhoun 2005; Anderson *et al.* 2005; Axelrod and Cohen 2000; Holland 1995; Plesk and Greenhalgh 2001). These characteristics are linked and interdependent and Neshavarz *et al.* (2010) claim that consequently each characteristic can be viewed as both a cause and consequence of the other properties. In my research I combined the perspectives of Colquhoun (2005) and Anderson *et al.* (2005) as the basis of my conceptual framework.

Colquhoun (2005) claims that CAS have 'fuzzy boundaries' which can range from the physical to the abstract. For example, while schools are specific bounded entities, they reach beyond the confines of

school gates and influence the surrounding community. Colquhoun (2005) highlights that boundaries that are permeable promote interactions by providing a stable structure where change can happen. Another feature of CAS that Colquhoun emphasises is that actions of different elements of the system are based on '*internalised rules*'. According to Colquhoun these rules can be explicit (for example, school bell or timetable) or implicit (hierarchies in the schoolyard). Conflicts and challenges can emerge in CAS due to competing demands and agendas from within and external to the system. In Colquhoun's interpretation, '*tensions and paradoxes*' are natural features of CAS. In a CAS new and '*novel behaviour*' emerges and consequently non-linearity and unpredictability are commonly observed. Colquhoun argues that although schools are very often depicted in terms of a linear model of inputs and outputs, in reality they can be '*unpredictable*' in nature. For example unplanned events and outcomes are not that unusual in school settings. This recognises that each school is unique and continually evolving.

Anderson *et al.* (2005) also highlight a range of features of CAS. They recognise that although systems do have elements it is the '*interdependencies*' and '*interactions*' that create the whole. Similar to Colquhoun (2005), they advise paying attention to '*non-linearities*' and in particular to where small events lead to large outcomes and vice versa. They emphasise the dynamics at work in CAS. Self-organisation and emergence are the terms used in CAS to describe the underlying dynamics and by thinking of the organisation (school / network) as a verb - as opposed to a noun - the organisation is viewed '*not as something that is, but rather something that is becoming.*' (Anderson *et al.* 2005: 76). Both Colquhoun (2005) and Anderson *et al.* (2005) provided useful descriptions of CAS that were relevant for my research on Health Promoting Schools (HPS). In the next section I outline how bees illustrate various properties of CAS that I think are particularly relevant to developing schools as HPS.

EXAMPLES OF INTRICATE COMMUNICATION MECHANISMS USED BY BEES

Honeybees exploit a variety of means to communicate with one another (see Tautz 2008). By using a range of chemical and tactile signals, bees succeed in providing a constant source of information and feedback to all members of the beehive. For example, when forager bees are returning to the hive, older bees at the hive entrance release and disperse an attractive scent to help guide the forager bees to the optimal landing site. Another example of intricate communication mechanisms employed by bees is illustrated when scouting bees upon discovering attractive flower patches return to the hive with nectar and proceed to inform the other bees of the location of the food source through dancing on the hive's comb. Feeding sites located nearby are indicated through a simple round dance that also conveys some information regarding the quality of the site. Distant food sources require more complex messages to be transmitted and to achieve this bees perform "waggle dances" (which look something like a figure of eight) on a particular part of the comb. Precise information including directions, distance from the hive, quality of the source etc. is shared throughout the colony by this means of communication (Tautz 2008).

Lesson One for developing a Health Promoting School

As in a bee colony, communication is vital as it plays a significant role in the evolution of the HPS process (IUHPE 2008). Bees clearly demonstrate the value of consistent communication for achieving the hive's goals. By regularly gathering information from the whole school community and providing ongoing feedback on developments, a HPS not only provides opportunities for monitoring quality and outcomes but also supports continuity of learning for its members. A wide range of mechanisms to exchange information should be provided.

EXAMPLES OF ADAPTABILITY AND DYNAMISM OF BEES

Bees' adaptability is illustrated by the variety of roles adopted by bees throughout their lives. Worker bees go through many occupational stages, for example, as cleaner bees, builder bees, brood care bees and

guard bees. Upon maturing, worker bees leave the hive and act as foragers. The extent of bees' adaptability is evidenced in that many of bees' age-related skills and abilities are characterized by a high degree of plasticity. For example, bees reach peak production with regard to manufacturing wax for the comb between about the 12th and 18th day of their lives. However should the need arise, older bees can again become 'wax gland young' (Tautz 2008) to meet a surge in wax demands due, for example, to a move to a new home following swarming (which would require the development of a new comb). Similarly, removal of the older bees - largely responsible for foraging activity - from the hive, results in the younger bees very quickly becoming foragers.

Honeybees' adaptability is also reflected in the maintenance of the temperature of the hive. The temperature of the brood nest is of great importance to the entire biology of honeybees and in order to reproduce and grow they must maintain the temperature within a fairly narrow range. Consequently, when the hive gets too cold, bees huddle together, buzz their wings and succeed in raising the temperature within the hive. Similarly when the hive gets too hot, bees in the hive spread out and fan their wings to cool things down (Miller and Page 2007). These examples of the bees' adaptability and dynamism illustrate that bees can very quickly mobilise in response to changing contextual factors.

Lesson Two for developing a Health Promoting School

One of the extraordinary features of honeybee development is that it displays an upward developmental trajectory with bees gradually becoming more responsible and adopting increasingly challenging roles. All of the bees' actions are influenced by their acute sensitivity to environmental changes and many can fluctuate between roles as needs arise. This ability to adapt increases the likelihood of sustainability for the colony. A HPS should actively promote growth experiences for all of the school community. This approach would reflect the curriculum view of SPHE (DES 1999b) as a process of lifelong learning and should be developed in ways that are appropriate to children's age and stage of development. Broad exposure to varied tasks would allow members of a HPS community to gain deep understanding of the shifting complexities that influence school life and create an environment where several solutions may be identified for different issues. In this way any member of the community can stimulate action based on their direct experience. This is also in keeping with the democratic principles and values that underpin HPS (IUHPE 2008).

EXAMPLES OF DECENTRALISED DECISION-MAKING AMONG BEES

Perhaps surprisingly, while the queen continuously produces eggs that develop into females, these remain sterile. Reproducing females are only produced when they are needed, by worker bees feeding a special diet to larvae housed in queen cells. The worker bees in the colony therefore determine the dynamics of the successive generations. Colonies are not organised as hierarchies and although having a queen, this does not represent a command structure in the traditional understanding of decision-making. The queen rather acts as an instrument for the community within the hive. Tautz (2008:248) when describing a bee colony as a CAS claims that:

There is no ruling body, instead the overall behaviour of the colony results from the co-operation and competition between the bees.

For example, the number of bees deployed as foragers fluctuates strongly and the workforce is sub-divided into various proportions of nectar and pollen collectors depending on the colony's needs. The pattern of deployment of the bee as a whole comes about as a result of the many small contacts between the individuals rather than being directed from a central source. These decentralised decision-making processes results in the effective use of resources and manifest in architectural changes in the comb itself.

For example, when there is no reason to raise drones - male bees (outside the mating season, these would be a drain on precious resources) - worker bees build comb cells that are smaller in size for female eggs. When drones are needed, extra larger cells are added to the edge of the comb to accommodate the larger males. The queen using her forelegs to gauge cell size, lays fertilised eggs (females) in the smaller cells and unfertilised eggs (males) in the larger cells. These examples of distributed authority illustrate how efficiently the colony can respond to contextual changes and stimulate the required actions to ensure the survival of the hive.

Lesson Three for developing a Health Promoting School

While it may be felt that certain members of the community may be in a better position to assess the school's needs at any particular moment, a good rule of thumb (according to bee practice at any rate) would seem to be that those closest to the information should make the relevant decision. Bees also avoid decision-making pitfalls by considering many 'opinions' that are often collectively evaluated, for example, when to start developing a new queen, or where to locate a new hive. However as with humans, bees sometimes have to make decisions in a hurry often with incomplete information. What the bees show us is that incomplete information does not mean insufficient information and that while few decisions can be made with absolute certainty, good decisions can still be made. Bees achieve quite a good hit rate by eliminating biases and prejudices as much as possible out of their decision processes. It should be noted that bees' actions are always oriented towards the future (O'Malley 2010). In terms of HPS then, the school community should exploit short-term possibilities but aim to be mindful of any potential long-term implications from decisions. In terms of bringing about systemic improvement and developing as a Health Promoting School it is important to recognise that embedding change in schools and ensuring that it is sustained takes time (IUHPE 2008; 2010).

SOME FINAL POINTS

In a bee colony the queen produces a special pheromone, which outside the hive acts as an olfactory lure for the drones during mating but which inside the colony suppresses the development of ovaries in the other female bees. This means that female bees remain infertile. The pheromone is spread throughout the hive firstly by 'court' bees that groom the queen but then more widely among the community through the continuous exchange of food that occurs between the workers. The queen odour conveys information about the presence and the status of the queen. Using this information the colony decides when it is to its benefit to change queens. Significantly, when the royal perfume dips below a certain level (which occurs as queens age) the colony immediately begin to rear a replacement queen.

One of the striking features of honeybee propagation relates to their unusual sexual reproduction. As stated earlier, in a bee colony there are very few fertile females, with many more fertile males in existence at mating times. Successive generations of reproductive females are separated by alternating short and much longer time periods. This is remarkably different to other insect propagation practices and challenges the Darwinian notion that an overproduction of many different fertile offspring is an important requirement for evolution. O'Malley (2010:12) points out that:

A colony headed by a high-quality queen has a more robust worker population and greater honey yield. These tensions and paradoxes within the colony illustrate that while the queen is not necessarily in command, the quality of the leadership has a significant bearing on the hive's survival. What is notable is that succession is not decided by the queen alone but rather by the hive as a whole. It is worth considering that Morrison (2002:189) speaking about complexity in relation to school leadership stated:

Complexity is a reality; it is happening; it is working in practice, whether we like it or not. Though its message is unsettling, for it argues that long-term planning is futile, that control is a chimera, and that the power of the bosses is limited, it is descriptively accurate.

While the bee colony seems to represent an almost unrivalled example of efficient adaptability and ability to self-organise it is also true that much of what bees do is repetitious. Many of the bees' routines are aligned to the natural rhythms of their habitat. The underlying patterns which indicate that the bees' actions are attuned to 'fuzzy constants' are less visible, for example the stable maintenance of the temperature within the hive, that waggle dances provide fixed references which take into account flying conditions, elevation, terrain and so on. What the bees' calibration shows is that when a system fixes itself to a few immutable principles, the system as a whole becomes more reliable.

Therefore, in relation to HPS, it is important to have clear goals and parameters before beginning any task. Constants in the forms of standards, conventions, policies and values are critical to communication, innovation and efficiency. O'Malley (2010:51) points out they "provide a fixed forum for the exchange of ideas and essential points of reference". These constants provide the stability that does not drive out innovation and spontaneity but rather makes it possible. Having clear standards helps to regulate behaviour and supports the school community in keeping on track to succeed in its goals.

It is clear that although honeybees have to contend with many competing demands (such as, stability versus flexibility, individuality versus group/society, similarity versus change) in general colonies do a good job of managing the tensions between these opposing forces. Bees achieve this by making the community central to all the operations of the colony. The organizing theme of the hive is that everything is done for the good of the whole. While it is natural for individuals to have needs for personal growth (and these should receive attention), in terms of HPS it is important to keep people situated within a cooperative enterprise. The more the school community internalise the values of HPS the more likely it will thrive.

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The Challenges of Implementing Social, Personal and Health Education in the Current Post-primary School System

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INTRODUCTION

In 1916, Pádraig Pearse defined education in Ireland as a "murder machine" (Pearse 1916, p.9). While some would advocate that good progress has been made in education, terminal examinations that dominate the system have ensured that the system has remained technicised and performative (Hennessy *et al.* 2011). This technicist approach was compared, over one hundred years ago by Pádraig Pearse (1916) to a machine obeying "immutable and predetermined laws;...devoid of understanding, of sympathy, of imagination" (p. 11-12). The stultifying uniformity of the state controlled examination system (Atkinson 1967) was illuminated by Pearse (1916) when he wrote, "precisely the same text-books [are] being read tonight in every secondary school and college in Ireland" (p.34). Pearse eloquently admonished the competitive state examinations, "down with it, down among the dead men. Let it promote competitive examinations in the underworld, if it will" (*ibid.*, p.48). This examination system has become even more prescribed since Pearse first wrote these words, with subject syllabi remaining narrow and conducive to a factual rather than a holistic approach to learning (Hennessy *et al.* 2011). Two prominent values that pervade this economically driven approach to curriculum are performativity and competition. If these are given priority without carefully balancing them with less egocentric values, many serious consequences can occur that are deleterious to health and well-being (Trant 2007). Therefore, the consequences of current curriculum paradigms, as they stand, are potentially very serious.

Performance driven education system

As a result of the dominance of the terminal exam, health education has become marginalised in schools. The tendency for teachers to teach to the exam and teach students 'what' to think as opposed to 'how' to think has been a problematic consequence of the central position exams are given in our schools. In effect, the space to develop critical thinking and the broader liberal education agenda has become marginalised. Such deterministic education is contrary to the values of health education, resulting in divergent agendas competing for space on the school timetable (Mannix McNamara 2012).

According to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in Ireland,

The general aim of education is to contribute towards the development of all aspects of the individual, including the aesthetic, creative, cultural, emotional, intellectual, moral, physical, political, religious, social and spiritual development, for personal and family life, for living in the community, and for leisure.

(NCCA 2012, p.1)

However, critics of the Irish education system argue that education as a process has become eclipsed in favour of means-end technicism, where schooling terminates in examination, to feed the needs of industry and business (O'Brien 2008). The rhetoric of education policy is admirable in its emphasis on student centred approaches to learning. However, a critical analysis of the practice of education tells a different story. The rhetoric is often sacrificed in favour of standardisation and performativity.

In this context it is particularly difficult for a health curriculum to make significant inroads embedding itself into school practice. Those involved in the development of policy for the Irish education system need to pay attention to the cautionary proviso that lack of attention to affective development results in negation of the provision of a holistic education, leading to a compromised vision of democratic education (LeBlanc *et al.* 2009). There is currently unbalanced and harmful overemphasis on academic measurable outcomes to the neglect of the other elements that are necessary for participation in a humane and democratic society. Such reductionism poses significant challenges for the teacher of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE).

Lack of value afforded to SPHE

Since it was made a compulsory subject for Junior Cycle in 2003, SPHE has consistently struggled with a lack of status. This is due to a number of reasons. Firstly, the fact that it is not an examinable subject, has led to the belief that it is of little worth to students. Subject hierarchy is a reality for education systems everywhere. Goodson (1983), reported concern thirty years ago and his sentiment remains as relevant today, "High status in the secondary school curriculum is reserved for abstract theoretical knowledge divorced from the working world of industry and the everyday world of the learner" (p.202). The academic tradition has an emphasis on theoretical knowledge with a central focus on examinations. According to Goodson (1983) if a subject is formally assessed, it carries with it the guarantee of high status. Unsurprisingly, SPHE, like Physical Education (PE), has suffered from a lack of status, because of the tendency to conflate academic disciplines as the only valuable and worthwhile knowledge in schools. SPHE is concerned with personal and social learning and is a subject of situated learning rather than abstract theorising. Therefore, since its introduction, the subject has struggled to gain esteem in schools, by parents, teachers, principals and students alike (Nic Gabhainn *et al.* 2007).

It is important to recognise the inherent value of a subject without conflating it with formal assessment. The number of points an individual secures in the Leaving Certificate does not provide one with an accurate measurement of intelligence. Healthy balanced individuals need a lot more than exposure to 'academic' disciplines. They also need exposure to social context, personal intelligence development and health and well-being education, which are critical to our quality of life.

The fact that SPHE does not feature on the Leaving Certificate syllabus speaks volumes about its considered worth in post-primary schooling. There has been a draft curriculum framework for the subject in existence since 2005, however, the impact of the 'points race' and performativity agenda in schools has ensured that health education has not been successful in gaining space on the timetable. Senior cycle is a particularly stressful period for adolescents and is, arguably, the period in which it would be most important for them to have this subject in schools. Serious consequences already exist due to the points race at senior cycle:

high levels of student stress, the negative impact of the points system on students' personal development; choice of subjects by students to attain the highest levels of points for entry to third level education; a narrowing of the curriculum arising from the tendency to teach to the examination rather than to the aims of the curriculum and an undue focus on the attainment of examination results.

(Hyland 2011, p.6)

If SPHE is to be taken seriously in schools it is vital that it is a core component of the curriculum at both Junior and Senior Cycle.

Many teachers in the study conducted by Nic Gabhainn *et al.* (2007) regarded SPHE as less important than examination subjects. The view that many of the teachers expressed was that it took valuable time away from the 'more important subjects' (p.26). If teachers do not value the subject and if principals do not afford it priority, SPHE becomes further devalued (Nic Gabhainn *et al.* 2007). This lack of status is also

evident in the position held by teachers who are sent for SPHE training and how this training is initiated. Burtenshaw (2003) posits that approaches to training have contributed to the low status of the subject. The study demonstrates that a large number of H.Dip and temporary or part-time teachers were sent for training (*ibid*). It is important to examine the implications of this in terms of sending out messages as to what is valued by schools. Geary and Mannix McNamara (2003) report, that in the majority of cases, the principal chose the teachers to teach SPHE, rather than teachers volunteering to teach the subject. It is understandable that when teachers have no previous experience of the subject and are asked to teach it by the principal, many do not hold the subject in high regard, thus perpetuating the vicious cycle of the lack of status afforded to the subject. The importance of the principal in the successful implementation of health education in schools cannot be underestimated (Grieg Viig *et al.* 2012).

Challenges faced by teachers

The teacher is central to the success of SPHE in Irish post-primary schools and indeed to promoting holistic education for young people. Teachers are facing many challenges in our school system at present, in relation to SPHE. Firstly, there is limited, if any, education provided for pre-service teachers in this area and often teachers do not feel they have any part to play in this aspect of a young person's schooling, since they view themselves as subject specific teachers (Mannix McNamara *et al.* 2012). "Subjects have tended to become preserves belonging to specialist teachers; barriers have been erected between them" (Norwood Report 1943, p.61). More work needs to be done during Initial Teacher Education (ITE) to create awareness among students as to the broader role they play in a child's education. The conceptualisation of the teacher as a 'subject' specialist' needs to be tackled so that students can see that their profession encompasses much more than being an expert in their subject.

It is a struggle for teachers to retain their own pedagogical beliefs and values, in this type of an exam-driven system. It is unsurprising that, in education systems where exam performativity dominates, teachers' beliefs about education quickly become "part of an older, increasingly displaced discourse" (Ball 2003, p.223). Consequently, teachers' commitment to students' affective development often languishes (McNess *et al.* 2003). Health education and health promotion in schools in effect, become collateral damage, disappearing from the teachers' daily priorities. It is understandable then, that many teachers are struggling to mediate the holistic needs of their students while balancing the teaching of the content for the exam. For many teachers, provision of health education is a complex challenge, involving not alone pedagogical proficiency, but also the strength to withstand competing pressures borne of the dominant culture of exam performativity. Teachers need more support in learning to manage their teaching beliefs and values in the system within which they work. More work is needed at pre-service level to challenge student teacher thinking with regard to their educational beliefs and their pedagogical practices as there is often tension between the two.

Evidence suggests that SPHE class is deemed a 'doss class' by many (Mannix McNamara *et al.* 2012) as teachers often use it as a chance for students to do their homework. There is also the tendency that the teacher who is teaching an exam subject may use this time to teach their own subject thereby getting an extra class a week to teach it, another consequence of our points driven system. Teachers are also challenged to win support for SPHE, when competing with examination classes for resources and timetable allocation. Lack of value associated with SPHE has resulted in a lack of teacher involvement in the subject (Burtenshaw 2003).

The national policy is that "every teacher is a teacher of SPHE" (Department of Education and Science 2000, p.6), yet presently, there is no nationally mandated university based programme for post-primary SPHE teachers. Exposure to health education and health promotion is critical in ITE in order that all teachers perceive they have a role in the affective development of students (Jourdan *et al.* 2010). Currently pre-service teacher education in SPHE is conducted on an ad hoc basis at post-primary level and is varied among teacher education providers, with some offering little more than an overview of SPHE

(Lyons 2008) and others offering no exposure at all. Ironically, in terms of the national policy that all teachers are teachers of SPHE, significant numbers of pre-service teachers may clearly not intend to engage with the subject. Mannix McNamara *et al.* (2012) reported that the majority (three quarters of respondents) of final year post-primary teacher education students do not intend to teach the subject. Reasons cited included limited knowledge of SPHE, lack of exposure during ITE, less than positive post-primary experiences of the subject and general lack of interest in health education. If the national policy states that all teachers are teachers of SPHE, then it follows that, health education should be placed on the curriculum for ITE at post-primary level (Mannix McNamara *et al.* 2012). This is currently the case for ITE at primary level. This would assist in engendering more openness to, and esteem for, the subject, necessary requirements for sustained and optimal implementation. Clearly some attention is needed for the promotion of the role of the teacher as an educator of the whole person.

Relationship between health and education

Given the significant pressures of performativity in schools, opting to concentrate on health education within curriculum only, while having its strengths as an approach, also brings with it significant challenges. The evidence is clear that whole school approaches are necessary in order for viable and sustainable implementation (Stewart-Brown 2006). The Irish experience demonstrates the potential of strong curriculum development. However, implementing a discrete curriculum has created problems in terms of parity of esteem and teacher engagement. Evidence suggests that if the school uses a Health Promoting Schools approach, educational and health outcomes are improved (Whitman & Aldinger 2009; Stewart-Brown 2006; SHE, 2009) and if a combination of strategies in more than one domain are used, a powerful difference can be made (Stewart-Brown 2006).

The link between better health and improved educational outcomes is established in the literature (Basch 2011; Stewart-Brown 2006; Wolford Symons *et al.* 1997). It is argued that healthier students are better learners (Basch 2011) and points to the fact that adolescents experience difficulty in learning when their health is not optimum (Freudenberg and Ruglis 2007; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development 1995). High-quality educational standards and experience influence the development of a healthier population (Jourdan *et al.* 2010; Young 2008). Limited education is also strongly associated with a range of risk behaviours, including smoking, poor diet, poor physical activity, early sexual activity, teenage pregnancy and crime, prompting Fiscella and Kitzman (2009) and Lleras-Muney (2005) to claim that the relationship between education and health appears at least to be partly causal both in the short and long term. Clearly, given the importance of health and well-being in schooling, it is imperative that schools equally prioritise the health education of their students with their cognitive development.

It is then of wonder that while the discourse of health has to some degree permeated schooling, it has not done so in a sustained and prioritised manner. It remains the case that in the majority of education systems, health is perceived as the “add on” to the school curriculum. The primary focus of the school remains focused on academic achievement with its core business being teaching and learning (Jourdan *et al.* 2010). Concurrent to the myriad and continuously increasing number of complex health issues confronting current school children, schools continue to grapple with enormous pressure to improve academic skills. Local school leaders and stakeholders either remain unconvinced that improving student health represents a means to achieving improved academic outcomes (Wolford Symons *et al.* 1997), or they have not been adequately educated as to the reciprocal link between health and educational outcomes. Yet, schools continuously experience considerable pressure to respond to health crises, especially those that manifest amongst youth, and while schools are not a panacea for societal health issues; they can play a key role in the promotion of health, particularly when there is partnership between health and education.

A look to the future

Students have a critical role in determining the future of SPHE and we need to start involving students in

decision-making. Recent research conducted with post-primary students regarding SPHE suggests three simple recommendations for the subject "more classes, better teachers and a wider curriculum" (Roe 2010, p.2). An overwhelming majority of students in the study felt the subject was important for them to learn. Forty-five per cent of participants deemed it 'very important' while over a third of students rated SPHE as 'important' (Roe 2010).

Change in education, does not come quickly or easily as we are reminded by Pearse's words over one hundred years ago. However, as the world changes so must our ways of educating. The new framework for Junior Cycle (DES 2012) has named SPHE as a one hundred hour short course over two or three years. The framework states that "This level of engagement will provide an opportunity for an enhancement of current provision for...SPHE" (p.13). However, the current proposal states that it will be at the school's discretion whether SPHE will be offered as a short course. Given the previous observations in this paper, it can be concluded that this new approach places SPHE in quite a vulnerable position. It is important that we do not undo the work of the past decade in the area of health education with these new proposals. Careful thought and consideration needs to be given so that we do not lose SPHE to this reform. If this new Junior Cycle Framework is introduced without close attention to changing the Leaving Certificate, it may serve to further reduce the perceived value of the subject of SPHE.

The points and exam driven system is antithetical to holistic education and requires immediate redress. The government has initiated some token responses by committing to reducing the amount of grading bands in the Leaving Certificate and committing to reducing the predictability of Leaving Certificate exams (DES 2013). These are clearly not enough. According to the Minister of Education, the key objective of these reforms is to reduce "over-reliance on rote learning and teaching to the test which inhibits that kind of broad learning experience at second level" (DES 2013, p.3). Fuller, more comprehensive engagement in reform is needed.

If we want to see deep change in our education system, of the type that Pearse envisaged, we need a radical overhaul of the current system, "a creation" (Pearse 1916, p.15) and not merely continuous launches of quick fix initiatives (Gleeson 2009) which has been indicative of Irish curriculum reform. Let us be the generation to finally transform this 'murder machine' into a system that brings "gallant inspiration", "freedom" and "fosters the elements of character native to a soul" (Pearse 1916, p. 21).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research has been funded by the Irish Research Council.

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Breakfast Clubs – A Guide for Good Practice

Sarah Jane Flaherty, Healthy Food for All

INTRODUCTION

Breakfast has long been considered the ‘most important meal of the day’. However, in the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Report, 13% of Irish schoolchildren report that they never eat breakfast on a weekday with a marked increase seen in those from lower social classes, girls and older children (Kelly *et al.* 2007). This study also found that 21% of schoolchildren report ever going to bed or school hungry as there is not enough food at home. Breakfast skipping is reported to affect cognition, memory, and performance in school (Pollitt 1998; Rampersaud 2005). Research also shows that children who are experiencing food poverty and are hungry coming to school are more likely to have lower educational attainment, receive special education support, and be absent from school more often (Kleinman 2002). Eating a nutritious breakfast also has a positive impact on the nutritional intake of children (Bois *et al.* 2009) and mediates against obesity (Hansen and Joshi 2008). Children should be encouraged to eat breakfast from an early age to give them the best start to the day.

There are a number of reasons why children do not eat breakfast. These include:

- **Poor appetite in early morning:** Some children have little appetite first thing in the morning and won’t eat at home. Others have to rise early and undergo a long journey to school.
- **Family tension and stress at breakfast time:** Many parents report extreme frustration and family friction caused by ‘picky’ children or children who simply will not eat at breakfast time.
- **Working parents who need to drop children:** Many working families need to leave home early and drop children to childcare and there is an increasing need for breakfast to be provided within the before-school setting.
- **Lack of food:** No consistent provision of food in the home setting means that children arrive to school hungry. Children often are not able to be confident that there will be a regular supply of breakfast food at home.
- **Lack of routine:** Poor routines at home mean that children are rising too late to be able to eat breakfast and get to school on time.
(Foley 2011)

A breakfast club is a safe, social environment where children can eat a nutritious breakfast and interact with friends, parents and teachers before the school day. Breakfast clubs can take place in schools or community settings and provide additional support to families. They are a great opportunity to ensure that children who may not have breakfast before attending school do so. Breakfast clubs have been linked to a range of benefits. They are shown to have a positive impact on school attendance and punctuality (Murphy *et al.* 1998; Shemilt *et al.* 2003). They are cited as the fourth most effective intervention of the School Completion Programme (School Completion Programme National Coordination Team 2009) which aims to support young people at risk of early school leaving. Evaluation of a breakfast club scheme in Co. Louth reported improved relationships between staff and pupils and a noticeable improvement in pupil behaviour in class (Fitzgerald 2006). An evaluation of breakfast club schemes in the UK reported similar improvements in relationships between staff and pupils and across age groups (University of East Anglia School of Social Work & Psychosocial Studies 2002).

A key aim of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum is to support the personal development, health and well-being of children (DES 1999). Breakfast clubs can support this aim through promotion of healthy eating habits, such as exploring new foods, and by developing social eating skills,

such as eating together as a group. Breakfast clubs can play an important role in the social and personal development of the child. Increased self-esteem and sense of independence are widely reported for children attending breakfast clubs (Lucas 2003). Anecdotal evidence suggests that breakfast clubs can build communication and language skills as they are an opportunity for children to engage with adults and peers on an informal basis. Breakfast clubs are more than just a means of providing food to children. They can support the personal development, health and well-being of children and so complement other SPHE initiatives in a school.

In 2011, Healthy Food for All commissioned a scoping study which explored current breakfast club activity in Ireland (Foley 2011). This found that over 500 organisations were funded by the Department of Social Protection's School Meals Programme to provide breakfast. The number of additional existing breakfast clubs that attain alternative funding is unclear. The study examined the support and resource needs of breakfast clubs in different settings and how these could best be met. The study also highlighted that no single information source on breakfast clubs, relevant to the Republic of Ireland (ROI), was available. There was also a lack of guidance on what constituted good practice in a breakfast club. Healthy Food for All (2012) developed A Good Practice Guide for Breakfast Clubs to address this need and to support the development and sustainability of breakfast clubs across Ireland.

METHODOLOGY: DEVELOPMENT OF A GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE FOR BREAKFAST CLUBS

The researcher visited 19 breakfast clubs as part of the development of the Good Practice Guide. No fixed number of breakfast club visits were agreed at the outset, but were continued until saturation point was achieved, i.e. until no new information was emerging at visits. Thirteen breakfast clubs were run by school staff on school premises. Three breakfast clubs were run by local community groups on school premises, and three were run by community groups in a community setting close to the school. The majority of the children attending these clubs were of primary-level age. The aim of each visit was to observe the daily running of the breakfast club and to discuss elements of good practice with the coordinator of the club. Observations were made by the researcher on the room layout, facilities available, foods served, staff numbers, and interaction between staff and children.

The researcher conducted an in-depth interview with the coordinator of each breakfast club. Respondents were told that the aim of the interview was to learn more about the breakfast club and to identify elements of good practice to incorporate into an information guide. All aspects of running a breakfast club were discussed, such as funding, training, engaging children, menus, plus the benefits achieved and challenges faced at each stage of development. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Where possible, feedback was also obtained from the school principal exploring benefits of the breakfast club and challenges faced in ensuring its continuance. Key themes were identified from the interviews and used to inform sections of the Good Practice Guide. Elements of good practice under each theme were identified and incorporated into the relevant section.

A review of the literature was undertaken to identify elements of good practice in developed countries. This was compared to the elements of good practice that emerged from the interviews with breakfast club coordinators. Those identified in the literature were also incorporated into the relevant section of the Good Practice Guide. Where conflicts occurred between the literature and feedback from breakfast club coordinators, alternative options were provided in the Good Practice Guide. Interviews with breakfast club coordinators identified a number of areas where further information and guidance were required, such as engaging local businesses to support the breakfast club and evaluating the breakfast club. Desk research was completed to address these issues and ensure accurate information was provided in the Good Practice Guide.

Key stakeholders were consulted to inform specific sections of the Good Practice Guide and to ensure all information was accurate. For example, a HSE Community Dietician was consulted to ensure all information on healthy eating and nutritional guidelines were accurate and appropriate for children. There was also an opportunity for these stakeholders to add information to the Good Practice Guide if it was relevant and appropriate. All information gathered was considered in relation to the Good Practice Guide and inputted appropriately.

FINDINGS FROM BREAKFAST CLUB INTERVIEWS

The interviews with breakfast club coordinators highlighted a number of important aspects to consider when setting up and running a breakfast club. All relevant information was incorporated into the Good Practice Guide. Key findings from the discussions are presented in the following section.

Aims of setting up a breakfast club

Feedback from interviews showed that breakfast clubs were established for a number of different reasons. The majority of breakfast clubs listed the following as their aims:

- Improve attendance and punctuality
- Improve behaviour and participation in class
- Improve social skills and personal development
- Improve the nutritional intake of children
- Engage and build relationships with local community members
- Provide an opportunity for key workers, such as Home School Community Liaison Officer or Social Worker, to engage with children and parents in an informal manner.

Benefits of Breakfast Clubs

Educational Benefits

Many of the benefits of breakfast clubs reported by breakfast club coordinators were consistent with those reported in the literature. In all settings, breakfast clubs were associated with improvements in attendance and punctuality. Coordinators commented that breakfast clubs provide a more attractive start to the school day which encourages children to attend school on time. In many schools, specific children were targeted to improve their attendance. Encouraging children to attend school on a regular basis will have clear benefits on their educational attainment.

Breakfast club coordinators also reported an improvement in children's participation in class since attending the breakfast club. A number of reasons were provided by coordinators as to why this occurs. Children who may have been coming to school hungry or without a nutritious breakfast were tired and unable to concentrate sufficiently in class. By providing these children with a breakfast they were better able to participate in class and interact positively with staff and other pupils:

The teachers notice the difference and those[children] that have had breakfast are ready to learn and be involved in class.

(School Completion Programme Officer)

Emotional Wellbeing

Children may come from troubled homes and arrive to school carrying problems and emotional issues which can have a negative impact on their school day. Coordinators stated that breakfast clubs offer these children a safe, warm environment to start their day where they can socialise with their friends or confide in an adult if needed. This allows children to have a positive start to the school day enabling them to concentrate better in class.

Personal Development

Breakfast club coordinators noted that clubs are a great opportunity for children to develop personal and social skills. A club can support the development of social eating habits of children, such as eating with others around a table, using cutlery, and clearing up after a meal. This might not be a usual occurrence for some children and clubs were seen as an important opportunity to teach these skills.

They are also developing social eating habits.....learning how to eat together as a group.

(School Principal)

In some clubs older pupils are involved in the running of the club, such as serving food or taking attendance. Such additional responsibility was seen as important for the personal development of these children. Breakfast clubs were also seen as a useful opportunity to encourage social interaction. This was especially important for those children who may need support to interact with other children and adults.

Benefits to the wider community

Some breakfast club coordinators reported wider benefits to the local community. The breakfast club allows a parent to meet teaching staff informally which has led to better relationships. It also allows parents to interact with other families in the local community. This is especially important for marginalised groups, such as migrant parents, who may not have strong links with other community members.

The club allows migrants to meet other parents and feel integrated into the community.

(School Principal)

CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

Space

One of the key challenges noted by breakfast club coordinators was a lack of suitable space and facilities in which to run a club. Some schools had a designated room available for their breakfast club with adequate catering facilities, which was seen as the optimum. However, in some instances the club was held in a classroom or in a small kitchen space. This restricted the number of children that could attend. Many breakfast club coordinators wanted to create a warm, safe environment for the children to come to each morning. If a space is too small to accommodate adequate numbers it can become quite chaotic. This is off-putting for some children and may actually have a negative effect on their interaction and their attendance at the club.

Hosting a breakfast club in a classroom was not seen as appropriate by many breakfast club coordinators. Coordinators wanted the breakfast club to be seen as separate to the classroom and a more fun, sociable way to start the school day. Coordinators felt that this would not happen if it was held in a classroom, and it was important that the club had its own space. It was also important that children had the opportunity to socialise while eating breakfast rather than be rushed out of the room because the space was needed for class.

The time available for the breakfast club was also a concern for some coordinators. This was often dictated by the insurance held by the school and the need for a staff member to be on site. Thirty minutes was seen as the minimum acceptable duration of a breakfast club. However, some coordinators felt that this was not enough as it did not allow for adequate social interaction or sufficient time to eat breakfast in a calm manner:

starts at 8.30....due to health and safety...only supervision from 8.30am....missing out on stuff by starting later...not as relaxed as it once was

(Breakfast Club Coordinator)

Funding

Funding was a clear concern for all breakfast club coordinators. The majority of breakfast clubs receive funding from the School Meals Programme which funds the food items solely. There is a need to acquire funding from elsewhere to fund staff time and equipment. Some schools were able to use funding from their School Completion Programme funds or core school funds. Budget cuts were having an impact on available funds and thus restricting the level at which the breakfast club could operate.

One of the biggest concerns was the effect that these cuts were having on funds available for breakfast club staff. Parents, teachers and local community members were involved as volunteers in some of the breakfast clubs but this was not feasible in all instances. A reduction in the number of staff would have an impact on the number of children they can accommodate in the breakfast club, the level of interaction with children and in some cases the number of days which the breakfast club could open. Many breakfast club coordinators were concerned about future cuts to budgets and were looking into alternatives for staffing and running their breakfast club.

Food Provision

Healthy eating was cited as a challenge for some breakfast club coordinators. The majority of coordinators and staff members knew what foods were healthy, but it was difficult to encourage children to eat these foods. Many breakfast clubs are trying to find the balance between what is healthy and what children will eat. They don't want to deter children from coming to the club nor do they want food wasted at the end of the morning. This was a constant challenge but persistence and small changes were seen as key means of addressing it. Adding variety to the menu was also a challenge. Breakfast club coordinators wanted to have different options available so that the children could try new foods. Not all coordinators were confident to make such changes while still ensuring that they are offering a healthy, balanced breakfast:

Need to keep the variety and being innovative all the time... seeing what the trends are and try to get the healthy option of them

(Breakfast Club Coordinator)

Maintaining Attendance

Keeping children interested in the breakfast club and attending on a regular basis was another key challenge. This was especially true for older children. Staff members would regularly change the foods that were available and do 'themed' days to keep children interested. The personalities of the staff members were seen as highly important in addressing this issue. It was important for staff members to create an enjoyable environment to encourage attendance.

ELEMENTS OF GOOD PRACTICE

Get children involved

One key success factor was involving children in planning and running the breakfast club. This gives children greater ownership of the breakfast club and ensures that they are more likely to attend on a regular basis. Breakfast club coordinators got children involved in a number of different ways, such as asking children to make suggestions of activities for the breakfast club, foods that could be served or suggestions for themed days. Older children were also involved in serving food and cleaning up in some of the breakfast clubs. This encourages their attendance but also the attendance of their friends and classmates:

kids also usually help out..... from 5/6th class. They really enjoy the responsibility and it makes them feel important.

(Breakfast Club Coordinator)

Making it Fun!

The social side of the breakfast club is central to the success of the club. It is important that the breakfast club is seen as a fun place and where children want to come each morning. A breakfast club needs to be attractive and colourful. Breakfast clubs are not just places to grab a slice of toast but should be seen as a place to stay and socialise with others. This is especially important for engaging older children. Breakfast club coordinators encouraged children to draw pictures to display in the breakfast club and used colourful tablecloths to make the club more appealing. Some clubs played music or encouraged children to bring in their own music to play. Children need to feel like the breakfast club is their space so coordinators made changes according to their needs and current interests.

Breakfast Club Staff

Staff members are a crucial element of a successful breakfast club. Good communication skills and providing a friendly face to all children was regarded by many as an important attribute. Children need to feel comfortable in the breakfast club and with staff members that run the club. Coordinators noted that other important attributes are that staff should be non-judgemental towards all children. A breakfast club is a place where children should be able to confide in an adult, and it is important that staff members are able to communicate effectively. Breakfast club coordinators also emphasised the need for staff members to be fun. The breakfast club is not the classroom and coordinators were trying to create a different space. This is especially important to highlight if teachers are volunteering in the club. Staff members should be able to interact easily with the children and create a fun, sociable environment for children each morning.

OVERVIEW OF A GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE FOR BREAKFAST CLUBS

Based on the findings outlined in the previous section, the following topics were chosen for inclusion in *A Good Practice Guide for Breakfast Clubs*:

1. Planning your Breakfast Club

This section focuses on assessing the need for a breakfast club and ensuring that different options are explored to develop a club that fits the needs of your school and community. It provides simple steps for developing an action plan and making links with key partners.

2. Funding your Breakfast Club

This section focuses on the different funding options available. It provides details on national food provision schemes of which schools can avail, plus alternative funding options, such as donations from local businesses. Details on charging for your breakfast club are included as this may be required for the sustainability of some clubs.

3. Getting Started

This section provides advice on what aspects are important to consider when choosing a venue, such as the facilities available and the space required to accommodate a specific number of children. The section also includes information on staff needs for a breakfast club and potential training needs, depending on their skills and the type of breakfast club being planned.

4. Running your Breakfast Club

This section gives information on nutritional guidelines for children. It includes sample menus for a breakfast club to show how different foods can be served throughout the week. Tips for a balanced breakfast are included and considerations to ensure healthy options are provided.

5. Developing a Healthy School Food Policy

This section provides simple, practical advice on developing a healthy school food policy. It lists the steps involved in this process and key partners at each stage. Useful resources and contacts are also provided.

6. Different Models of Breakfast Clubs

Different models of breakfast clubs exist based on the needs of the local community and the resources available. Further information is provided on each model and specific aspects to consider when setting up a particular model of a club.

7. Breakfast Club Activities

Some breakfast clubs choose to run activities during their club, such as physical activities or craft sessions. This section provides advice on different activity types and resources available.

8. Evaluation

This section provides a practical approach to evaluation. Details are provided on what information is useful to collect, data collection methods, and how this information can be used once collected.

9. Case Studies

Case studies provide examples of different breakfast clubs from around Ireland. Each case study includes information on how the club was set up, funding sources, and how they have kept the club running. The case studies allow the reader to see the real process of setting up and running a breakfast club and gain a better understanding of what is involved in running a breakfast club in a particular setting. Contact details for breakfast clubs are included to allow learning and experiences to be shared directly between clubs.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Healthy Food for All's *A Good Practice Guide for Breakfast Clubs* has received very positive feedback since its publication in September 2012. The Good Practice Guide has been disseminated widely to a range of professionals in the education and community sector. The involvement of breakfast club coordinators in developing the Good Practice Guide was an important component and ensured the guide was as practical and relevant as possible. It was equally important to engage with a broad range of stakeholders, as outlined previously, to encapsulate a broad range of experiences and knowledge.

Healthy Food for All continues to support and advocate on behalf of breakfast clubs across Ireland. We are currently coordinating a Pilot Programme of Breakfast Clubs where we are directly supporting and funding four new breakfast clubs in north Dublin. The Pilot Programme runs from January 2013 to June 2014. Progress of the breakfast clubs is being monitored and reviewed in each school and the outcomes of the evaluation will be shared in late 2014.

For more information on Healthy Food for All or to download a copy of *A Good Practice Guide for Breakfast Clubs*, visit our website www.healthyfoodforall.com

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Good Practice Guide for Breakfast Clubs was funded by Kellogg's Corporate Citizenship Fund.

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Giving Teachers a Voice in *safefood*'s Education Resources

Victoria O'Dwyer and Emily Kelleher



INTRODUCTION

The link between education and health is well established. It is generally accepted that those with higher educational attainment experience better health than those with lower levels of education (Ross and Wu, 1995). Schools are known to be important settings in developing health promotion and influencing health-related behaviours among children and young people (Haaple and Probart 2004). On September 29th 2012, *safefood* had the opportunity to carry out a workshop at the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Network conference. This workshop highlighted the many and varied *safefood* educational resources in a practical way.

The education team at *safefood* offer teacher-led, curriculum based educational resources for children and young people on food safety and healthy eating. These resources are free to schools on the island of Ireland (IOI) and are designed to be interactive, with each resource developed for a particular age. However, when producing resources for schools, it is important to bear in mind that evaluation is integral to any programme planning and development. It helps generate useful knowledge and improves the probability of creating a successful programme. In addition to this, it enables researchers to understand the effect (if any) of the intervention/resource under evaluation. *safefood* has sought feedback from teachers on their experience of *safefood* resources in the past in a number of ways including:

- Postal surveys
- Online surveys
- Telephone surveys
- Enclosing evaluation forms
- Stands at teacher events
- Hosting summer schools
- School visits
- Focus groups
- Research projects
- Meeting representatives e.g. heads of education centres, youthreach co-ordinators, LCA co-ordinators.

While these activities have provided a significant amount of feedback and have helped *safefood* inform the development, format and content of the resources published, there have been some challenges in gathering feedback from teachers including low response rates and self-selecting respondents. With this in mind, the next section of this article will cover a brief introduction to *safefood*'s education resources, their application in the classroom followed by any school reaction to these resources, gathered throughout the years.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR PRIMARY LEVEL TEACHERS

At primary level, *safefood* has developed three resources for teachers to use. *Clean Hands* is an enjoyable song-based activity that teaches children about the importance of hand washing and is aimed at all children in their first two years of school. *Hands of Doom* also aims to teach 3rd-6th class pupils the importance of hand washing while *Tastebuds*, aimed at children aged 8-10years, helps children to enjoy learning about the origin and production of food and the importance of eating a balanced diet.

Clean Hands – Make a song and dance of it

Health and hygiene instruction should start at the outset of compulsory education and be extended and reinforced throughout schooling, so that good habits are established and maintained into adulthood (Guinana *et al.* 2002). With this in mind, the education team at *safefood* has developed *Clean Hands*, a song-based activity that teaches children about the importance of handwashing. It highlights the need to wash your hands, especially after using the toilet and before eating and it outlines the key steps for hand washing. The video is for all children in the first two years of primary school. Two aspects of the resource were developed, a song and dance DVD or *safefood* online video to play in class as well as a teaching version complete with song words, sheet music and choreographed dance routine.

An evaluation of *Clean Hands* was carried out by the education team at *safefood* in 2011. A short evaluation form for teachers was included with each DVD as well as an accompanying letter. As an incentive, each completed evaluation form returned by a certain date was included in a draw for vouchers to the value of €200. Of those surveyed who used the resource a total of 84% of teachers (n=205) had showed the resource to the target age groups of Junior and Senior infants. A further 28% showed it to 1st through 4th classes and 7% to other age groups. The majority of teachers (88%) agreed that this resource fitted in with their planned curriculum work, the remaining 12% found that the resource was useful for general hygiene and could be used at the beginning of the year. Over half the group (54%) said the song and dance was their favourite part, while 44% said they enjoyed both the song and dance and the teaching version of the resource. Teachers reported that most of their students enjoyed the song and dance (84%), 8% enjoyed the dance only, 6% liked the song only and approximately 2% didn't answer. Overall, both teachers and pupils found the resource very valuable and enjoyable. The teachers said they would continue to use this to teach their pupils a valuable public health message advocated by *safefood*.

Hands of Doom

Keeping with the theme of handwashing, *safefood* has also developed *Hands of Doom*, a pantomime drama for all primary school children aged 9-12 years. Taking the classic concept of good triumphing over evil, the kit can be used by teachers in the classroom to put on a drama show by pupils which uses comic characters, jokes and songs to communicate simple hygiene messages. Script, soundtrack, ideas for costumes and staging tips are all provided and the resource is accompanied by lesson plans, additional reading worksheets with answers and a leaflet for parents. There is also an Irish version of the pack available to download on the *safefood* website. This resource is particularly useful as it is cross-curricular covering Music, Art, Drama, Literacy and SPHE. Drama-based education offers a valuable way of tackling key subjects such as the importance of hand washing and other basic hygiene practices, in a manner that also helps to reinforce health messages. *Hands of Doom* introduces common food poisoning bacteria, cross contamination and the four easy steps to food safety. The emphasis of the lesson is to help students adopt habits that will help them minimize their risk to exposure to these foodborne bacteria. The message is suitable for all age groups and can be performed for students and parents alike.

In 2008, an evaluation was carried out by the *safefood* education team to assess the impact of the resource in primary schools. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed for this evaluation. Questionnaires were posted to all the teachers (n=102) who had requested the resource. This was followed by telephone interviews (n=16) conducted with the teachers who agreed to be interviewed and had used

the resource in the classroom. A questionnaire was also used to determine the knowledge, attitude and behaviour of primary school children (n=53), pre- and post- use of *Hands of Doom*. The evaluation reflects a positive response to the resource, with some encouraging findings that teachers are using the resource as part of their curriculum subjects. One teacher who did not have enough time to stage the whole drama drew on sections of the resource depending on time and circumstances. Teachers were generally positive about the resource, praising the material content and script. The music and comedy aspect seemed to be the highlight, also the characters were fun and interesting, therefore making the message of the resource more meaningful for the children and easier to convey for the teacher. If children are to be engaged by health education, it needs to be fun and relate to real life, and provide opportunities to practice what is learned.

Tastebuds

Launched in 2008, *Tastebuds* was developed for primary school children to create an awareness of the origins and production of food, and to explain the importance of a balanced and active lifestyle throughout life. The resource is an interactive CD designed for 8-10 year olds to help support teachers deliver the Food and Nutrition component of the SPHE curriculum. The SPHE strands and strand units linked to in this resource are: *Myself: Taking care of my body; Growing and changing* as well as *Myself and the wider world: Media education; Developing citizenship*. Other cross-curricular links include: Geography strands: *Human environments; Natural environments*, as well as Science strands: *Living things; Environmental awareness and care*. The curriculum context of the resource is indicated in the Teachers' Notes section on a session-by-session basis and provides useful notes and ideas for class discussion as well as some homework suggestions for students. The resource also helps to encourage a whole school approach by use of homework activities designed to engage parents, and teachers are encouraged to consider food in the wider school context - one teacher reported holding a healthy food awareness day at the school after using the resource. *Tastebuds* consists of eight sessions, each taking 30-40 minutes and consists of classroom slides, extension activities, teachers' notes and homework suggestions. Each section is then brought to life by four *Tastebuds* characters who have very different personalities and convey different messages about healthy eating and physical activity.

In 2009 an evaluation was carried out by the *safefood* education team on the *Tastebuds* resource showing that it is rated very highly by both teachers and pupils alike. Each school that requested the resource received a *Tastebuds* Teacher Feedback Form in their resource pack and schools were informed that all forms returned by a particular date would be entered into a free prize draw. All teachers surveyed (n=98) rated the resource as being relevant both to cross-curricular aspects of the curriculum and more specifically to the SPHE curriculum. This indicates that this resource has achieved its main objective of helping teachers deliver the Food and Nutrition component of the SPHE curriculum. Content items that were rated highly amongst teachers included teachers' notes, classroom slides as well as extension and homework activities. The layout of the resource, the lesson plans and cross curricular links were also valued in class. When teachers asked their students about the resource, they said that their preferred feature of *Tastebuds* was its interactive element such as the games, animations and slides. The teachers were also asked if the school had taken part in other activities as a result of the resource. Some respondents said that the resource led them to either strengthen an existing healthy eating policy or create a new one within their school. Other schools also reported holding events such as a healthy eating day/week, where parents/teachers and children were involved.

Healthy Lunchboxes Leaflet

Packed lunches are regarded as an essential part of the school day, providing children with the energy they require to keep their brains active. Lunches provide around one third of our daily nutritional needs, so it is important to put some thought and planning into them. Many parents are aware that a lot of schools nowadays have adopted a healthy eating policy. To help with this, *safefood* has produced a leaflet for parents that provides practical tips on how to prepare healthy, varied and interesting lunches. The

leaflet is distributed to primary schools across the country and then further disseminated to parents of the children in these schools. Also included in the leaflet are healthy snack options, a 5-a day planner to illustrate the potential variety in the diet and an outline of the importance of fluids and hydration for children. The leaflet also incorporates steps to ensure food safety, making sure lunchboxes are clean, safe and kept at the correct temperature.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR POST-PRIMARY LEVEL TEACHERS

In relation to post-primary schools *safefood* has developed two resources. *safefood for life* aims to develop food safety skills and *How they measure up - deciphering food labelling* aims to give students a better understanding of food labels and how to use them to make healthy and more informed choices. In 2011, *safefood* in collaboration with St. Angela's College in Sligo, developed and launched the hugely successful *Takeaway My Way* competition which encourages students to display their culinary skills while also promoting the importance of healthy eating. Finally, in partnership with the Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute, *safefood* developed a teenage sports booklet which provides general advice for 13-17 year olds who are involved in sport.

safefood for Life

The *safefood for life* programme is a certified food safety programme that is being delivered in post-primary schools across Ireland. It aims to help students develop important food safety skills and allows them to sit an online food hygiene examination at the end of the course. On completion of the online examination successful students will meet the minimum training requirements to work in the food industry. Upon request *safefood* has now produced an Irish language version; *safefood don saol*, as well as an Irish language version of the online exam, for schools that teach through the medium of the Irish language. The resource is aimed at Transition Year Students and Leaving Cert Applied Students and covers topics such as personal hygiene, food contamination, food delivery and storage, food preparation and cooking, cleaning, design and layout of food premises and Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Point (HACCP). The resource pack consists of a set of teachers' slides, student activities, teachers' notes and students' notes to help teachers to prepare and teach the programme while the online examination Primary Certificate in Food Hygiene is certified by the Environmental Health Officers' Association (EHOA) and is valid for 5 years.

A 2010 evaluation found that teachers felt the visuals and interactive aspects of the resources provided fun learning for students and that the online exam was very popular with the students as they liked completing computer work. Teacher's notes were also reported as being very good and were used throughout the course. Teachers also spoke about the 'buzz' created when students received their certificates. It was noted however that some students did have difficulty with student notes and some multiple choice questions and therefore the programme needed plain English proofing to simplify the language used.

How they measure up, deciphering food labelling

It is widely recognised that unhealthy eating contributes to increased prevalence of preventable diseases including obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and many forms of cancer (Popkin 2006). Thus, creating supportive environments that help people to make healthy choices is an important underlying principle in promoting health. Eating healthily is made more difficult nowadays by an environment in which a great variety of convenient, cheap and 'fast' foods are readily available. These foods are more often than not energy-dense and nutrient-poor and packaged and marketed in ways that do not help consumers understand their nutritional content (Crockett *et al.* 2011). Nutrition labelling is one example of a population-based approach aimed at helping to make the food selection environment more conducive to healthy choices by providing information to consumers about the nutrient content of a food. *How they*

measure up, deciphering food labelling is a teaching resource developed by *safefood* for use in the post-primary school setting for Junior Cycle. This resource will also be useful for students in Transition Year and those studying Home Economics. The purpose of this resource is to examine the issues surrounding food labelling and to provide pupils with the skills necessary to make healthy and safe food choices. It was developed in conjunction with the SPHE Support Service and is divided into three lesson plans "What is a food label?" "Knowing your nutrients" and "The Food Pyramid & Food Additives", with accompanying class activities, discussion ideas and homework options provided to encourage the application of the information to real-life situations. Every effort has been made to develop strong curriculum links. Some suggestions are cross-curricular, to assist students to gain a broader understanding of what it is to be a consumer. It also links to the SPHE curriculum (post-primary) under the modules *Physical Health, Communication Skills and Influences and Decisions*. As part of the SPHE curriculum these lessons are designed to enable students to put labels in the context of a typical diet, thereby promoting the concept of self-management. Finally the resource also supports the strategic direction of the National Health Promotion Strategy 2000-2005 (DoHC 2000) and was also developed on foot of the recommendation from the Department of Agriculture's Food Labelling Group (Department of Agriculture and Food 2002) to heighten public awareness of food labelling through access to educational/promotional material.

An evaluation was carried out in 2007 to ascertain the effectiveness of the resource in supporting the SPHE/Home Economics curricular elements of food labelling and to identify any changes/improvements that could be made to the resource to meet the requirements of its users. The study indicates that there is a continuing, ongoing need for *safefood* to produce this education resource. Specific results indicate that there is high use among those teachers who were aware of the resource with 67% reporting using it to support existing elements of the SPHE curriculum. Other contexts of use included: support for a Home Economics class, support for a Science class, and within a Health Education module. Eighty per cent of the teachers who used the resource used it only in part i.e. 1 or 2 lessons, class/homework activities or the accompanying posters. Reasons cited for not using the resource in all surveys were mainly lack of awareness of the resource or having previously covered the subject area. The evaluation concluded that further development of the resource should focus on increasing access and awareness.

Take Away My Way

The *Take Away My Way* competition aims to encourage students to display their culinary skills while also promoting the importance of healthy eating. It is designed to get children thinking about making a healthier version of their favourite take away dish at home, and to give them a creative and fun way to put those thoughts into practice. Upon entry, students are invited to create a healthy takeaway dish for two people. The competition is open to all post-primary students in Ireland and to students in Youthreach centres, whether they are Home Economics students or not. The 2012 finalists delighted the judges with their pizzas, curries, stir fries, fish suppers, kebabs and burgers. In 2013, the third year of the competition 1195 applications were received. Amongst the winning dishes were pizza, vegetarian burger, popcorn chicken, salmon sausages, salmon fish cakes and salmon goujons. The competition final was judged by a panel of experts including award-winning chef Neven Maguire. Certificates and prizes were issued to winners and their teachers after the finals and a certificate of participation was distributed to every student who entered along with one for their school's home economics department.

The competition was evaluated in 2013 with a number of Home Economics teachers (n=40) through the use of an online questionnaire on the Association of Teachers of Home Economics (ATHE) website. Ninety-six per cent of them were of the opinion that the competition complements the curriculum, 97% agreed that the competition was engaging for the students and 98% thought that it helped to promote healthier food choices to the students. Challenges faced by teachers in relation to the competition included the time of year, as the finals clashed with certain exam preparations and other end of term projects in some schools. The location was considered remote for some finalists (St. Angela's College, Sligo) and 22% of teachers encountered difficulties uploading their applications online. However the entire group (100%) of teachers surveyed would encourage their students to take part in the competition again.

EVALUATING *safefood*'s EDUCATION RESOURCES – MOTIVATORS, BARRIERS AND EXPECTATIONS

The workshop at the SPHE Network conference generated useful discussion around the topic of evaluation and identified some of the motivators and barriers behind evaluating our resources with teachers. Further to this, the workshop also identified ways in which *safefood* can encourage teachers to provide their much needed feedback. The preferred methods when it comes to teachers giving their opinions included more face-to-face approaches, focus groups, telephone interviews or student feedback directly. Barriers to giving feedback included poor survey layout, disinterest by the teacher and lack of clarity with regards to who should complete the form. Finally a reduction in paperwork, more clarity to be given on the time required to complete, and the purpose of the evaluation, were also requested by teachers.

With these recommendations in mind, *safefood* continually strives to seek out teacher feedback, both on their use and awareness of these resources, as well as on how teachers rate them once used in the classroom. *safefood* also frequently revisits how best to reach teachers in order to gather feedback and advice. When these education resources are sent out to schools or are made available to order or download, it is often hard to evaluate their use afterwards without proactive teacher contact. Therefore, regular provision of teacher feedback is vital if *safefood* is to build on, change or improve aspects of these resources in an effective manner and ensure these resources are developed in a way that truthfully reflects the needs of teachers and students in today's classroom.

* We greatly appreciate feedback, comments and suggestions at any time. All resources mentioned in this article are available to schools by contacting the *safefood* helpline at 1850 404567 or by logging on to the *safefood* website at www.safefood.eu.

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Addressing the Barriers for Teaching Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Effectively in Primary Schools: Findings from an Intervention Project with Pre-service Teachers

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INTRODUCTION

RSE was introduced into Irish primary schools in 1996 (Department of Education 1996); however, its implementation has been found to vary significantly between schools, with one-third of primary schools not implementing RSE effectively (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) 2008; Department of Education and Science (DES) 2009). It has also been found to be implemented on a patchy basis in post-primary schools in Ireland (Geary and Mannix McNamara 2003; Mayock *et al.* 2007; Roe 2010). As a consequence, it cannot be assumed that pre-service teachers have experienced effective RSE and have the required subject content knowledge when entering teacher education. Barriers to effective implementation of RSE in schools are multi-level, ranging from individual factors to broader socio-cultural factors. Individual factors include teachers’ lack of confidence and personal inhibitions (NCCA 2008; DES 2009) and lack of training (Morgan 2000). With this in mind, the authors designed an intervention that would address some of the individual barriers and facilitate the acquisition of pedagogical content knowledge.

As part of the B.Ed. course¹, students have a module on Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). Module evaluations found that students felt that there was not enough time allocated towards RSE; in particular, there was not enough time to explore issues and teaching and learning methods in depth. Students also observed that the large group size (approximately 50 students) was a barrier for engaging effectively with RSE. They admitted to having little confidence in their ability to teach the topic. This led the authors to explore possible options for further provision of RSE to the B.Ed. students, and a focus group was held with 2nd Year B.Ed. students in 2009 to explore the feasibility of an extracurricular course. The outcome of the focus group research was an intervention project which was undertaken with 2nd Year B.Ed. pre-service teachers in 2010. This innovative extracurricular course sought to enhance attitudes, subject content knowledge and pedagogical skills for teaching RSE. This paper will describe the intervention, outline and discuss evaluation findings and provide recommendations.

THE INTERVENTION

Design

The aim of the project was to implement and evaluate an extracurricular course on the teaching of RSE. Furthermore, the content, approaches and methods used were documented with a view to using these in a programme wide context (i.e. with all SPHE students), and making recommendations for the future teaching of RSE to B.Ed. students.

¹ This study was conducted in the context of the three year B.Ed. programme. The new four year B.Ed. programme came into effect in 2012.

The design of the course was underpinned by Shulman's (1986) concept of pedagogical content knowledge - the blend of content knowledge (the what) and pedagogical skills (the how) in teacher education. The course was designed to enhance students' subject specific knowledge of RSE and develop skills that supported best practice teaching of RSE.

The project was informed by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen 1991; 2010), one of the most popular theories for understanding the relationships of beliefs, attitudes, social norms and perceived behavioural control with intention to perform a behaviour (Figure 1). It is thought that the more favourable the attitude and subjective norm, and the greater the perceived control, the stronger the intention to perform a specific behaviour. As previous research has found that internal factors such as personal comfort, confidence, lack of skills and information acted as barriers for effective implementation of RSE, it was felt that the TPB would suit the context of this study. It was theorised that pre-service teachers' intention to teach RSE was influenced by their attitudes towards RSE, their subjective norms towards teaching RSE and their perceived behavioural control. These constructs were used both in the design and evaluation of the intervention.

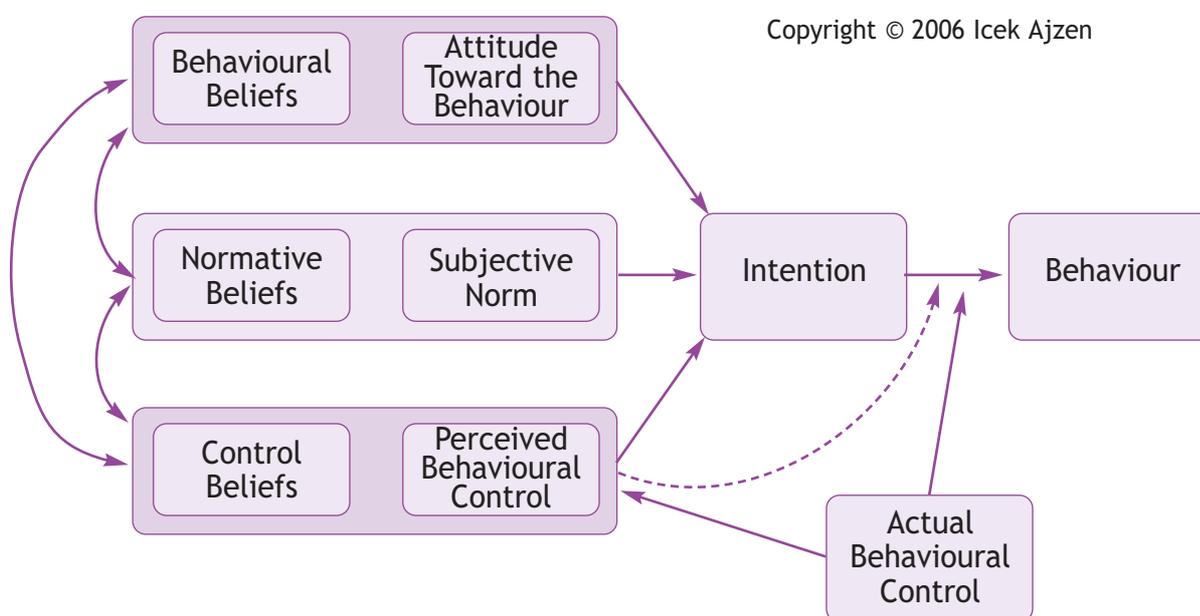


Figure 1: Constructs of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen 2006).

There is empirical support for the use of the TPB in understanding, predicting and changing a variety of social, health and lifestyle behaviours (Ajzen 2010). There is also an increasing evidence base supporting its use in predicting professional behaviour (Smarkola 2008; Cote *et al.* 2012; Mannix McNamara *et al.* 2012).

Implementation

The aim of the course was to enhance participants' awareness, skills, knowledge and confidence to deliver RSE in schools and other settings.

The course was extracurricular, consisting of eight hours over four weeks, and free to students. Three facilitators delivered the sessions, and the number of course participants was limited to twenty. The demand for the course was high, with over one hundred students applying to participate; participants were randomly selected. Students received a resource pack and a certificate of attendance. The teaching and learning methods were interactive and mirrored desired SPHE pedagogy, including small group work

and experiential learning. Session content included trust building; exploration of attitudes, beliefs and values around RSE and how they impact on one's professional practice; physical and emotional changes at puberty; reproduction; contraception; sexually transmitted infections (STIs); RSE curriculum; resources; teaching and learning methods; and policy development. Content exceeded beyond the RSE primary programme; for example, it included information about contraception and STIs. This served the dual purpose of enhancing students' personal knowledge about sexual health and their professional content knowledge, addressing possible gaps in students' prior knowledge and experience of RSE.

METHODOLOGY

The study received ethical approval from the institution's research ethics committee.

The evaluation used a "post then pre" design, capturing views at one point in time following completion of a programme. This design is particularly useful when capturing "how participants perceive the changes they have made in knowledge, skills, attitudes or behaviour rather than quantifiable changes in outcomes" (Colosi and Dunifon 2006, p.5).

A survey was administered to course participants (N=19)² at the end of the course. A survey was also administered to a control group of 2nd Year B.Ed. students (N=21) using convenience sampling. Thirty respondents were female, seven were male and three did not respond. Two identical questionnaires were developed, one set for course participants and one for the control group, except for a section of questions specific to the course for participants. The survey examined attitudes towards RSE; self-rated ability and confidence level in teaching RSE, views on current provision of RSE in the B.Ed. curriculum, and views of the course. The control questionnaire was piloted with five 3rd Year students in December 2009, with no resulting changes. Data underwent descriptive analysis using the software package, PASW Statistics version 17.0.

A qualitative approach followed, using a focus group (N=3 course participants) and semi-structured interviews (N=3 course facilitators). The focus group explored participants' attitudes towards RSE, their views on their own ability and confidence in teaching RSE, and their views of the course. Interviews with the facilitators sought to gather their experiences of delivering the workshop. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the written transcripts were analysed using a systematic approach involving the extraction and coding of themes relevant to the aims of the evaluation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION³

Students' previous experience of RSE

Respondents were asked about their previous own experience of receiving RSE in primary and post-primary levels (Figure 2). Among all respondents (N=40), only 9 (or 22%) had experience of RSE at both primary and post-primary levels. The same proportion (22%) noted that they had RSE experience at primary level only, while the most common (N=18 or 45%) response was post-primary level only. Only 4 students (10%) noted that they had no previous experience of RSE.

² One student did not participate in the evaluation.

³ Source of quotations will be referred to as FG (Focus group Participant) A, B or C; FI (Facilitator Interview Participant) A, B or C; WG (Workshop Group Participant) and survey number; CG (Control group) and survey number.

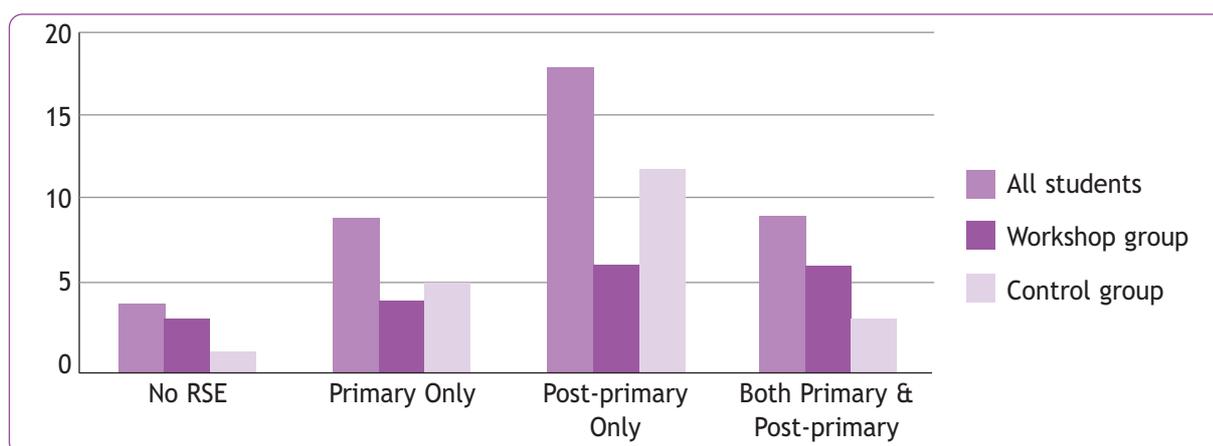


Figure 2: Previous experience of RSE

The three focus group participants all agreed that their own experience of RSE was limited.

- *the only background I had was what I got when I was in 5th class...but it wasn't really mentioned before college... (FG B)*
- *I never in my life got RSE in primary school...in secondary school we did a little bit in first year on AIDS, and it was...it was not made a reality...some people over there it happened to...and it wasn't STDs in general it was just AIDS that was it...and that was the only tuition I had ever received in RSE...my RSE was in the playground...(FG C)*
- *I wouldn't have had enough knowledge or confidence in doing it...and no experience at all...no experience as in a student having had RSE (FG A)*

Although caution must be applied to interpretation, as the sample was small and not randomly selected, the findings reflect national findings. Most students in the sample (90%) reported having some experience of RSE, similar to a large national study where 81% of men and 85% of women in Ireland aged 18-24 had received some form of sex education in school (Layte *et al.* 2006). However, 45% in this sample reported having had RSE in post-primary school only. While recall bias may have affected responses, over half of the sample had not experienced RSE in primary level, reflecting the concerns of national implementation reported by both the NCCA (2008) and the DES (2009). The implication for teacher education providers is clear; they cannot assume that students entering third-level primary teacher education programmes have experience of RSE and sufficient content knowledge of the subject.

Views of current provision of RSE in the B.Ed. curriculum

Students were asked to rate their satisfaction level with the current provision of RSE in the B.Ed. curriculum. More than half of the students (63%) were not satisfied with the current provision, while 23% perceived that they were satisfied. Comments provided by students related to the short time given to the RSE unit in the B.Ed. curriculum and the large group sizes. Students perceived that the weighting of SPHE compared to other subjects was low in the B.Ed. curriculum.

One of the facilitators stated:

way more needs to be done at 3rd level...the SPHE curriculum gets very little time...but that's only reflecting what's happening in the curriculum...SPHE as a whole needs to be more front lined...it helps all the other subjects and RSE is only a small part of that. I think the methodologies used in SPHE will help teachers teaching...become more comfortable in their roles...trust themselves as professionals...(FI B)

It is clear that students in this sample⁴ did not feel that they had received enough time allocation for RSE on the curriculum. This has been addressed to some extent in the new four year B.Ed. curriculum where more time has been allocated to SPHE.⁵ Students on the new B.Ed. programme may also be able to avail of an elective SPHE subject specialism (in development) which would allow for further exploration of RSE.

⁴ In the context of the three year B.Ed. programme.

⁵ The four year B.Ed. programme commenced in 2012, with the SPHE/RSE programme introduced in year 2, (2013).

Attitudes towards RSE

Attitudes towards RSE were positive and key findings are reported in Table 1.

Statement	Most common response (N=40, all students)
RSE should be taught in schools	100% agreed ¹
RSE should be taught in senior classes only	70% disagreed ²
RSE should be taught only by those comfortable enough to teach it	73% agreed ¹
A guest speaker has an important role in the delivery of RSE	67% agreed ¹
Parents play a key role in RSE	100% agreed ¹
I worry about going against the culture of the home in teaching RSE	75% agreed ¹
I worry about the reactions of the children in relation to RSE	58% agreed ¹
I find it difficult to talk about RSE	65% disagreed ²
I would prefer not to teach RSE	75% disagreed ²

Table 1: Summary of responses to attitudinal statements

¹ reflects combined agree and strongly agree responses

² reflects combined disagree and strongly disagree responses

Differences between respondents from the workshop group and control group emerged for some of the statements⁶. It is interesting to note that when asked if they would “worry about going against the culture of the home in teaching RSE”, a higher proportion in the workshop group (89%) agreed compared to the control group (62%). This finding was not elaborated on in the focus group, and one can only speculate on possible explanations (including chance) for this difference. It is possible that the workshop participants held a higher level of awareness of the role of the parents in RSE and were more sensitive to this aspect. When asked if they “find it difficult to talk about RSE”, the level of agreement was higher in the control group (33%) compared to the workshop group (5%), as displayed in Figure 3.

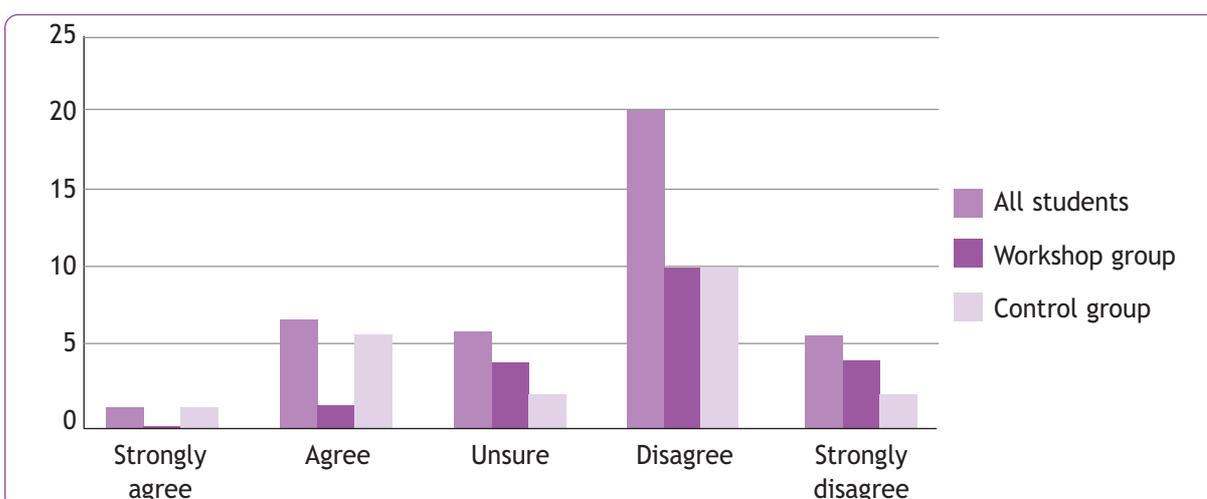


Figure 3: I find it difficult to talk about RSE

⁶ Statistical tests for associations were not conducted due to the limited sample numbers.

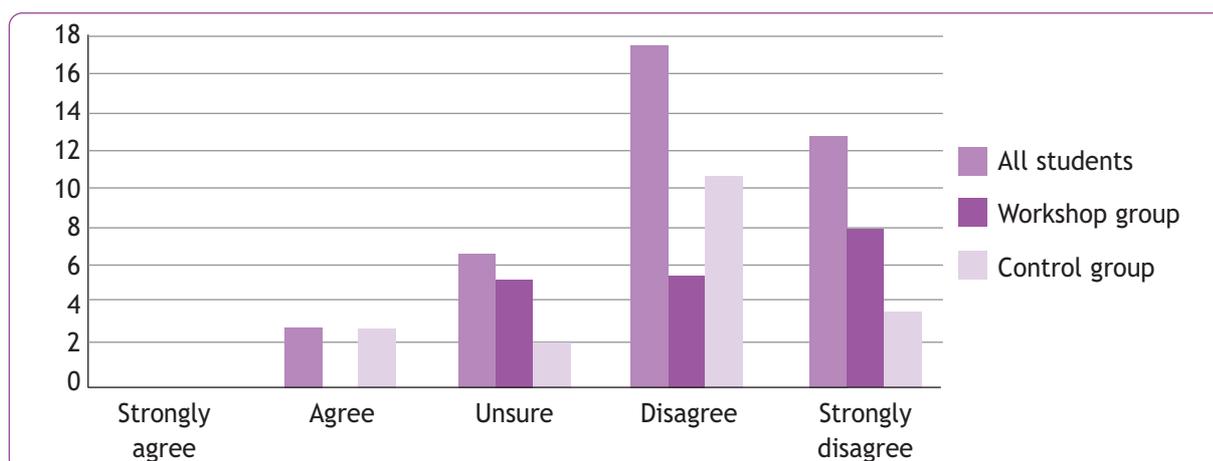


Figure 4: I would prefer not to teach RSE

The students who agreed that they would prefer not to teach RSE were all from the control group (Figure 4). One student, who had responded “unsure”, commented:

...I ticked unsure. I did so because I feel I have not received enough instruction on how to go about it. I certainly agree that it should be taught and is very important, but I feel I need more support...(CG 8).

Caution must be used when interpreting the findings as the sample was small, not randomised and not subject to statistical tests for associations; however, findings suggest that general attitudes towards RSE were positive among all students, but that students from the workshop group were more worried about the culture in the children’s home. Workshop participants were less likely to find it difficult to talk about RSE and more likely to disagree that they would prefer not to teach RSE.

According to the TPB, positive attitudes may positively influence the intention to act on a behaviour (teaching RSE), so it is encouraging that the students in this sample held mainly favourable attitudes towards the subject. The findings indicate that workshop participants were more comfortable talking about RSE and held a stronger preference for teaching RSE. While no statement can be made about correlation or causality, it is possible that participation in the workshop may have contributed to these perceptions in this sub-sample.

The respondents’ positive attitudes correspond to national attitudes, where 90% of a national sample agreed that young people should receive sex education in the school setting (Layte *et al.* 2006). The belief in the important role of parents in RSE in this sample is also reflected in research, where 80% of a national sample supported sex education in the home (*ibid*). However, while this is desired it is not a reality. The same national study reported that a majority of young people do not receive this: among 18-24 year olds only 21% of men and 38% of women reported having received parental sex education, compounded by the view that young people felt it was difficult to talk to their parents about sex when they were young (*ibid*). Again, teacher education providers cannot assume that RSE had been addressed in the home of pre-service teacher students. This has also implications for the future teachers who cannot assume that parents will share RSE with the school, and reinforces the importance of effective implementation of RSE in the school setting.

The findings relating to the role of guest speaker and the view that only teachers who are comfortable with RSE should teach it warrant some further attention. This concurs with current practice, as findings from previous studies indicate that external facilitation of RSE is common in schools (DES 2009). It may reflect the students’ own personal experiences. It may also reflect what young people prefer; the Dáil na nÓg report found that over 60% preferred external facilitators (Roe 2010). These views suggest that the role of the external facilitator, and best practice related to external facilitation (DES 2010) should be addressed in pre-service teacher education.

Self-rated confidence

Students were asked to rate their level of confidence in teaching RSE, and with the exception of one student (who rated this as unsure), those in the workshop rated this as “very good/good”, while only 57% in the control group did so (Figure 5).

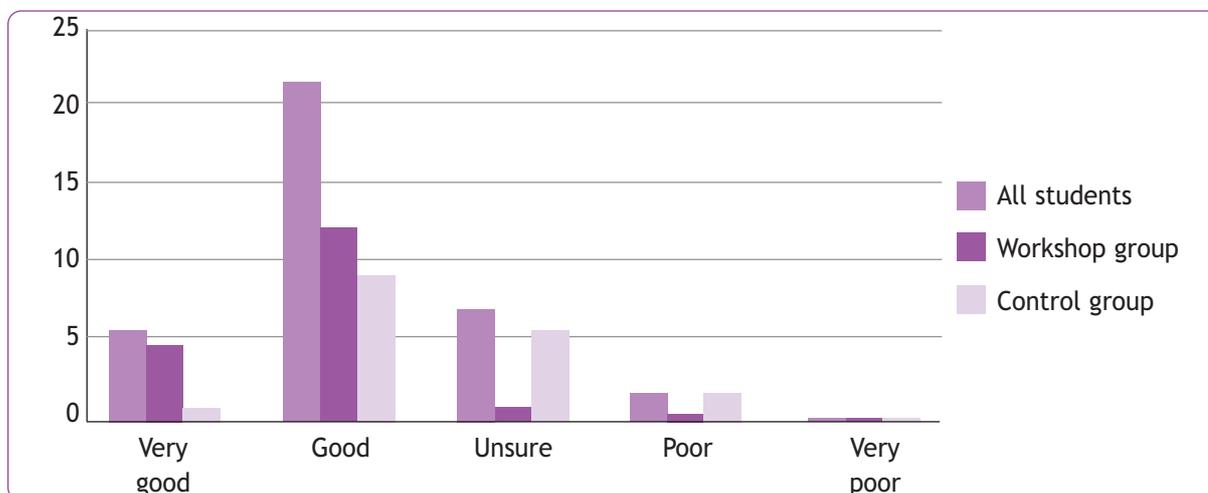


Figure 5: Self-rated confidence level in teaching RSE

The focus group participants agreed that their confidence had been enhanced:

I would feel confident enough doing it whereas before I don't think I would have considered it...it has definitely improved...knowledge and confidence...I think confidence is the biggest thing...it is a lot more approachable now...it's not this scary thing that you didn't really know how to go about it...it's a lot easier to approach (FG A)

One of the facilitators observed:

I also do that kind of work with 3rd Year B.Eds and I found it completely different with this group...they were comfortable with each other...with the material...I didn't notice any awkwardness...(FI B)

While conclusions about the effect of the workshop on confidence levels of the participants cannot be drawn, findings suggest that participation in the workshop may have contributed towards the positive findings in the workshop group compared to the control group, and this is encouraging. Lack of teacher confidence is an important barrier to effective implementation of RSE in schools (NCCA 2008, DES 2009), and is also linked to the intention to act on a behaviour in the TPB. It follows that the issue of confidence needs to be addressed in pre-service primary teacher education.

WHAT WORKED WELL?

Evaluation findings suggest that the participants perceived that the course had met with their expectations and that the learning outcomes had been met. Some of the supportive factors will be outlined in this section.

The teaching and learning methods, such as small group discussions and role play, were perceived as very useful. One focus group participant noted:

the group activities...for example the yes/no right/wrong exercise...we were just so comfortable in talking about things in the small groups...what I really liked was the way we did the questioning...we were in small groups of three and put questions on post-its...it put a bit of confidence in the person asking awkward questions... (FG C)

One of the tutors commented:

the difficult question exercise was a really good one because they got a sense that...oh yeah...I can deal with this...I have the confidence...I can respond to that... (FI A).

Students also recognised how the course had mirrored desired SPHE pedagogy, commenting on how they would use activities in their own teaching:

...there were a lot of good activities in all the sessions...(FG A).

A survey respondent stated:

the activities we took part in were excellent and I will use them in my future teaching... (WG 8).

The tutors, who were experienced RSE facilitators, were important as role models and sources of information. One student explained:

the sharing of experiences...the tutors told us about their experiences...made us understand it...it helped us in dealing with questions...(FG B).

A survey respondent stated:

it was fantastic to have three different speakers giving us different perspectives...(WG 5).

Focus group respondents stated:

We saw them being brilliant and confident in their teaching of RSE.. I had never seen how a teacher would go about it so from that point of view this was definitely of benefit.... (FG A).

When you see how comfortable they are... (FG C).

The small group size helped to provide an environment where they could "openly talk about things" (FG C).

One survey respondent stated: " the small number in the workshop was also really helpful..."(WG 8)

One tutor remarked that the workshop was "a good size, especially for the experiential work".(FI A)

The resource pack was viewed positively:

We got so many resources and they are of huge benefit...(FG B).

We got work sheets and information packs and we also got information on where to go...web sites and how to contact other organisations for more information.... (FG C).

WHAT COULD IMPROVE?

Recommendations from participants and tutors for future development of the course included condensing the content in the first two sessions to have a stronger focus on the teaching of RSE, dealing with difficult questions from the children, and dealing with parents. While the participants in the focus group agreed that the pace of delivery in the first two sessions could be faster, they did agree that the first two sessions were important. One participant stated:

the first two days I just thought it was a bit of a slow pace to it and we could have done more...but we did do some good activities... I remember feeling that we haven't got much out of it but I think...you could put more into it...we did some warm-up exercises which was good because we didn't know each other... (FG A)

Another student agreed:

the emphasis was more on getting to know each other and building trust and then content...but you could argue that the rest of the weeks would not have been as beneficial had it not been for that first session... (FG B)

The importance of the trust building sessions was noted by the tutors:

a safe environment for people to talk is very important...how can they speak if they haven't got the language...night one and two were hugely important... (FI C).

Limited resources led to the inequity that all students who applied to participate in the course were not able to attend. This is an important issue, and some students commented on this, recommending that the course should be available to all students, but kept optional rather than mandatory. Another suggestion was to include a male facilitator on the tutor team.

DEVELOPMENTS

With support from the Mary Immaculate Students Union the course was provided 2011 - 2013. The demand continued: in 2011 120 students applied for 20 places. To provide more places students were asked to contribute a nominal fee in 2012 and 2013, allowing two workshops to take place with 44 places being available. Demand continued strong, with 65 applicants in 2012 and 97 applicants in 2013. Content has been amended, with the first two sessions combined into one, and with the addition of one session with input from BeLonGTo (National Organization for Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and Transexual (LGBT) young people) on LGBT terminology and issues, homophobic bullying and resources for teachers. Course evaluations continue to confirm the pilot project findings around enhanced confidence.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The TPB proved useful as a theoretical framework for this study. While constructs were not measured in a quantitative manner to test the model, the design of the intervention aimed to influence TPB variables through the syllabus, and teaching and learning methods. The evaluation also examined aspects of the TBP, such as intention to teach RSE, attitudes towards RSE and confidence, an important element of perceived behavioural control.

SPHE educators cannot assume that B.Ed. students have themselves experienced RSE at primary and post-primary levels and therefore, may not have the required subject content knowledge to teach RSE effectively.

The evaluation found that the pilot workshop was received positively. In this sample of students, the course enhanced students' feelings of confidence in teaching RSE. Further research needs to be conducted with a larger sample, and also examining the long term impact of the extra training on professional practice in the context of wider influences on effective RSE implementation.

It is clear that teacher educators have an important role to play in influencing future implementation of RSE in primary schools by building pre-service teacher capacity. More space on the curriculum for SPHE generally, and RSE specifically, can positively influence students' beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and skills, strengthening their intention to teach RSE. All B.Ed. students now have more SPHE in their programme; however, this could be still viewed as limited given the breadth and complexity of issues in this curricular area. More time is still required, in particular for RSE. While other priorities would seem to have emerged since the introduction of RSE, it is important that the focus on this area is maintained. The SPHE Network has a strong role in this regard.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Funding for the pilot project was received from the Mary Immaculate College Research Office.

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The Role of SPHE in Promoting Democratic Practice in Schools

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INTRODUCTION

Surely it is an obligation of education in a democracy to empower the young to become members of the public, to participate, and play articulate roles in the public space

(Greene 1985, p.4).

If children are to become critically engaged, active citizens committed to democratic values and principles, it is imperative that they are provided with education in, for and through democracy during their years in primary and post-primary schooling. As key social and cultural institutions, schools have a significant role to play in fostering democratic values, modelling democratic practice and facilitating student voice, participation and empowerment. In the Irish context, the fostering and development of the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for democratic citizenship are explicitly provided for in the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum. In this regard, in the SPHE Curriculum, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (1999) states,

SPHE plays an important role in developing an understanding of the democratic way of life and individual and group rights and responsibilities. It provides opportunities for children to learn about, and actively participate in, the various communities to which they belong and to develop a sense of a shared commitment.

(p.3)

Democracy has links to all three stands of the SPHE Curriculum: "*Myself*", "*Myself and Others*" and "*Myself and the Wider World*" (NCCA 1999). It also has links to five of SPHE's strand units: "Self-Identity", "Making Decisions", "Relating to Others", "Developing Citizenship" and "National, European and Wider Communities". The SPHE Curriculum emphasises the need to "Develop further the ability [of the student] to express personal opinions, thoughts and ideas and listen to, respect, think about and comment critically and constructively on the views of others" (p.64). Similarly, it highlights the importance of engaging students in the democratic process, stating that students should be facilitated in "taking democratic decisions" and "working together for the common good." (p.65). The promotion of democratic values, skills, attitudes and behaviours is therefore an important component of the SPHE Curriculum.

Hodgkin (1998) shrewdly observes, "Democracy...is not something which is 'taught', it is something which is practised" (as cited in Rudduck and Flutter 2000, p.83). While essential, the fostering of democratic skills and values requires more than participating in thirty minute SPHE sessions each week. The structures and organisational practices of schools must be democratic and must provide authentic opportunities for students to live and practise democracy in their everyday school lives. In this context, this paper explores the meaning of democratic practice and its implications for school structures and practices. It presents the democratic approach of one urban, ethnically diverse, socio-economically disadvantaged Irish primary school (fictitiously named "Rushgreen") and demonstrates how Rushgreen has embedded democratic values and principles in its structures and organisational practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While the various sub-fields which nest under the umbrella of citizenship education (e.g. human rights education, global citizenship education, civic education) have diverse foci and goals, they share a common commitment to the promotion of democratic values, principles and behaviours (Howe and Covell 2005). They particularly emphasise the need to empower students to exercise their voices, to actively participate in society, to advocate for the rights of marginalised groups and to critique and challenge asymmetric power relations (Howe and Covell 2005; Dudley *et al.* 2006; Apple and Beane 2007). Apple and Beane (2007) provide a comprehensive delineation of the values and principles which underpin democratic practices in schools. These include,

- Concern for the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities.
- Concern for the welfare of others and "the common good."
- Faith in the individual and collective capacity of people to create possibilities for resolving problems.
- The open flow of ideas, regardless of their popularity, this enables people to be as fully informed as possible.
- The use of critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, problems, and policies.
- An understanding that democracy is not so much an "ideal" to be pursued as an "idealised" set of values that we must live and that must guide our life as a people.
- The organisation of social institutions to promote and extend the democratic way of life.

(p.7).

The above provides a very useful set of guiding principles for schools seeking to promote democratic practice. There are also issues which teachers can explore with students during SPHE classes. The following section addresses the relationship between children's rights, democratic practice and SPHE.

Children's Rights, Democratic Practice and SPHE

The facilitation and realisation of children's participation rights is an essential feature of democratic practice in schools. Authentic participation requires giving students the opportunity to exercise their voices about "real things", about the important issues which shape their everyday school lives (Holdsworth 2000, p.354). It involves listening carefully to what students have to say, involving them in the decision-making process and providing them with opportunities to exercise influence and shape action (Holdsworth 2000; Cook-Sather 2006). In this regard, Cook-Sather (2006) asserts,

Having a voice - having presence, power, and agency - within democratic, or at least voting contexts, means having the opportunity to speak one's mind, be heard and counted by others, and, perhaps, to have an influence on outcomes.

(p.252)

Children's position in society has been strengthened by the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) (United Nations 2013).¹ The Convention enhances the status of children as individuals by giving them the right to participate in society and to have their authentic voices heard (Morrow and Richards 1996). Article 12 is particularly significant. It provides both for the right of children to express their views on all matters concerning them and to have those views given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.

While the Convention is not explicitly mentioned in the SPHE Curriculum, it does reference children's rights and responsibilities, the need to facilitate student voice and multiple perspectives and the need for teachers to foster children's commitments to active and participative citizenship (NCCA 1999, pp.3-10). In particular, the SPHE Curriculum states that through SPHE, students should be enabled "to develop...a commitment to active and participative citizenship and an appreciation of the democratic way of life"

¹ Ireland signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 30 September 1990 and ratified it on 28 September 1992.

and to “become aware of some of the individual and community rights and responsibilities that come from living in a democracy” (pp.9-10). Moreover, research conducted by Waldron *et al.* (2011) into primary teachers’ understandings of, and perspectives on, human rights suggests that while the SPHE Curriculum only makes limited references to children’s rights and does not explicitly reference human rights instruments, SPHE is seen by primary teachers as offering an enabling and facilitatory environment for children’s rights. Therefore, while the SPHE Curriculum may not explicitly mention the specific human rights instruments which provide for students’ participation rights, its strand units and participative methodologies provide opportunities for students to realise their participation rights.

Bringing Democracy to life in Schools and in the Classroom

Writing in the context of human rights, diversity and citizenship education, Banks (2010) argues that schools must be conceptualised as interrelated holistic entities. In this context, schools seeking to promote democratic practice need to work towards democratising all aspects of school life, from school governance and policy development, to classroom pedagogical approaches and classroom management strategies to leadership models and interpersonal relationships (Apple and Beane 2007).

Regarding schools governance, a democratic approach requires models of leadership which involve dialogue and collaborative decision-making and includes all members of the school community (Apple and Beane 2007). In the classroom, it involves facilitating student voice by providing students with opportunities to share their views on important issues, involving students in collaborative planning and curricular negotiation and providing students with real choices and opportunities to vote on pertinent school and classroom issues (Kavanagh 2013). The Green School Committee and The Student Council are examples of wider democratic school structures which facilitate student voice and participation.² Previous Irish research demonstrates the popularity of Green School Committees in Irish primary schools (Waldron *et al.* 2011). Encouragingly, Waldron *et al.*’s (2011) research indicates that two-thirds of the surveyed schools (n=110) had democratic organisational structures in place such as Green School Committees.³

While both the Green School Committee and Student Council are important democratic structures which have the capacity to democratise teacher-student relations and to give students a meaningful role in the decision making processes, research suggests that they can often be teacher-centred and their processes tokenistic (Alderson 1999; Rudduck and Flutter 2000; MacBeath *et al.*, 2001; Wyness 2009). Authentic democratic practice requires student involvement in decisions which have a direct impact on their school lives, namely, decisions pertaining to the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment procedures (Alderson 1999; Apple and Beane 2007; Rudduck and Flutter 2000; MacBeath *et al.* 2001; Wyness 2009; Osler and Starkey 2010). The authenticity of democratic structures must be regularly critically reviewed. A failure to do so can result in such structures paradoxically undermining rather than supporting students’ participation rights.

In terms of pedagogical approaches, democratic education shares much in common with human rights education. Both approaches promote active, collaborative and dialogical pedagogical approaches. Democratic participatory approaches, including circle time, thinking time, co-operative group work, discussion, debates and drama activities are foregrounded. Such approaches engage students by drawing on their prior knowledge and personal experiences, facilitating co-operative learning and fostering critical thinking and critical reflection, dialogue and debate (Howe and Covell 2005). Within a curricular context, students are provided with access to a wide variety of information from a wide variety of sources so that they can explore issues from multiple perspectives and become “critical readers” of society who challenge the status quo (Apple and Beane 1999, p.15). Students are conceptualised as active co-constructors of knowledge rather than passive recipients of knowledge.

Recent years have experienced a shift in conceptualisations of democratic education. Understandings have extended from the promotion of a commitment to democratic values, principles and attitudes to the

² *The Green Team (student led) was established as part of an initiative called ‘The Green Schools Programme’ (known internationally as ‘Eco-Schools’). For more information see <http://www.greenschoolsireland.org/>).*

³ *Only nine percent of the surveyed schools had a student council structure in place (Waldron *et al.* 2011).*

need to empower students to exercise their voices, critically engage with and actively participate in democratic processes (Reich 2007). To be effective, democratic practice needs to permeate the whole school environment. Students need to experience the democratic process and its attendant practices in their everyday lives in schools (Apple and Beane 2007). However, research indicates the need to ensure that participation is authentic rather than tokenistic and that all students, not just the more vocal and confident, are provided with opportunities to exercise their voices and to play a meaningful role in the decision-making processes of the school (Silva 2001). SPHE can play a key role in fostering the values, skills, attitudes and behaviours necessary for active democratic citizenship. Embedding democratic principles, values and practices in all aspects of school life is not easy. However, as the following study attests, it is possible in schools and its benefits for both the school community and wider society are manifold.

THE STUDY

This paper presents Rushgreen's efforts to promote human rights-informed democratic practice, focusing particularly on its organisational structures and processes. It accords significant attention to the school's attempts to tackle power asymmetries and to democratise pedagogic and organisational relations.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative case study methodology grounded in critical ethnography (Anderson 1989). Reflecting this methodology, policy and practice at the case study school was examined by drawing on the qualitative methods of observation, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Following purposive sampling, five weeks were spent in the case study school, observing the whole school environments, shadowing and interviewing four mainstream teachers, interviewing the principal and support teachers and analysing the school's policy documents.

Analysis of Data

Data was analysed using the software package N-Vivo 9. Following three phases of coding and the construction of analytic memos, the study's empirical findings were integrated with concepts drawn from the field of human rights education (Osler and Starkey 1998 2005, 2010; Waldron and Ruane 2010; Howe and Covell 2005), democratic education (Apple and Beane 1999) and children's voice literature (Alderson 1999; Rudduck and Flutter 2000; MacBeath *et al.* 2001; Fielding 2001; Cook-Sather 2006; Whitty and Wisby 2007; Wyness 2009).

Profile of the School

While 89.6% of primary schools in the Republic of Ireland are under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Church, Rushgreen is under the patronage of Educate Together. Reflecting this, the school's ethos is underpinned by the liberal and democratic philosophy of the Educate Together movement. The four central principles which comprise the ethos of Educate Together are: multi-denominationalism; co-education; child-centred education; and democratic governorship (Educate Together 2004).

The school is located in a large residential area on the outskirts of a medium sized urban centre. There are approximately 300 students enrolled at the school, many of whom are multilingual. The school has 28 staff members including an administrative principal, 14 mainstream teachers and 13 support teachers.⁴ The school is a designated disadvantaged school and has DEIS Band One (Urban) status.⁵

⁴ The six teachers who participated in this study were assigned the following pseudonyms: Peter Smith, Karen Hume, Rebecca Byrne, Cathal Neary, Keith Browne and Therese Ryan.

⁵ DEIS is an acronym which stands for "Delivering Equality of Opportunities in School." The DEIS Programme is funded by the Department of Education and Skills (DES). For more information see <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools/>

TOWARDS A DEMOCRATISATION OF SCHOOL RELATIONS: LEADERSHIP FOR DEMOCRACY & HUMAN RIGHTS

Rushgreen's principal, Oliver Flynn, is a progressive educator whose rights-based and democratic approach to school leadership permeates all aspects of the school environment. According to Freire (1993), "Democracy demands structures that democratise" (as cited in Weiner 2003, p.93). In this regard, Oliver, with his teaching colleagues, has endeavoured to create a network of democratising structures. In this context, the following sections explore the impact of these structures on organisational and pedagogical relations in the school (Baker *et al.* 2009).

Hidden Curriculum: Tackling Asymmetric Power Relations: Principal-Teacher Relations

Oliver has endeavoured to adopt a non-hierarchical and egalitarian approach to school governance. Peter Smith states, "Oliver obviously is the principal but there's *no sense of hierarchy* [italics added]. *He's one of us* [italics added] and we all work together, so it's a team and he's part of that team" (Interview 2). Teachers can, and indeed, are encouraged to assume "provisional authority" irrespective of their rank or position (May 1994, p.98). Oliver states,

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

Depending on where their expertise and interests lie, individual staff members assume leadership roles in curricular initiatives and meetings such as the school's Thursday Policy Development Meetings; Class-band Planning Team Meetings and Curriculum Planning Team Meetings (Spillane and Diamond 2007).⁶ Critical reflection and critical analysis are central to all processes in the school.

Hidden Curriculum: Tackling Asymmetric Power Relations: Teacher-Student Relations

In an effort to democratise teacher-student relations, the school actively promotes a democratic interactive pedagogical approach (Osler and Starkey 1998, 2010; Apple and Beane 1999). Reflecting the CRC (1989), it also foregrounds participatory formal organisational structures such as The Student Council and The Green Team. Both processes seek to challenge and reconfigure traditional teacher-student power relations. In this context, the following section examines the school's efforts to promote a participatory democratic culture specifically through its pedagogic practice and through formal organisational structures such as the Student Council.

An Interactive Pedagogical Approach

Apple and Beane (1999) maintain that students can only truly learn about the democratic way of life by actively experiencing it in the classroom. Transmission and banking forms of pedagogy are strongly resisted in Rushgreen. Rather, as far as possible the teachers engage students in dialogue and active learning. The teachers in Rushgreen endeavour to work in partnership with the students and to draw on students' experiences as much as possible, as is illustrated by Cathal in the following quotation.

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

The manner in which teachers interact with students suggests a respect for students' rights and dignity (Howe and Covell 2005). A climate of trust and security exists in the school, where students have "the

⁶ The staff is divided into two policy development teams (A & B) and has policy development meetings on alternate Thursdays. Policies are collaboratively developed during these sessions.

power. . . to raise questions” (Giroux 2004, p.43) and staff members are encouraged to take risks and to experiment with new methodologies. In keeping with pedagogic best practice, a wide variety of interactive teaching methodologies are employed, including circle time, thinking time, play, co-operative group work, station teaching for literacy and numeracy, off-campus fieldwork, classroom visitors, blogging, story, poetry, debate, project work, cooperative games, digital learning and drama activities such as hot seating, freeze-framing, conscience alley, role play (Field Notes). Circle time in particular, provides an excellent forum for engaging in discussion of issues central to democracy, for example fairness, co-operation, sharing opinions, giving critical feedback, rights and responsibilities, critical reflection, working as a team, voting etc.

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

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

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

Such practice enables students to directly experience the democratic process in the classroom - a practice deemed essential by advocates of citizenship and democratic education (Apple and Beane 1999; Rudduck and Flutter 2000; Biesta and Lawy 2006).

Organisational Structures: The Student Council

Student Councils can provide students with the opportunity to exercise genuine authority by influencing the decisions that affect their lives (Alderson 1999; Rudduck and Flutter 2000; MacBeath *et al.* 2001; Fielding 2004; Wyness 2009). Rushgreen’s Student Council was established to promote student voice, to facilitate learning through democratic participation, to act as “a sounding board” on “smaller school initiatives” and to represent the school in certain out of school activities. A new Council is elected during Human Rights Month each October and meetings are attended by either the SPHE post-holder or another facilitating teacher. The Council is deemed to be a forum in which “children’s right to voice, opinion, freedom and experience of democracy” is realised (Student Council Statement). The school promotes a model of democracy premised on the first-past-the-post electoral system with quotas to ensure equal gender representation - the Council contains an equal number of male and female representatives from second to sixth classes. Once elected, members are provided with training in relation to the “functions” of the Council, including how to make representations on behalf of peers and how to conduct a meeting (Student Council Statement). Student Council meetings are accorded status in the school taking place during curriculum time, every two weeks.

The influence of Article 12 of the CRC on the school’s conceptualisation of student voice and participation is evident from the outset. Article 12 states that students have the right to “express. . . [their] views freely”. In Rushgreen, student voice is interpreted as students’ “right to say what they think” (SPHE Post-holder Action Plan). Classroom observations and observations of Student Council meetings indicate that freedom of expression is foregrounded in the school. Students are actively encouraged to voice their

opinions and views. Article 12 also states that students should be able to articulate their views “in all matters affecting them” [italics added]. The nature and authenticity of the Student Council’s involvement in “all matters” which affect the student body in Rushgreen is explored below.

Similar to other European countries, issues discussed at Student Council meetings in Rushgreen generally tend to be safe, comfort issues divorced from core educational priorities such as teaching, learning and assessment (Wyness 2009; Alderson 1999; Rudduck and Flutter, 2000; MacBeath *et al.* 2001). During data collection, issues discussed by the Council included students’ desire for a school swimming pool, a chocolate fountain, additional play time, a uniform day for teachers and the possibility of a “pet day” where all students could bring their pets to school (Student Council Meeting). When issues relating to teaching and learning were discussed, it was in the context of school events, for example, Féile na Gaeilge or Get Active Week and students’ views were sought on possible activities. Consequently, students acted as “sounding boards” and as de facto “data sources” (Fielding 2004; MacBeath *et al.* 2001). While it may not be intentional, this focus means that students’ influence is marginal with regards to the decisions that affect their lives.

Notwithstanding the shortcomings of aspects of the student council model promoted at Rushgreen, students are given the opportunity to experience the democratic process, to represent the interests of their peers, to engage in collective collaborative decision making and to voice their opinions.

CONCLUSION

Recent years have seen increased scholarship and research into how the structures and processes of schools can be made more democratic in order to enhance children’s voices and to realise their participation rights as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Practice at Rushgreen is a good example of how democratic practice can be mainstreamed as part of a whole school approach. It is imperative that as well as learning about democracy, students are provided with opportunities to experience democratic processes and methodologies in their everyday school lives and are given the opportunity to exercise their voices and to play a meaningful role in decision making processes in their schools. SPHE provides a space in which the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours associated with democracy are fostered and developed. It therefore plays a key role in helping students to develop the skills necessary to live as active, critically engaged, democratic citizens.

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Empowering Children Through Circle Time: What's Happening in the Classroom?

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INTRODUCTION

Circle time has been used in Irish primary schools for over twenty-five years since its introduction by the author Jenny Mosley, who has written extensively on the subject. It involves children sitting in a circle on an equal basis with their peers to interact, discuss and work on particular issues. It is particularly associated with the SPHE Curriculum (1999), and while it is a suitable method across all strands, evidence suggests that it is the strands of *Myself* and *Myself and others* that are most frequently implemented in SPHE at primary level (NCCA 2008; DES 2009). Despite a lukewarm endorsement by the Department of Education and Skills, (as evidenced in the SPHE Teacher Guidelines, 1999), its popularity has grown, with the NCCA (2008: 79) finding that 81% of teachers reported using it "frequently" or "sometimes". Its meteoric rise in popularity in the Irish primary school context warranted investigation, and I decided to undertake a small scale research project in classrooms where circle time was frequently used. This paper describes the research journey, highlighting key insights and particular challenges of the method and how it has evolved in the Irish context. A vision of how circle time might further evolve is presented which makes empowerment of children a real prospect in Irish primary classrooms and schools. A full description of the research described here can be accessed at <http://eprints.nuim.ie/3728/>.

REVIEWING THE CIRCLE TIME LITERATURE

Literature on circle time can be broadly divided into two categories: promotional literature which provides guidance on how to run circle times and outlines the benefits of the method (for example, Mosley 1996; 2006); and research literature which attempts to investigate its effects or benefits in a classroom or school context.

Circle Time Promotional Literature

I wanted to find out if the particular model that was introduced in the early 1990s (the Mosley Model) was still in use, and to identify if it had evolved in any way since then. Mosley's Model provides a linear structure as follows:

- Game/opening activity
- Rounds (where a speaking object is used to regulate contributions)
- Open Forum (where discussion or debate can occur)
- Celebration of success (where achievements are celebrated on an individual or group/class level)
- Closure/game

This simple structure is informed by ground rules (such as "no put-downs"; only the person with the speaking object can speak; you can pass if you don't wish to speak), and is underpinned by principles of equality of voice and participation and promotion of self-esteem. While the Mosley literature provides practical guidance on how to initiate and conduct circle times in the classroom, in common with much literature aimed at teachers, it is short on research evidence that circle time actually delivers on its promise of enhanced self-esteem, promotion of positive relationships and improved discipline. Its

theoretical base is also underdeveloped in the promotional literature, with little attention paid to either the effects of circle time on self-esteem or indeed the effects of positive self-esteem on the individual.

Research Literature on Circle Time

As it was the Mosley Model of circle time that was of interest in this research, research which was based on that Model was identified and analysed. Much of this research seeks to find out if circle time makes a difference to children's self-esteem (a key claim of the promotional literature), and the results are generally positive (Miller and Moran 2007; Kelly 1999). Teacher perception is often cited as a measure of success in the research (for example, Lown 2002). This is problematic as teacher judgement in this regard has been proven to be inaccurate in many instances (Miller *et al.* 2005).

Another cluster of research seeks to investigate the effects of circle time on social and educational skills with children who have special educational needs (Canney and Byrne 2006; Galbraith and Alexander 2005; Clancy 2002; Lee and Wright 2001). The results are generally positive in terms of improved social skills, reading scores and listening for children. However, teacher perception is relied on for assessment of gains in some instances, while the use of other interventions at the same time makes it difficult to say definitively that it was circle time that made the difference. When children are asked about circle time (Lown 2002; Clancy 2002), they are generally positive about it and enjoy the experience. In Clancy's work, the "novelty factor" is identified as significant for children (Clancy 2002: 112), while enjoyment and fun are mentioned by both teachers and pupils in Lown's (2002) work. This however should not be seen as evidence that children's self-esteem is enhanced or that they are learning more than they would in the usual classroom set-up.

In the circle time research literature surveyed there was little evidence of circle time being used to promote citizenship or democratic education. It appears that circle time is used mainly for personal or social skills development and that it is a "starting point" for the skills required to be a good citizen but does not "move beyond" this to embrace global issues (Holden 2003: 27).

Conceptual Framework

Empowerment was an underpinning concept in the research that was conducted. This is because circle time is widely presented as an empowering method, both in terms of giving children confidence, social skills and an equal forum in which to engage with peers, but also in relation to giving children an opportunity to exercise their voice. The focus on self-esteem building in circle time potentially allows children to feel valued, capable and worthy. Emotional intelligence was identified as another informing concept, as it appeared that many of the skills targeted in circle time fell within that field, particularly skills around dealing with emotions of self and others. Children's right to a voice is upheld in circle time through various techniques (such as use of a speaking object). Voice and participation theory were of interest for that reason. Circle time falls within a suite of active learning methods advocated in the Irish primary school curriculum, which prompted investigation of active learning theory. Finally, another key concept investigated in the research was circle time as a counselling forum, a criticism that has been raised by detractors of the method (Ecclestone and Hayes 2009; Furedi 2004). These concepts formed the lenses through which the practice of circle time was to be researched. The following diagram captures the relationship of the concepts as envisaged by me during the research:

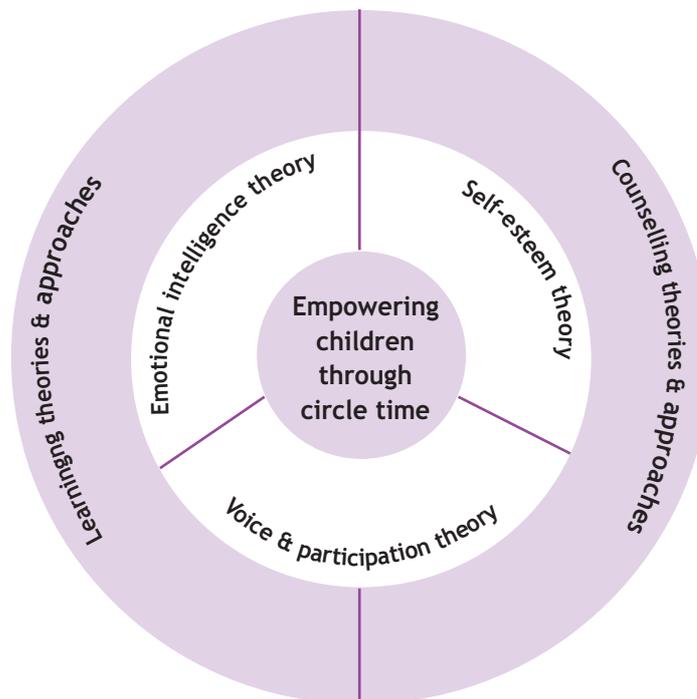


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

In researching the concepts, it became evident that they are not without their problems and challenges. Self-esteem building is seen as a universally “good thing” by many educators, and this is evident in the circle time promotional and research literature. Maslow, Rogers and Glasser (among others) are cited in the Mosley circle time promotional literature and emotional education, self-esteem and academic achievement are portrayed as “not only interlinked: they are indivisible” (Mosley 1998: 10). However, there are some detractors in the field, and the evidence is not clear cut in relation to the effects of high self-esteem on the individual (see, for example, Baumeister *et al.* 2005). Others suggest that the pursuit of self-esteem in the education context is a “fad” that has run its course (Craig 2007: 43).

Coinage of the term “emotional intelligence” is popularly credited to Daniel Goleman (1998), although there are some commentators who criticise his lack of a theoretical base for his assertions (Mayer *et al.* 2004; 2008; Gardner 1999). Gardner initially endorsed “the new construct” of emotional intelligence as an amalgamation of intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences (Gardner 1999: 41). However, he rowed back on this in later work and claimed they were “clearly different” (Gardner and Moran 2006). Mayer *et al.* (2004; 2008) provide a clearly delineated definition of the concept which is useful in the research outlined here:

The capacity to reason about emotions, and of emotions to enhance thinking. It includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth...

(Mayer *et al.* 2004: 197)

This definition ties in with the aims and content objectives of the Irish SPHE Curriculum (1999) and was therefore adopted in the research as an analytic heuristic for my research.

Giving children a voice in circle time is a key characteristic of the method. From a rights perspective, children’s right to have a voice and to participate in matters that affect them is enshrined in Article 12

of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). Lundy (2007) proposed that this right could be evaluated across four key criteria: space; voice; audience; and influence. While circle time has the potential to deliver on some of these criteria, the extent of its promotion of this particular right remains to be established.

Voice and participation are used interchangeably in some research literature, however in this research, a distinction was made between these concepts as it was felt that while children might not use their voice in every circle time (for a variety of reasons), this would not preclude their participation through, for example, games and other activities.

An important clarification of children's rights in relation to participation is contained in *Desk Review* (UNICEF 2009):

Most importantly, children and young people must be free to form their own opinions, decide whether or not to express them and decide whether or not to participate in activities or events. Their participation must be voluntary and they must feel free not to participate or to leave a project or activity at any time.

(*Desk Review*, UNICEF, March 2009)

While the choice of non-participation will be familiar to researchers as it is described here, it was not clear prior to the research how this might be honoured in circle time, apart from the inclusion of the pass rule. If the right to a voice is seen as one of a range of participation strategies, then circle time is less likely to lead to erosion of children's privacy as some have argued (Hanafin *et al.* 2009).

Circle time is located within a suite of active learning methods in the SPHE Curriculum (1999). Active learning theory was examined and the social constructivism theory of Vygotsky (1962) appeared to match most closely what might happen in circle time. This provides for children learning with adults or more able peers enabling movement to a higher level of mastery known as the zone of proximal development.

The extent to which circle time is a counselling forum (as characterised by some of its detractors) was also examined. This was an area in which I had a particular interest, arising from discussions and queries with practising teachers during in-career activities over a long number of years. The provision of "warm and non-judgemental settings in which to reflect and develop positive self-esteem" (Housego and Burns 1994: 26) is identified as emanating from the work of Karl Rogers, a prominent US counsellor and psychotherapist. He is included in a list of influential therapists and psychologists in Mosley's (1996) writings, along with Maslow and Glasser (among others). The psychological base of circle time inherent in the pursuit of self-esteem may incline teachers towards an informal counselling role in circle time. Because of the captive audience in any classroom setting, it was important to establish how teachers saw their role and how this played out in circle time sessions.

While circle time had the potential to deliver empowerment to children across the five key concepts outlined in Figure 1 above, it remained to be seen whether the reality in the classroom matched the promise.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design was chosen in order to get as close as possible to the practice of teachers in the primary school classroom. The main research questions were identified as follows:

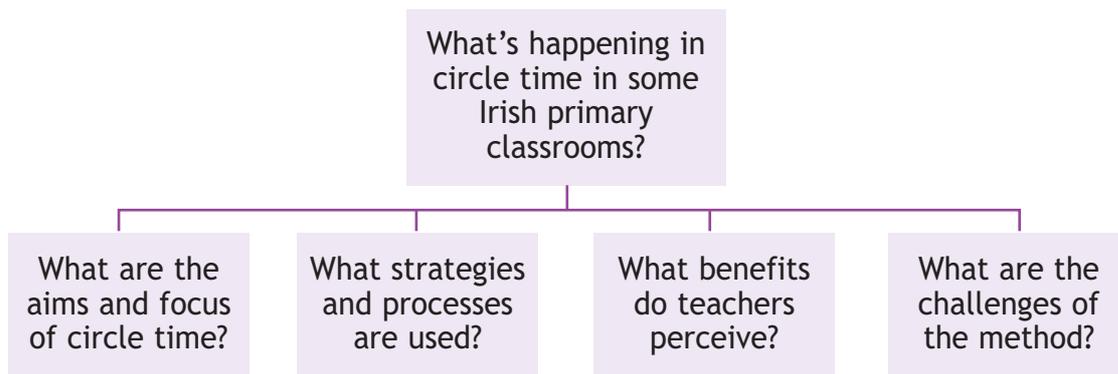


Figure 2: Research Questions

Key informants were identified as teachers who were using circle time in their classrooms on a regular (weekly or fortnightly) basis. A qualitative approach was adopted which allowed for close observation of a small number of primary school teachers in the classroom setting. The following Table summarises the research activity undertaken in the academic year 2010-2011:

Teachers using circle time (Pseudonyms)	School/ Organisation	Observations (30 - 50 mins each)	Journals	Interviews
Neasa (6th Class)	Rural mixed	3	3	2
Majella (3rd Class)	Urban mixed	3	3	2
Tomás (3rd Class)	Urban boys	3	3	2
Annette (6th Class)	Urban mixed	3	3	2
Sally (Senior Infants)	Urban mixed	3	3	2
Principals	In each school above		5 (one per principal)	
Jenny Mosley	Jenny Mosley Consultancies		2 (pre and post school fieldwork)	
Teachers not using circle time (Pseudonyms)				
Michael	Urban mixed		1	
Teresa	Urban boys		1	
Alan	Urban mixed		1	
Former Education Officer	NCCA		1	
Totals	15 observations	15 journals	21 interviews	

Table 1: Overview of Fieldwork

Using multiple tools (observations, journals and interviews) allowed for triangulation, thereby increasing validity and reliability of findings. Post-fieldwork interviews with the teachers provided an opportunity for testing of initial hypotheses. Interviews with teachers not using circle time was important for balance, as it was expected that those teachers using circle time would be generally positive about its effects. The interviews with the author Jenny Mosley allowed for discussion of the method and, in particular, its evolution from the introduction of circle time in Ireland in the early 1990s.

As well as the usual considerations of research in terms of reliability and validity, of paramount concern were the ethical issues of doing research in a classroom context where the focus was a forum that children might reasonably view as their space, and where they might feel more inclined to offer personal opinions and information. A rights-based approach was adopted (Bell 2008) which involved negotiating permission and consent not only with the adults in the research but also with the children in each class. Prior to the fieldwork, I outlined my plans to each class and invited them to participate if they chose, with the usual guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality. I also got written parental consent for each child. In some schools, this involved a deviation from school policy where parental permission was assumed unless there was an explicit instruction to the contrary, and where child consent was assumed on foot of parental consent.

In spite of the fact that there are many teachers who report using circle time (NCCA 2008), it proved difficult to find teachers willing to allow me into their classrooms to observe their practice. My role as a teacher educator may have had a bearing on this. An opportunistic sample emerged which luckily involved a range of classroom levels, school types and teacher experience. However they are not presented here as typical although no doubt they are likely to resemble similar classrooms, schools and teachers across the country.

The data gathered was inputted into a software programme called MaxQDA (2010) for ease of analysis after transcription and coding. This allowed for comparison across data sets. What emerged is an interesting insight into the practice of circle time in some Irish primary school classrooms.

Some of the limitations of the current research are; its small scale, the possibility that the schools and classrooms chosen are atypical, and the fact that my close association with circle time over a long number of years may have predisposed me towards a positive research outcome. These were all borne in mind in the research journey, and it is hoped that teachers will nonetheless relate to the findings and find resonances with their own practice.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN CIRCLE TIME?

While some of the findings concur with the promotional and research literature outlined earlier, it appears that there are significant differences in terms of how the practice has evolved in the Irish classroom context. The findings are presented here under the key research questions.

Aims

The aims identified by the observed teachers are similar to those in the Mosley Model which relate to enhancing self-esteem, self-discipline and positive relationships. There is a difference in emphasis, with the observed teachers focusing on personal and social skills development more than self-esteem. The way they develop these skills is through solving problems or dealing with issues that have arisen in the classroom or yard through a fictional lens. A journal entry of Neasa (a 6th Class teacher) illustrates her aim in one particular session:

How different situations make us feel - how you would react to various scenarios - the right and wrong way to react to various situations and scenarios.

Giving children an equal voice is a key aim among all interviewees (not just the observed teachers), however in the circle this relates more to the development of communication and problem-solving skills than an attempt to establish in-class or in-school democratic structures or skills. Some of the observed teachers identify the promotion of a positive classroom atmosphere as an aim.

Processes and Strategies

The format and strategies used by teachers in circle time are similar to those in the Mosley Model of circle time as outlined earlier. However, some of the rules that are in use in the circle times observed diverge from the Model, particularly in relation to a rule relating to confidentiality (which Mosley did not endorse in an interview with me), and an ambivalence on the part of some teachers about the pass rule. The following quote from Tomás (in 3rd Class) gives a sense of this:

Circle time for others maybe it's ok to pass, and maybe sometimes it is ok to pass if there is something they can't really think about or whatever, but as a rule I try to omit that rule, that other people may enforce, and I say c'mon, think of something...because it does encourage them to get out of their 'I can't think of anything'
...

The use of a fictional lens rather than the individual problem-solving modelled in the Mosley Model (see Mosley 1999) indicates another divergence. Resources used included books, DVDs and sample scenarios (devised by the teacher) to initiate discussion on a particular problem which might be about bullying, exclusion or other personal issues. The role adopted by teachers in the circle is facilitative, and, in this research, falls short of a counselling role in a number of respects, particularly in relation to lack of evidence of a focus on individual problem-solving.

Benefits

Teachers identify key benefits relating to enjoyment, safety and ease of communication as a result of circle time. As Tomás wrote in his journal: "I really enjoyed this week's lesson, they seemed to enjoy it too". A sense of safety was encapsulated in the following quote from Neasa (a 6th Class teacher):

...you could get a real opinion from them because they have that sense of security that we're in circle time now, we're not allowed to get in trouble...

Sitting in a circle formation allows for ease of communication among children, and between teacher and children in a way that is not generally possible in a busy classroom routine. As perceived by the observed teachers, these benefits in turn foster positive relationships in the classroom among the children, and between the teacher and children.

Challenges

There are challenges for the teachers in conducting circle times, including the usual behaviour management issues and those that are particular to the method. The latter include inappropriate or controversial contributions from children, and the potential exposure of both children and teachers in the circle. Majella (3rd Class) was unnerved in one session by a comment made by a child in her class who wanted to "shoot Nazis":

I felt I couldn't give out to him and turn around in the next circle time and expect the child to open up again.
I thought it was more about speaking to him about what's appropriate and what's not.

This exemplifies the tension that can exist for teachers who are trying to promote an esteeming and open space while at the same time negotiate on moral issues. These challenges do not deter the observed teachers from continuing circle time with the children, even when they find it difficult to quantify the gains made as a result of the practice.

DISCUSSION

The observed teachers appeared to be more interested in developing children's skills in key areas rather than their self-esteem, suggesting that a shift in aims towards building emotional intelligence in circle

time has taken place. This may be a wise move, given the ambiguity around self-esteem enhancement evident in some literature surveyed (for example MacLellan 2005). It also allows teachers to focus on skills that they deem important in the classroom management context, while allowing children to develop self-regulation skills and empathy.

While equality of children's voice was seen as a focus of circle time, using that voice to explore democratic and rights-based education as outlined in the *Myself and the Wider World* strand of the SPHE Curriculum (DES, 1999) was a minority focus, which is in line with findings of the NCCA (2008) and DES (2009). Promoting children's voice outside the classroom context to develop citizenship skills would be a move towards empowerment of children in a wider world context.

Evolution does not necessarily always move in a positive direction, and some of the practices that were evident in the observed circles were unhelpful in relation to children's privacy and right of non-participation. Equality of voice does not mean that children must use their voice when invited, and erosion of the pass rule is a significant incursion into children's right to choose in this regard. In addition, I argue that there is little to be gained and more to be lost from a confidentiality rule in circle time, particularly in terms of its impact on extending children's sphere of influence outside the classroom context. While those who are concerned about privacy in schools might argue the opposite case (Hanafin *et al.* 2009), I believe that upholding the pass rule would be more beneficial for children's privacy than a confidentiality rule. The children's right not to participate is undermined if teachers insist on oral contributions in circle time. Pressure is likely to encourage superficial and copycat responses in any case. A revisiting of basic principles in this regard would be helpful.

Based on my own experience in in-career education with teachers, the challenges that arose in circle time during the observations were typical of the kinds of challenges that emerge from time to time in circle time. Circle time could be an ideal forum for moral development of children which may necessitate challenging children's opinions and assumptions. This should be done with respect and care for the dignity of the child and their family. Proposed changes in patronage of schools in Ireland may facilitate the evolution of circle time as a space where children can discuss moral issues.

CONCLUSION

The benefits of circle time need to be weighed against the cost in terms of teacher and children's time at a moment in education when value for money and attainment in key skills such as numeracy and literacy are a national focus. While more could be done in making the learning in circle time explicit and focused, some of the benefits of circle time may be in the intangible range. The fact that teachers using the method are committed to it suggests that they see benefits (such as fun, enjoyment, and positive atmosphere) which are not readily quantifiable but valued by practitioners in the field. It may be that the case for circle time needs to include a clearer articulation of its contribution to national educational goals (such as numeracy and literacy) in order to maintain and develop its place in Irish primary classrooms.

The position of circle time as a dominant and popular method in Irish primary classrooms, if harnessed, could be a powerful force for change. The suggestions proposed in this paper would build on what is good in the existing practice, and could enhance the empowerment potential of circle time for children on a personal, social and wider world level.

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Developing SPHE Lessons for the Interactive Whiteboard: Challenges and Opportunities

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INTRODUCTION

This paper outlines the progress of a lesson development project undertaken in 2011-2012 by Educate Together in cooperation with Plan Ireland. The aim was to produce a series of lessons for use within the Irish Primary Curriculum, around the themes of Poverty, Migration and Gender Equality, using ICT and Interactive Whiteboard (IWB) technologies as teaching media. Learnings from the lesson development process was presented to conference delegates at the SPHE Network conference, in a workshop format. During the workshop, delegates had an opportunity to engage in a practical way with some of the challenges and decisions encountered during the development of the lessons for IWB use. The project was funded by Irish Aid and jointly implemented by Educate Together and Plan Ireland. The lessons were developed in conjunction with primary school teachers from Educate Together primary schools, where they were also piloted before final editing. Some of the lessons were aimed at the 1st-2nd class cohort while the other lessons were aimed for use with 5th-6th classes.

The project ran over seven months and included lesson development, piloting and final editing. During the process a number of challenges emerged which can inform future projects, in relation to lesson development, technological application and overall project design. The project also highlighted potential for the use of new technologies in the design and delivery of SPHE themes at primary level. The lessons were linked to the SPHE strands *Myself*, *Myself and Others* and *Myself and the Wider World* as well as curriculum strands in English, History, Geography, and 'Learn Together', the ethical education curriculum in Educate Together schools. This paper explores how the project developed and the challenges and opportunities it encountered in the process.

THE CONTEXT

As stated on their website, for Educate Together schools "ETHICAL EDUCATION FOCUSES ON QUESTIONS OF EQUALITY, JUSTICE, SUSTAINABILITY AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP. IT HELPS LEARNERS TO DEVELOP SPIRITUALLY AND TO THINK CRITICALLY, AND EMPOWERS THEM TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE" (EDUCATE TOGETHER [ONLINE] 2004). For the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) development education is "an educational process aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of the rapidly changing, interdependent and unequal world in which we live..." (IDEA nd). Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the themes which can emerge in the context of meeting these educational objectives through the SPHE curriculum, it is important for teachers to understand the complexities of engaging students around these issues. Not only are the topics of social justice and equality potentially challenging and sensitive for students, but teachers may also experience dissonance between their own perspectives or experiences and those of their students. This adds further complexity to decisions about resource selection as well as to the learning experiences during such lessons (Allen 1997). Bigelow *et al.* (2001) provide guidance on key aspects of effectively teaching equality and social justice themes, including; encouraging critical questioning, maintaining a multi-cultural and anti-bias approach with cultural sensitivity, and offering opportunities for participatory and experiential learning, while remaining grounded in the lives of the students and maintaining academic rigour.

As Irish teachers experience unprecedented changes in the range of diverse academic abilities, ethnic and religious backgrounds, countries of origin and educational and personal challenges, represented in their classrooms, the need for accessible and innovative teaching support tools continues to grow. In many schools the interactive whiteboard (IWB) offers potential which is not always exploited and this lesson plan project sought to combine IWB technology with established criteria for effective teaching of development education themes.

THE PROJECT

The brief for the lesson plan project was to develop innovative, interactive whiteboard-based lessons for the Irish primary curriculum around the development education themes of Poverty, Migration and Gender Equality, to link with the Millennium Development Goals¹. These goals were developed at the 2000 Millennium Summit, and are specific world targets to address extreme poverty in all its forms while promoting gender equality, education and environmental sustainability. They are time bound to be completed by 2015.

The general lesson themes included Gender Equality for both 1st/2nd and 5th/6th classes, a set of lessons on Poverty for 1st/2nd classes and a set on Migration for 5th/6th classes. Each lesson set would include five lessons of thirty minutes duration, which could stand alone or be linked to each other as part of a lesson scheme. All lessons were expected to include some additional lesson extension activities and have multiple cross-curricular links to subjects including SPHE, Ethical Education, English, Geography and/or History.

Lessons were to be easy to use and easy to modify for teachers. They were to be stereotype free, have significant interactive technology elements, be differentiated to meet the needs of all student abilities, be culturally sensitive, original and relate directly to the Irish primary school curriculum. All materials required for each lesson were to be included with the lesson plans to maximise ease of use for teachers. Lessons were to be available in an easily adaptable format which could be used across the multiple IWB applications in use in schools.

METHODOLOGY

Four teachers were recruited by Educate Together for the project. They worked in pairs to develop two sets of lessons per team. Following a half day briefing where logistics, timelines, lesson formats and main themes were outlined, the teachers were to develop their lesson sets, engage with their team partner for feedback, and complete final lesson plans for submission. They worked remotely over the summer school break and were expected to complete the process over three days within a three week period.

Once completed, the lessons were piloted by eight teachers in five Educate Together primary schools between September and November 2012. Each lesson set was tested by two teachers who provided written evaluation and feedback. Four classes who had piloted the lessons were visited and an in-class evaluation of the project was conducted. Students provided verbal feedback on their experiences and written evaluations in the form of questionnaires (5th/6th classes) or in art/poster format (1st/2nd classes). In addition to submitting written feedback, the four teachers visited were interviewed for detailed feedback on the lesson plans. Parents were invited to participate in the evaluation and feedback process via Survey Monkey and by a written questionnaire sent home for completion.

¹ Information on the Millennium Development Goals can be found on the United Nations website or at <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals/index.htm>

Each teacher created a short video on the lesson set they had developed and tested, providing guidance and suggestions for teachers on how to work with the lessons. Following the piloting and feedback process the final lessons were edited and uploaded, along with the teacher tutorials, and are available through both the *Educate Together*² and *Plan*³ websites.

CHALLENGES

Lesson Development

During lesson development, issues emerged relating to the appropriate presentation of development education themes, such as managing stereotypes and balancing the inclusion of local/global aspects of the concepts used. These are consistent with points made by Allen (1997) and Bigelow *et al.* (2001) about some of the key elements in developing classroom resources on such sensitive themes. The UNESCO (1999) report on ICT use in education highlighted concerns about 'cultural imperialism', or the promotion of a single, Western, world view through the use of existing internet resources in the development of ICT-based classroom resources. This report concluded that ICT tools themselves are neutral but their impact depends on the choices teachers make about how to use such resources (UNESCO 1999). This was reflected in challenges which arose in the selection of sensitive and appropriate audio and visual resources, to meet the criteria set for the project. It exposed the need for skills not only in the area of primary teaching, but also in the areas of development education and equality, to ensure the effective and sensitive development of lessons with such themes for the modern Irish multi-cultural classroom, where students may have first-hand experience of the issues presented and the specific global examples used.

For example, one of the migration lessons features the experiences of children and adults as a result of the widespread practice of children remaining in Moldova while their parents go abroad to find work. The lesson plan includes an emotional audio-visual resource depicting this experience. In one of the classes piloting this lesson, a child in the class had only recently arrived in Ireland from Moldova to follow a parent who had moved to Ireland to find work, when the child was a toddler. The importance of teachers knowing their class well before engaging in these lessons was starkly highlighted in this case, as was the issue of parental involvement when addressing such sensitive issues.

In another class children reported memories of sisters being removed from school to care for younger siblings or to go to work. These direct personal reports had the potential to be painful or reinforce stereotypes, but as with some children in another class, who reported memories of fathers and brothers using scythes to cut crops or of mothers and sisters carrying heavy buckets of clean water over long distances, the children became class celebrities as a result of their experiences.

Bigelow *et al.* (2001, p. x) suggest that classroom teaching of equality and social justice themes should be "hopeful, kind and visionary...to make children feel significant and cared about" in their learning. Creation of a safe and respectful classroom environment in which learning from such direct experiences can take place, around often negatively stereotyped images, does not happen accidentally or quickly. In the piloting schools these scenarios were managed effectively by the teachers and accepted by supportive classmates. The teachers interviewed attributed this to a strong culture of respect, dignity and acceptance as well as the regular practice of activities such as 'Circle Time' and open discussion of respecting feelings and differences. These practices are part of the implementation of the Learn Together, ethical education curriculum, in many Educate Together schools.

The piloting of the lessons exposed the need for teachers to understand the potential wider and deeper consequences of using the lesson tools and how such classroom discussions are managed. To develop the

² *Educate Together* teacher resources are available by registering on their moodle site at: <http://learning.educatetogether.ie/> and clicking on the Equality and Justice section.

³ *Plan* teacher resources are available at: <https://plan.ie/what-we-do/dev-ed/school-resources/primary-school-teachers-learning-centre/?searchterm=teacher%20resources>

skills for managing these issues in the modern classroom it may be worth exploring the value of continued professional development in this regard.

Piloting also identified that some of the lessons were either too complex or too simplistic for the intended age cohort. Final editing incorporated greater differentiation and extension activities to address this. The diversity of individual classroom settings and teaching approaches, encountered during piloting, reinforced awareness of the challenges for teachers in using off-the-shelf lesson plans, and the need to consider these variations when designing lessons and schemes for general use.

Technological Issues

The positive academic impact of effective ICT use in classrooms, with students of mixed ability and various special needs, has been noted by Lewin *et al.* (2008). They point to the improved motivation and engagement of children when they can actively participate in lessons using the IWB. Dialogue, or what Bakhtin (1981) calls 'shared inquiry', is central to the exploration and learning around these sensitive themes. Ensuring the effective use of the ICT and IWB tools, to facilitate such engagement and dialogue, is an important part of lesson development and planning (Hennessy 2011).

ICT proficiency levels within the project team presented early and on-going challenges on two fronts. It identified the need to adapt the project expectations to match the ability of the team, most importantly because it was recognised that the team reflected the proficiency levels of teachers in general. This is consistent with research showing that while teachers find IWBs useful they often lack the knowledge to use the tools adequately or to best effect (Korkmaz and Cakil 2013). While the project was initially intended to be highly interactive and use innovative technology, it became apparent that expectations for the extent of the ICT/IWB elements of the lessons should be scaled back. This was necessary to ensure ease of use for teachers with limited confidence using the technology, or for those using technologically simpler systems without an interactive functionality.

Secondly, it emerged early during the lesson development stage that no single IWB program could be used to facilitate universal transfer of the lessons to all IWB systems. Direct inquiries by the author to several schools and two whiteboard suppliers identified a wide variety of whiteboard systems in use across the Irish school system. The lessons were therefore produced using PowerPoint as the most easily used option for all systems. The interactive aspects of the final lesson sets are varied but all lessons contain at least a PowerPoint element to them, with some lessons including more interactive components than others.

Project Design

Working independently and remotely offered flexibility to the team, to work on the project as it suited their style and schedule. In the post-project analysis it was suggested that joint working group sessions might have facilitated greater collaboration and exchange of ideas, offered opportunity for feedback and guided re-direction where relevant. The teachers, while competent and creative in the design of the lessons and tools, identified that a greater opportunity to discuss potential lesson ideas, resources and formats earlier in the process, might also have facilitated greater clarity and direction for them while designing the lessons to meet the multi-faceted brief.

As with many funded projects there was limited flexibility to fund additional lesson development time or to extend deadlines. Equally typical of such projects, all involved invested considerable extra time on a voluntary basis to complete the lesson plans. Upon reflection, the expectation of the number of lessons to be produced by the project may have been over-ambitious. The teachers were however unanimously committed to the idea of a five lesson/one week series per theme and engaged fully in their completion despite the extra time involved. In planning or comparing similar projects it will be relevant to consider that the final twenty lessons therefore reflect this additional time spent.

OPPORTUNITIES

As a result of the engagement of a qualified multi-disciplinary team, a wide range of lesson ideas were generated. This afforded an opportunity to incorporate a variety of ideas as extension activities, complementary cross-curricular ideas or alternative projects. The result is a lesson series rich in ideas, projects and resources which could be applied to the intended age cohort or modified to suit older or younger students as required. The variety of resources in the final lessons, offer teachers the opportunity to explore a theme in a single thirty minute lesson or over an entire term, as suits their scheme of work.

The challenges identified during this project also present opportunities for lesson plan development which is responsive and sensitive to the needs of both teachers and students. Clearly the current thrust is in the direction of greater use of ICT in the classroom, however, effective use of such resources will depend on how they are developed and supported. Teachers require appropriate support and on-going training in order to engage comfortably with this medium, not only on a technical functional level but also on a pedagogical level. To ascertain the relevance and appropriateness of ICT based lessons and tools for their own classroom and students is one decision facing teachers. Another is having the proficiency to be able to adapt such resources to meet their needs so that teachers can choose how to use the tools not just whether to use them.

The lessons in this project focused on challenging and sensitive issues. Inclusion of photographic, audio and video resources in lessons must allow teachers to select what aspects they will use and offer them alternatives. Ensuring that such resources are bias and stereotype free, age appropriate and culturally sensitive is essential. For those designing such lessons these are issues requiring a significant investment of time, in order to consider their impact. More importantly this presents an opportunity to develop genuinely sensitive and inclusive lessons for use within our culturally, ethnically, socially and religiously diverse classrooms. To use such resources to their greatest effect teachers may also benefit from continued professional development support focussed on the selection, development and use of relevant content and tools for ICT based SPHE lessons around sensitive themes.

During piloting, a challenge was noted for students with limited English language proficiency to participate easily and engage in the lessons. Likewise where children were removed from the class for resource support during the presentation of all or part of these lessons, an opportunity was missed for them to engage with these important topics and to contribute their perspectives to the class discussion. While the withdrawal model of resource support provision is changing, future projects in this area might consider ways to engage the resource support system to facilitate such engagement by students, rather than reinforcing their exclusion from discussion of these themes. Use of ICT teaching resources provides an opportunity for materials used in the lesson to be revisited where this would be helpful for a student. There is also a potential for resource teachers to participate in supporting the lesson by identifying elements and tools they can use in their individual or group sessions. This finding suggests a significant opportunity to explore the value placed on the importance of these themes for all students, how the input by all students is valued in class engagement with the topics and the issue of the inclusion of students receiving resource support in mainstream class topics.

CONCLUSION

Feedback from teachers, parents and students in both age cohorts was emphatically and unanimously positive. While one parent reported discomfort that the topic of poverty was being addressed with their young child, they also acknowledged its importance and the need for it to be addressed. A number of parents also reported engaging their children further at home around the issues discussed in the lessons, such as gender equality, and welcoming the opportunity to initiate conversation on these themes as a

follow-up to the classroom activities. The children reported learning and could identify how the themes directly impacted them as well as developing an understanding of the impact on others and, especially for the older cohort, on the wider world. The interactive nature of the lessons provided an opportunity for positive, transformative learning around sensitive and challenging topics showing that this is possible in diverse classrooms, when lessons are sensitively and carefully designed and delivered.

For some teachers and students full engagement with ICT resources comes almost naturally while for others it presents a host of challenges. Regardless of the level of comfort or proficiency teachers have with this medium, it looks like it is not only here to stay but is likely to continue contributing to the transformation of the classroom and learning. The pace at which technological developments are proceeding suggests that benefits can be realised from enhancing the skills of teachers, and developing frameworks for how such resources should be designed and used to support the Irish primary school curriculum.

ICT based resources have the potential to expand and explore topics in multi-dimensional ways whether cross-curricular, inter-cultural, multi-sensory, cross-ability or a combination of all of these. This medium also has powerful potential to either challenge and change or to reinforce perceptions and learning. While these lessons were innovative when developed in 2012, such is the pace of change that many of the IWB/ICT features used may already be standard practice or seem somewhat basic in today's classroom. It would be easy to become immersed in the pace of technological change. This project demonstrated however, that in addition to focussing on the technical aspect of developing ICT-based lessons, it is also essential to ensure that new lesson development, especially around sensitive topics and themes, has a clear focus on being bias-free, stereotype sensitive and inclusive. Going forward, provision of support to teachers in this regard, as well as ensuring adequate resource allocation, will be central to harnessing the opportunities offered by new technologies for teachers and students alike.

The observations and conclusions drawn in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of Educate Together or Plan Ireland.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Sincere thanks and acknowledgement are due to the teachers who designed the lessons; David O'Neill, Ross Ó Corráin, Diana Mc Cormick and Emer Bryden; to Susanne Bosch-Thomas who assisted with editing; to Marguerite Gallagher from Plan Ireland and Fionnula Ward from Educate Together for their administrative support; to the teachers and students who piloted the lesson; and to all who provided feedback during the process.

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Social-Emotional and Personal Influences: The Role of Self-Regulation in School Achievement

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INTRODUCTION

The focus of the work presented here is on the relationship between social/emotional/personal attributes and school achievement, with an emphasis on how these influences are mediated through self-regulation. The point of departure is the theme of the conference and specifically the paper by O'Sullivan (this volume), who argues that SPHE can be an agent of transformation at both the level of the individual and society. The guiding principle running through her chapter is that SPHE can profoundly impact decision-making, problem-solving as well as resilience and, indeed, school achievement. While the specific argument in the present chapter focuses on the relationship between social-emotional development and self-regulation on school achievement, the context of the argument is around the potential of SPHE.

Following a preliminary overview, we consider these main areas; (i) the effects of personality factors on school success, (ii) the impact of social-emotional learning programmes (SEL) on achievement and (iii) how self-regulation influences school achievement. Finally, conceptual challenges are examined along with the implications of the research for curricular changes, as well as how we think about individual differences in human ability.

It has been known for some considerable time that social/anti-social behaviour is indeed related to school achievement. A stark indication of this relationship is found in the prison literacy study (Morgan and Kett 2002), which showed that up to 40% of people serving prison sentences, had virtually no literacy skills. The problem here is to pin down the causal direction: Did the low literacy skills contribute to the anti-social behaviour that eventually resulted in a prison sentence or was it the case that problem behaviour resulted in alienation from school with a lack of engagement, that resulted in a failure to acquire basic skills like literacy? Similar problems of interpretation arise in the work of Wentzel (1991) who reviewed a body of evidence on the presumed effects of social responsibility on academic achievement and while noting the important associations, the direction of the effect was problematic. For these reasons, particular attention is given here to the causal effects of social-emotional factors on school success/failure.

TRADITIONAL PERSONALITY FACTORS AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS

A recent review by Borghans *et al.* (2012) concludes that various aspects of personal and emotional make-up are important in predicting outcomes in life and that these features of social and emotional make-up predict educational achievement as much as cognitive skills, as measured by IQ tests. That review of the evidence led to the conclusion that features of personality predict educational attainment as much as cognitive skills (measured by IQ tests) but that personality factors are more important in the prediction of several other important outcomes, including success at work and health-related behaviours.

Of the various personality factors, *conscientiousness* (the tendency to be organized and hardworking) emerges as the most important dimension in predicting educational outcomes. This is hardly surprising

given the importance of organization and persistence in the variety of tasks that are central to educational success. It is especially noteworthy that conscientiousness is a better predictor of educational achievement than IQ and that similar outcomes emerge when other outcomes are considered like labour market success and grades in school (Borghans *et al.* 2012). As noted above, the fact that personality factors predict educational achievement does not necessarily indicate a causal relationship. However, it is interesting that other features of personality are also related to educational success. Particularly important is *emotional stability* which has been shown in numerous studies to be quite strongly related to educational outcomes.

What is especially relevant and underlined by Borghans *et al.* (2012) is that many non-cognitive aspects of personal make-up are malleable and more easily modified than IQ. Several of the most successful early childhood programmes show how personal make-up can be changed in ways that produce beneficial long-term outcomes. Perhaps the most striking example is the Perry Preschool programme which taught children social skills in a sequence involving planning a task, carrying it through and then reviewing it with teachers and fellow students. What was impressive was that while the programme did not improve IQ scores, there were profound effects on interpersonal skills (Heckman 2008). This was especially the case in relation to externalising behaviours in school (levels of truancy and defiant behaviour). Even stronger illustrations of the same point are evident in the next set of studies considered below.

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) devised a framework of person-centered key social emotional learning (SEL) competencies. The competencies which have been identified as inherently linked to improved academic performance and success in school include:

- Self-awareness - identifying and recognizing emotions, accurate self perception, and recognizing strengths
- Social awareness - perspective taking, empathy and respect for others
- Responsible decision making - problem identification and situational analysis, problem solving and personal responsibility
- Self-management - impulse control and stress management; self-motivation and discipline
- Relationship management - communication, social engagement and building relationships

There is evidence that the development of these skills can help children and young people to feel motivated to succeed and to set clear and important academic goals, as well as to organize themselves to achieve these goals and to overcome obstacles. SEL involves the integration of two related strands to promote successful school performance and youth development: (i) skills development and (ii) supportive environments. First, through evidence-based classroom programmes, social and emotional skills are explicitly taught, practiced and applied to diverse situations so that students internalise them as part of their repertoire of behaviours. The second component is the development and maintenance of a safe, supportive learning environment where children feel cared for and respected, and adults model and provide opportunities for them to practice and apply SEL skills both in class and throughout the school. There is evidence that high performance expectations, classroom structures and rules, commitment to the academic success of all students, and openness to parental and community-involvement are all necessary for the successful creation of a supportive learning environment (Greenberg *et al.* 2003).

A meta-analysis of 213 evaluations by Durlak *et al.* (2011) showed that compared to controls, students in the interventions demonstrated substantially higher SEL skills, attitudes and positive social behaviours and also showed lower conduct problems and lower levels of emotional distress. However, it is more significant from the present perspective that academic performance was also improved as a result of the SEL interventions. In fact the impact was as great as might be expected if academic skills rather than SEL were

the target of the programmes. It should be acknowledged that not all studies collected information on achievement; still the studies in which this information was available relate to over 135,000 students.

There are at least three important features pertaining to the effects of SEL on academic performance. In the review by Durlak *et al.* (2011) 33 studies collected follow-up data at least six months after the intervention ended. It emerged that not only were there substantial effects on social behaviour and emotional distress and other features of social-emotional development but also that there were major long-term effects on academic performance. A second important feature was concerned with whether the intervention was carried out by the regular classroom teacher or by non-school personnel. While it was not possible to identify the personnel involved in all cases, the strong indications were that the classroom teacher was more effective in terms of both social and academic outcomes than was the case with non-school personnel. Both of these findings are extremely important since they show that long-term effects on academic achievement can be expected from SEL programmes, especially when these are delivered by the class teacher.

Thirdly, the CASEL review also underlines the moderating effects of aspects of the programme implementation. It emerged that it was crucial to have a sequenced and coordinated set of activities in the programme; as well as active (rather than passive) forms of learning. Furthermore, the meta-analysis demonstrated the need for a component specifically devoted to developing social and personal skills and that the skills targeted should relate to SEL rather than positive behaviour in general. These implementation features were especially important in moderating the outcomes; where there was adherence to these dimensions the outcomes were much more successful than when this was not the case. There is one further aspect of the impact of SEL programmes on achievement which is worthy of mention viz., the moderating influence of successful implementation. The review by Durlak *et al.* (2011) showed that programmes that encountered difficulties of implementation did not bring about effects as strong and persistent as those which did not have issues of implementation. Among the main factors contributing to problems of implementation were failures to conduct some parts of the programme or when unexpected external events prevented the execution of the programmes as planned. It is interesting that failures of implementation are especially important in lessening the effectiveness of many educational reforms particularly those in traditional curricular areas like mathematics (Spillane *et al.* 2002).

Recent findings indicate that successful SEL programmes enhance not only children's social and academic progress but also bring about improvement in teachers' job satisfaction and resilience. A Canadian study showed that teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of social-emotional learning in their schools not only enhanced classroom climate but also had positive effects on their own stress levels, as well as increasing teaching efficacy, and job satisfaction (Collie *et al.* 2012) Thus, the potential of SEL is relevant not only to students but also to teachers' well-being.

SELF-REGULATION AND SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT

Self-regulation refers to goal-directed control of cognitions, emotions and behaviour and has been shown to be important in several domains including school achievement. As Zimmerman (2008) points out, unlike measures of mental ability/academic performance, self-regulation refers to the **self-directive process** that students use to acquire academic skills, such as setting goals, selecting and deploying strategies, as well as self-monitoring their effectiveness. In other words, rather than focusing on the cognitive process of learning, self-regulation is concerned with contextual procedures like planning, organizing and evaluating learning but importantly the direction of these processes is in the control of the learner. Self-regulation applications are relevant for school, higher education, adult education and for the prevention of cognitive decline associated with ageing.

The very substantial body of research on the acquisition of self-regulatory skills in childhood is matched by a comparable body of work demonstrating how self-regulation can enhance commitment to school and school completion. In a study of Irish secondary school students, Freeney and O'Connell (2010) found that, even when cognitive ability and socio-economic deprivation were taken into account, a student's ability to defer gratification, to wait longer for an improved reward (an important aspect of self-regulation) was a significant predictor of academic attainment. A later study by the same researchers showed that this capacity was a significant predictor of intention to remain in school (Freeney and O'Connell 2012). The implication is that individuals who fail to defer gratification also fail to recognise the benefits of persisting with education, instead opting for a quick fix, low paid employment. Another illustration of the potential of self-regulation comes from a study by Morgan (1985) who found that Irish third level students trained to monitor their learning in study outperformed a control group in final examinations.

Of the various areas of research demonstrating the value of self-regulation in school achievement, one of the most important is based on findings on the impact of undercontrolled and rebellious behaviour on performance in school. A classroom study by Lopes *et al.* (2012) is directly relevant to the general issue of the capacity to manage emotions. Their study, involving two high schools and a University, examined indicators of adaptation to school, based on teachers' ratings as well as school records. The results indicated that the ability to manage emotions, as measured in a situational judgment test and indicators of adaptation to school, were significantly related even when controlling for socio-demographic factors as well as tests of cognitive ability. They concluded that the skills to manage and regulate emotions account for a major part of school adaptation above and beyond the variables normally considered most important like IQ and background variables. A recent study by Duckworth *et al.* (2012) was concerned with the ways in which self-regulation interacts with measures of intelligence and achievement. They proposed that standardized achievement test scores assess competencies that are determined more by intelligence than by self-control, whereas report card grades assess competencies determined more by self-control than by intelligence. In two longitudinal studies of middle school students, they found that IQ predicted improvement in standardized test scores while self control predicted report card improvements.

There is also substantial literature on self-regulation in learning and students' learning in private study. The Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI) instrument involves 80 items designed to measure students' strategies for effective study and consists of 10 scales that assess skills and self-regulation strategies as well as scales to measure skills like Concentration, Selecting Main Ideas, and Information Processing. Nist *et al.* (1990) investigated the LASSI scales in measuring college students' acquisition of study skills, following a study skills course and also the extent to which they were predictive of academic achievement. Following the course, students did indeed improve in their self-regulation strategies and for a group of regularly admitted students, the LASSI scores were predictive of grade-point average. Also relevant are measures of self-regulation in study through interviews. One approach is the Self-Regulated Learning Interview Scale (SRLIS) devised by Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986). This involved presenting students with six problem contexts to which they are asked to respond, such as writing an essay. The answers to these open-ended questions are transcribed and coded into 14 self-regulatory categories that include self-evaluation reactions, goal setting and planning as well as organizing and seeking information. In a study of the validity of the SRLIS, high-achieving students displayed significantly greater use of various categories of self-regulated learning. Even when controlling for gender and social background, self-regulated learning measures proved to be the best predictor of standardized achievement test scores.

One of the most promising lines of research regarding self-regulation is based on the finding that children's self-regulation skills, especially their meta-cognitive capacity, can be improved (Diamond 2013). Particularly convincing evidence has been found for computerized training and for curricular programmes like the Chicago School Readiness Project (Raver *et al.* 2011). This latter study targeted disadvantaged children's readiness for school through training in self-regulation. Their findings in a randomized control

study indicated that the children's meta-cognitive skills improved substantially as a result of training as well as their attention and impulse control but there was also an improvement in their academic skills, including letter naming and math skills. This study also suggests that the improvement in self-regulation was the mediating factor in enhanced academic readiness. Diamond's (2013) review of self-regulation interventions suggests a number of positive outcomes, particularly for children who lag behind in self-regulation including disadvantaged children. There is also substantial evidence that it is better to embed self-regulation training in a variety of activities in school if positive results are to be found as opposed to training in skills in isolation from subject matter.

The latter point is extremely important since the case for including self-regulation in the experiences of children and indeed of learners in secondary and higher education, is quite strong. The least desirable option is to have an additional 'subject' or 'programme' in an overcrowded curriculum. One possibility is to integrate the teaching and learning of self-regulation skills into routine classroom teaching. The case was made recently by Jones and Bouffard (2012) for the teaching and reinforcement of self-regulation skills to be an integral part of the daily interactions and practices with students and thus changing school culture.

CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGES

While the research reviewed above signals promise for the future of personal-social-emotional influences on achievement, there are other studies that indicate limitations and challenges. A major question concerns the extent to which the various influences 'hang together'. The view advocated here is that the various factors operate through self-regulation, implying that the various features of self-regulation are integral to the learning process. However, this view is not without difficulties. There is some troubling empirical evidence that this is sometimes not the case. A meta-analysis by Sitzmann and Ely (2011) of adult learning in the education and training context found that goal level, persistence, effort, and self-efficacy were the self-regulation constructs with the strongest effects on learning and accounted for 17% of the variance in learning, after controlling for cognitive ability. However, other self-regulatory processes including planning, monitoring, and emotion control, did not exhibit significant relationships with learning.

Even more challenging is a recent major review of self-regulated learning by Bjork, Dunlosky and Kornell (2013), which recognizes that self-initiated and self-managed learning has promise, but draws attention to a body of evidence indicating that people often have faulty mental models of how they learn and remember. For example, several studies have found that most students (in higher education) believed that re-reading was a better strategy than self-testing - a belief that is quite inaccurate. The indications are that, in general, students manage their learning poorly. For example, a study by Dunlosky and Ariel (2011) found that students read through assigned pages without having any plan of attack that might guide their studying. These are critical findings since they indicate that we know little about how self-regulation operates to improve school achievement and by implication we have a very imperfect understanding of how social and emotional influences can exert influences as powerful as those sketched here.

On the other hand, the consistency of the results regarding the benefits of approaches based on self-regulation cannot easily be discounted. Furthermore, there is now evidence that self-regulation may be an important factor in promoting motivation and resilience of teachers. A recent study by Jennings *et al.* (2013) examined the effects of the 'Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education' (CARE) on a sample of 50 teachers. The CARE programme is based on the principles of mindfulness and is designed to reduce stress and improve well-being. The results indicated a significant improvement in self-regulation skills underlying the capacity to cope with stress and burn-out as well as improvement in teacher self-efficacy.

Furthermore, a study by Clarke (2011) demonstrated enhanced emotional well-being in Irish primary school children following an intervention devised in Australia (Zippy's Friends).

An important question for this research area is whether there is an association between the self-regulation competencies of students and teachers and the parallel finding regarding the effect of the teacher-student relationship (TSR) on achievement. There is now substantial evidence that liking for school and teachers has an impact on academic performance beyond other potentially confounding factors like social background. Roorda *et al.* (2011) used a meta-analytic approach to explore the association between affective dimensions of TSR and student engagement and achievement in almost 100 studies with students from preschool to high school, involving over 130,000 students. The results of the analysis led the authors to conclude that the TSR had a strong beneficial effect on engagement with school and also had a positive impact on achievement. It was especially interesting that the effect sizes were somewhat higher in the case of older students and were significantly higher for secondary school as opposed to primary school students. It was also of interest that the effect of the relationship was relatively stronger in the case of students with learning difficulties. The authors suggest that part of the reason for these findings may be that having a conflictual relationship with their teacher may add to the existing load for students which in turn results in a decline in engagement and in subsequent achievement. An important question is whether a set of self-regulation skills might be identified for teachers and students which would enhance the TSR relationship.

IMPLICATIONS

As the rate of technological and cultural change continues to accelerate, the need for constantly modifying learning experiences gains momentum. The consensus on the 'overcrowded' curriculum suggests the need for a different way of thinking about new learning experiences. A strong case can be made for a focus on broadly-based competencies at the interface of social-emotional and cognitive domains. Recently the NCCA invited responses from the education partners on curriculum priorities for primary education (Fitzpatrick *et al.* in press). The priorities for primary education that were identified across these 960 responses included life-skills; communication; well-being and engagement; and students' sense of identity and belonging. What is especially striking is that curriculum areas and 'subjects' were not at all prominent in the responses. Many of the priorities are either social-emotional in nature or at the interface of the social-emotional with cognitive features.

Findings regarding the interaction of self-regulation and psychometric measures of ability (IQ) can be expected to be especially influential. The work of Sternberg is especially relevant with regard to what he identifies as 'successful' intelligence (Grigorenko *et al.* 2009; Sternberg 1999). Sternberg's views extend the concept of self-regulation to the context in which people work and study and his arguments pertain to career planning and life-skills. His argument is that successful intelligence is the use of an integrated set of abilities needed to attain success in life, however an individual defines it, within his or her socio-cultural context. Specifically, people are successfully intelligent by recognising their strengths and making the most of them and at the same time being aware of their weaknesses and finding ways to correct or compensate for them.

An emphasis on self-regulation could be especially influential at all levels including higher education. In particular, if the content of courses is less important than the capacity to acquire new competencies, then the introduction of a self-regulation approach offers a valuable avenue for promoting self-direction and motivation. In this regard, the statement of the aims of Dublin City University is especially significant, since it places particular emphasis on the interaction of self-regulation and cognitive/educational development. In listing aptitudes and proficiencies, it proposes that:

Students will be encouraged to self-appraise and to recognize both the possibilities and the boundaries of their knowledge and capabilities. They will take responsibility for their personal development and seek expert advice, where appropriate to their decisions and actions

(Dublin City University 2011).

Given the evidence on the faulty processes that frequently lead to mismanagement of students' own learning and the evidence on the potential of self-regulation, this emphasis seems worthy of serious attention.

CONCLUSIONS

A number of conclusions are warranted on the basis of the evidence considered here. Firstly, social-emotion-personal development is important not only for its own sake but also for its contribution to success in school. Whether this dimension is more important for academic success than cognitive capacity (like IQ) is debatable. What is clear is that social skills and competencies are not a luxury but form part of the disposition to learn. It is especially striking that interventions to improve social and personal skills have been quite successful and have outlasted effects on cognitive measures. These results have particularly important implications for future curricular developments. Given the experience of curriculum overload and the demand for programmes to address the ever-increasing demands on schools, it would seem appropriate to look at the potential of social-personal factors to address such requirements. The potential of self-regulatory skills in 'learning to learn' is especially promising.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to acknowledge the contribution of Aleisha Clarke, Zita Lysaght and Yseult Freeney for their cooperation on related work and the positive comments of a referee on an earlier draft.

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Supporting Pupils with Emotional and/or Behavioural Difficulties: Educational Structures and Pupil Trajectories

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INTRODUCTION

Two recent publications, one commissioned by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and undertaken by Cooper and Jacobs (2011), the second, a policy paper by the NCSE (2012), provide timely and comprehensive analysis and review of the education of children and young people with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties (EBD) in the Republic of Ireland. Against this background, this paper is written with a dual intention. First, it aims to map the typical trajectories of young people with EBD as they navigate the primary and post-primary education systems, with reference to the nature and extent of supports provided by the education sectors. Second, it seeks to highlight the implications for teachers of key policy documents that guide schools' responses to pupils presenting with EBD, guidelines that, for all intents and purposes, exist in parallel with the SPHE curriculum, which, in turn, makes no specific reference to the issue of EBD.

For the purposes of this paper, the definition of EBD currently employed by the NCSE in its implementation of Department of Education and Skills (DES) policy, particularly when determining resource allocation for pupils within this category of Special Education Needs (SEN) is assumed.¹ It is acknowledged that DES policy (as detailed in Special Education Circular 02/05 and as further developed in *Special Educational Needs, A Continuum of Support: Guidelines for Teachers* (2007) encourages schools to use their existing internal resources to assess and intervene with pupils exhibiting EBD. Seeking psychological assessments and/or referrals to support services, such as the National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS) is only recommended when internal strategies have been exhausted and/or proven ineffective. Consequently, some schools routinely cater for pupils who are not recognized officially by the DES as having EBD, although they exhibit behaviours that cannot be managed effectively in accordance with agreed discipline codes.

THE ORGANISATION AND NATURE OF SCHOOL SUPPORTS FOR PUPILS WITH EBD

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) policy regarding the education of pupils with SEN is underpinned by a commitment to inclusion through a continuum of support to schools and families. It is informed by legislation, notably the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland [GoI], 2004) in tandem with a broader legislative framework including inter alia the Education Act (1998), the Education (Welfare) Act (2000), the Equal Status Act (2000-2004) and the Disability Act (2005), under the overall umbrella of the Constitution, as well as various international agreements and human rights provisions (NCSE, 2006b; 2012).

¹ Such pupils are those who are:

...being treated by a psychiatrist or psychologist for such conditions as neurosis, childhood psychosis, hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and conduct disorders that are significantly impairing their socialisation and/or learning in school (This category is not intended to include pupils whose conduct or behavioural difficulties can be dealt with in accordance with agreed procedures on discipline).

Such pupils in this category may need resource teaching support. Care support from a special needs assistant may be required where a pupil's behaviour is a danger to himself or others or where it seriously interferes with the learning opportunities of other pupils. In certain circumstances, some pupils may require both supports (DES, 2005, SP ED 01/05: 18, emphases as in original document).

The Continuum of Support

The 'continuum of support' denotes a graduated, incremental, problem-solving model of assessment and interventions provided in response to the continuum of special needs that present in schools and the range of interventions and supports that developed over time in response to the specific difficulties presented by pupil cohorts (DES, 2007b; 2007c). As outlined by the NCSE (2006b; 2012), and as recorded in Table 1, this continuum spans a range of options at primary and post-primary levels, from full-time enrolment and inclusion in a mainstream class in a mainstream school, to dual enrolment shared between a mainstream school and special school/class, to full-time enrolment in a special school. This reflects the Council's view that while some SEN "...are common to all students", other categories of SEN, such as specific learning disabilities, are group-specific, while yet others "...are unique to individual students and can only be dealt with in a highly individualized way" (NCSE, 2006b: 40).

Table 1: Principal models of educational provision in Ireland for pupils with EBD

School Type (as Designated by the DES)	Enrolment and Pupil Age Profile	Pupil-Teacher Ratio/Average Class Sizes	Internal School Supports
Mainstream primary and post-primary schools	Cater for pupils from the local catchment area in the age range 4 - 12 years (Primary) and 12 - 18 (Post-primary)	Standard Pupil-Teacher (P/T) ratio supplemented by a number of permanent teachers provided under the General Allocation Model (at primary level only) in order to support the integration of pupils with high incidence SEN. Average Class Sizes: 24:1 at primary level (16.4:1 when additional teaching hours are included); 18 at post-primary level Note: Ratios represent optimal figures available	General Allocation Model (at primary level only) - Learning Support and/or Resource Hours for pupils with High Incidence SEN; additional hours for pupils with Low Incidence SEN, with/without Special Needs Assistants (SNA) Post-Primary Supports for pupils with SEN include Resource teaching, SNAs, Equipment grants, assistive technology and transport. Number of additional teaching hours per week at primary and post-primary levels: EBD = 3.5 hours SEBD = 5 hours
Mainstream primary and post-primary schools with Special Class(es)	Established in consultation with DES/NCSE; ratios and cohorts reflect nature of SEN and specific school needs	P-T ratios in special classes are determined by the nature of the SEN being catered for	As above with additional supports as per SEN categorisation
Mainstream school with designated disadvantaged status	Generally, as above; may offer Early Start	Primary level: DEIS 20:1 (Junior Classes) 24:1 (Senior Classes)	As above with additional supports under DEIS - social inclusion programmes
Special Schools which cater for other categories of SEN but whose pupils present with co-morbid conditions including EBD/SEBD	Almost all cater for pupils with SEN aged 4-18	Significantly lower P-T ratios as determined by the nature of SEN. Ratio depends on specified category of SEN. Average ratio = 7:1	Class ratio and SEN deployment depends on specified category of SEN. Typically special schools have the support of a range of professionals from statutory and voluntary agencies.
Special School for EBD and/or SEBD	Caters for pupils from an unspecified, catchment area in the age range 4 - 18 years	Ratios are determined by the nature of SEN: EBD = 8:1 SEBD = 6:1	As immediately above: EBD = 4:1 SEBD = 1:1

Note: Table 1 above presents a distillation of data from a variety of sources (DEIS, 2005; INCA; Parliamentary Debates, 2008; Smyth and McCoy, 2009), because it was not possible to obtain the data, particularly quantitative data, from one source. Moreover, the pupil-teacher ratio figures should be read with caution because different sources provided conflicting data. Ratios in relation to specified categories of SEN obtained from the *NCSE Implementation Report Plan* (2006b; 2012) and the *Report of the Role of Special Schools and Classes* (2009), commissioned by the NCSE may be taken to be reliable.

In interpreting the data in Table 1, a number of points should be borne in mind:

School Designation and Pupil-Teacher Ratios

First, schools in Ireland are designated disadvantaged (Band 1, 2 or 3) according to criteria such as the number of pupils attending the school whose families are resident in local authority housing or non-permanent accommodation, hold medical cards, and are in receipt of unemployment benefit or assistance under schemes administered by the Department of Social Welfare. Such a designation attracts increased resources from the DES, both in terms of reduced pupil-teacher ratios and in terms of the allocation of permanent teachers under the General Allocation Model (GAM) - the principal mechanism by which schools are supported to include pupils with high incidence SEN. For a comprehensive review of the GAM and recent changes introduced on foot of DES circulars 0007/2012 (primary level) and 0010/2012 (post-primary level), the reader is referred to the NCSE (2012).

Regarding pupil-teacher ratios, the DEIS report (DES, 2005) indicated that maximum class sizes should be 20:1 in all junior classes (junior infants through 2nd class) and 24:1 in all senior classes (3rd class through 6th class) for each of the 150 urban/town primary schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage. In addition, schools included in the Breaking the Cycle and Giving Children an Even Break schemes were to retain their reduced class sizes of 15:1 in junior classes and 27:1 in senior classes, and 20:1 in junior classes and 27:1 in senior classes, respectively.

SCHOOL RESOURCE ALLOCATION

As outlined in Circular 02/2005 (DES, 2005), the general allocation of teaching resources empowers schools to provide additional teaching support to pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs arising from high incidence disabilities without the requirement of making applications on behalf of individual pupils. Under the GAM, pupils performing poorly in reading and/or mathematics with/or special educational needs arising from a specific learning disability or a mild general learning disability have an automatic entitlement to additional teaching and support. In addition, although EBD and Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) are categorized as low incidence disabilities under DES policy, "...pupils with mild social or emotional difficulties and pupils with mild co-ordination or attention control difficulties associated with identified conditions such as dyspraxia, ADD, ADHD..." (DES, 2005: 3) may also be resourced under the GAM (see Table 2).

As structured, in accordance with the GAM, additional permanent teaching posts are provided on the basis of (a) school size, i.e., enrolment; (b) pupil gender, (e.g., boys' schools with 135 pupils or more get their first post at 135 pupils, whereas girls' schools with 195 pupils or more get their first post at 195 pupils) and, (c) school type (e.g., for a designated disadvantaged school with 60 eligible pupils, the general allocation is 0.8 of a post; for a boys' school with 215 pupils the general allocation is 1.5 posts...) (DES, 2005).

SCHOOLING OPTIONS

Pupils with SEN may be enrolled in mainstream primary or post-primary schools, either in special classes or in mainstream classes with the support of resource teachers. Alternatively, such pupils may attend special schools, which are designated as primary schools even though they frequently enrol pupils from 4 to 18 years inclusive. Given the wide spread in levels of functioning and potential, including multiple disabilities, with which pupils with SEN may present, generally, classes in special schools cater for a considerably wider age range than that which is found in many mainstream classes with only the larger schools being in a position to organize classes in accordance with age as typically happens in mainstream schools. In addition, special schools work closely with personnel from statutory and voluntary agencies

including psychologists, speech and language therapists, nurses, occupational therapists and physiotherapists.

Classes in special schools have a maximum pupil-teacher ratio of 8:1 (in many cases the ratio is lower depending on the categorisation of SEN). Special needs assistant support is provided where required. Pupils may transfer from special schools to special classes attached to mainstream primary schools or to mainstream classes. Pupils need a review assessment before transferring. The reviews are necessary so that the resource teaching and/or special needs assistants can be provided. As reported (NCSE, 2012), eight schools currently provide special classes for pupils with emotional and/or behavioural disorders. It is likely, however, that there are pupils with SEN in almost every mainstream school in the country and that it is possible that there is more than one special class in a school, due to some schools catering for either a high number of pupils with similar SEN and/or different categories of SEN (Ware *et al.* 2009). Of the 119 special schools currently in Ireland catering for approximately 6,676 pupils with disabilities, 12 cater specifically for approximately 5.1% of pupils with EBD. Of these 12 schools, one caters for pupils with mild EBD; the remainder for pupils with severe EBD (NCSE, 2012).

Significantly, although nominally catering for a particular category of SEN, the pupil profile of special schools is changing. Consequently, while some special schools consciously opt to make additional provision for young people in other disability groups, in general, special schools cater for a range of co-morbid conditions, including EBD, irrespective of their stated designation. Indeed, authors of the *Report of the Role of Special Schools and Classes* (2009) found that special schools with a designated responsibility for pupils with mild and/or moderate general learning disabilities serve a very diverse population of pupils that includes pupils with EBD and/or SEBD. That is, their pupils present with multiple disabilities, by which is meant that, having been assessed, these pupils "...meet the criteria for two or more low incidence disabilities" (NCSE, 2009: 61). EBD/SEBD are two of a possible eleven low incidence disabilities (which includes the category multiple disabilities) recognized by the DES and the NCSE for the purposes of SEN resource allocation.

RESOURCES FOR SEN

Additional resources are provided to support the attendance and inclusion of pupils with SEN in schools. These supports range from increased capitation grants and transport facilities to special equipment and reasonable accommodations for those sitting State Examinations, such as the Leaving Certificate. However, the core element of support comes in the form of additional teaching by learning support and/or resource teachers with/without the aid of Special Needs Assistants (SNA). Such additional teaching takes many forms including in-class teaching, withdrawal to work in small groups and/or one-to-one withdrawal for intense instruction. The role of the SNA, in each case, is one of a strictly non-teaching nature. SNAs are assigned to schools on foot of an application to a local Special Educational Needs Organizer (SENO). The SENO weighs the evidence provided in a report by a professional who has identified the nature and extent of the pupil's core needs - in light of the school's existing SNA allocation - to determine if additional support is warranted.

It is noteworthy that a pupil who has been receiving special education resources or support in primary school is eligible for continued support at secondary level so long as they continue to have a special educational need. The method by which teaching resources are allocated in mainstream post-primary schools differs from that in primary schools as the GAM does not apply to second level schools. While the allocation of resource hours for pupils with low incidence disabilities is the same as that in primary schools, additional special educational supports require a professional assessment, carried out by one of the listed professionals as set out in DES policies, to identify the particular category of disability as determined by DES criteria. If resource teaching hours are granted, allocation may consist of part-time resource teacher hours, whole-time teacher equivalents and/or teacher posts.

TYPICAL SCHOOL TRAJECTORIES OF PUPILS WITH EBD

Recent years have seen the establishment of a range of support services (for example, the National Educational Psychological Service [NEPS], the National Education Welfare Board [NEWB], the National Behaviour Support Service [NBSS] and the Special Education Support Service [SESS]), together with the publication of various guidelines and reports by these agencies (see entries for each agency in the Reference list), aimed at empowering schools to develop their internal capacity to prevent and - as required - respond effectively to challenges that inevitably present. One of the most fundamental and, frequently, time-consuming and difficult issues schools have to deal with is pupil behaviour.

Table 2 presents a model of the various stages - from prevention to assessment and intervention to suspension/expulsion and/or possible referral - through which a school is likely to progress when supporting pupils with EBD. As such, this model attempts to map the typical trajectories of pupils who exhibit varying degrees of EBD, thereby recognizing that SEN operates on a continuum from mild to severe and from transient to long-term. Table 2 seeks to highlight some of the key supports available to schools from the education sector, in particular, the nature of this support and how/when it is most relevant with reference to the legislative bases that inform the guidelines and the order in which various guidelines might be used by schools.

Table 2: A model of the structure of school organization and supports for pupils with EBD

Continuum of Support - Spanning Prevention through a School-Based, Staged Approach			
Preliminary Stage	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Broad-based Legislative Framework (From Education, Health, Justice and Law Reform, chiefly)			
Key National Guidelines			
Developing a Code of Behaviour (NEWB, 2008)	Learning Support Guidelines (DES, 2000); Guidelines on the IEP Process (NCSE, 2006); SEN: A Continuum of Support (NEPS, 2007a)	SEN: A Continuum of Support (NEPS, 2007a)	SEN: A Continuum of Support (NEPS, 2007a)
Key In-School Assessments and Interventions (DES Sp. Ed. Circular 02/05)			
Preventative Pupil feels he/she belongs, is safe, respected and valued; school expectations re. behaviour are clear; learning contexts and curricula are differentiated as required/ appropriate	Classroom Support A problem-solving approach is initiated in light of concerns expressed in relation to a pupil's behaviour; a classroom plan is agreed & implemented. Review follows to decide to discontinue, continue or intensify support	School Support A school support plan is agreed and implemented by class, learning support/ resource/other personnel and parents, following consultation. Review follows to decide to discontinue, continue or intensify support	School Support Plus An individual education or behaviour plan is agreed and implemented in accordance with the recommendations of the EPSEN Act (2004) by class, learning support/ resource/other personnel and parents, following consultation.
Key External Supports			
NCSE: General advice & support; NEPS: General advice; NBSS*: Whole School Approach; SESS: In-School Support	NCSE: Allocation of resources through GAM &/resource hours as per school level & designation NEPS: Consultation & advice; NBSS*: Customized Approach; SESS: Individual Professional Development	NCSE: Allocation of resources through GAM & SENO intervention in case of suspected EBD diagnosis; NEPS: Consultation & advice; NBSS*: Customized Approach; SESS: Group Professional Development Initiatives	NCSE: Support under GAM &/ Resource Hours &/or SNA allocation in case of EBD diagnosis; NEPS: Direct involvement with pupil, parents, teachers..; NBSS*: Behaviour Support Classrooms; SESS: Telephone &/or email support
Possible Pupil Trajectories following Supports/Interventions			
EBD pre-empted EBD present/continue	EBD contained EBD continue despite supports/interventions	EBD contained EBD continue despite increased supports/ interventions	EBD contained EBD continue despite increased supports/ interventions

Note: The asterisk (see the NBSS) indicates that this service is limited to second level schools. Key External Supports refer to educational supports only; Health and voluntary sector supports are addressed by the NCSE (2012). Access to pre-school provision, though not included in the Table, represents a key, early childhood preventative strategy (see NCSE, 2012).

Table 2 does not differentiate between school type, level or designation. Accordingly, the resources and procedures outlined should be read and interpreted in conjunction with the information provided in Table 1. Nor does the information in the Table apply to pupils in residential settings; this is given extensive coverage in the recent NCSE report (2012). Rather, the trajectory is intended to emphasise the staged approach to support and assessment recommended in national guidelines (e.g., DES, 2007b; 2007c; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c) and DES circulars (e.g., DES, 02/05) in addition to logging the additional supports that are provided to schools by the various support services.

RESPONDING TO EBD

Both national guidelines in relation to school management of EBD (e.g., NEWB, 2008) and school support services (e.g., the SESS, the NBSS and the NEPS) encourage the adoption of a proactive, preventative approach to EBD in the first instance, informed by an eco-systemic interpretation of the causes of EBD that acknowledges that behaviour is not a-contextual and is likely to be influenced significantly by school and classroom organization and management. However, it is also acknowledged that where such procedures prove ineffective, the school has the right to suspend and/or expel a pupil, subject to meeting the criteria set out by the NEWB (2008) code of behaviour.

The NEPS (DES, 2007a) uses the term 'support' to include both assessments and interventions undertaken with regard to a specific pupil with EBD. Such interventions are likely to include a range of strategies - behavioural, cognitive-behavioural and/or eco-systemic approaches - reflecting what is termed a bio-psychosocial perspective on EBD, as best befits the profile of the pupil and his/her school environment.

Preventative Strategies: Developing a Code of Behaviour

Under Section 23 of the Education Welfare Act (Gol, 2000), the Board of Management of a school is obliged to prepare a code of behaviour for its pupils in consultation with the principal, teachers and parents, in accordance with the Guidelines issued by the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB). As indicated in Table 2, external bodies including the NEPS, the SESS, the NBSS and the NCSE all offer supports to schools at this preventative stage to try to offset the development and/occurrence of EBD in the knowledge that "...in most schools 80 - 90% of students will be sufficiently supported with whole school initiatives related to positive behaviour" (NBSS, 2009: 2). However, if and when challenges occur and young people present with EBD, schools are recommended to adhere to a staged approach to assessment, identification and planning.

The Staged Approach to Assessment, Identification and Programme Planning

Appendix 3 of the Special Education Circular 02/2005 (DES, 2005) details how schools are intended to implement a staged approach to the assessment, identification of, and programme planning for, SEN. This approach complements the approaches recommended in the *Learning Support Guidelines* (DES, 2000), the *Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan Process* (NCSE, 2006) and, in particular, the recent publications from the NEPS on the continuum of support guidelines and resource packs for teachers at primary level (DES, 2007c; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c). Columns two, three and four in Table 2 signpost the different stages that teachers are requested to follow when providing the continuum of support advocated by the NEPS (2007a: 2). As indicated - up to and including Stage 2 of this process - the focus is on maximising the internal capacity of the school to respond creatively and effectively to the needs of the pupil. However, at Stage 3, the School Support Plus level, there is an acknowledgement that external,

specialist help may be required to supplement and optimise the potential of the school to cater for the enduring and/or escalating difficulties presented by the pupil's behaviours (see the NCSE [2012] for more details on the processes and personnel involved). A key feature of the assessment of need and the allocation of resources at Stage 3 is that it necessitates involvement of expert personnel outside the school staff because "...the assessments at Stages I and II of that model, i.e. school-based assessments, carried out by teachers are not acceptable for resource allocation under current policy" (NCSE, 2006b: 100). It should be borne in mind, also, that despite the fact that the staged approach is based on the premise that the needs of pupils with SEN may best be considered in terms of a continuum, with supports being allocated to reflect this, the DES recognises that it is not always possible or appropriate to progress through each stage (see DES, 2005: 23).

Supports Provided by External Support Agencies

Throughout each stage in a pupil's trajectory, support is provided by a range of external support agencies. The SESS offers a four-pronged support package to schools that includes in-school advice, individual professional development opportunities for teachers, group professional development initiatives and telephone/E-mail assistance. They also offer a range of seminars that relate directly to the management of EBD in schools include *Challenging Behaviour and Students with SEN at Primary Level* and *Preventing and Managing Challenging Behaviour of Students with SEN in mainstream Primary Schools: A Whole School Seminar* (SESS Website: <http://www.sess.ie/>).

The NBSS offers support complementary to that of the SESS, although the support it offers is limited to second level schools; it promotes and supports positive behaviour for learning through the provision of a systematic continuum of support to school communities, grounded in evidence based practice at three levels. At each level, support is customised to the specific characteristics, needs and requirements of the partner schools and this is most intense in the 36 schools nationally that provide full-time *Behaviour Support Classrooms*.

CONCLUSION

As noted at the outset, this paper was intended to signal rather than detail the nature and extent of provision available to pupils with EBD in Ireland currently and readers are strongly recommended to consult the Cooper and Jacobs' (2011) and NCSE (2012) publications for more comprehensive coverage of issues raised here. Significantly, one of the key recommendations in each of these publications is the provision of accredited, sustained, high quality professional development for teachers in this area. It is hoped, that this paper has bolstered that call by highlighting the centrality of the teacher to the welfare of the pupil with EBD across the continuum of support provided in Irish schools.

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SPHE: Rediscovering Meditation and its Benefits in the Primary School

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INTRODUCTION

The work of Gardner (1983) in identifying multiple intelligences and types of learning outlined the wonderful diversity in humans. Despite the fact that our genetic make-up differs by a mere five per cent (Rosenberg *et al.* 2002) there are many differences among populations, groups and individuals in terms of health, well-being, longevity and attainment. Certainly social conditions and self-management have been shown to have a significant influence on health (Pincus *et al.* 1998). Marmot and Wilkinson (2006) outlined the impact of social factors, such as employment, transport, neighbourhood, social support and health behaviours in determining health and well-being. Yet, despite the influence of those and other factors, Stockdale (1993) outlines that, from his study of the work of the ancient Greek philosopher Epictetus and his own first-hand experiences, it would appear that it is how we respond to our circumstances that has the most important influence on our health, education and quality of life. Thus we need to optimise our responses to day-to-day events and stressors.

It is clear that there are many factors that determine health and well-being. In the course of a study on such factors as part of a Masters Programme in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) in Waterford Institute of Technology I was intrigued to find so many benefits associated with the practice of meditation. Of further interest was the discovery that these benefits were not confined to the strict interpretation of the practice of meditation. For example, adopting the lotus position and using a mantra is not the only way to meditate.

Wallace and Shapiro (2006) outlined how meditation allows the body's systems to synchronise and work in harmony. The accompanying physiological, neurological and neurochemical changes have been shown to be quite remarkable. These may be garnered not only through meditation but also through some more common practices, not readily associated with the practice of meditation. Having explored the potential of meditation in enhancing health and well-being, I also further explored the impact of meditation on learning. I was surprised at the paucity of research in this area, especially in Ireland. The significance of the study I undertook is that it is the only one (of which I am aware) carried out in Ireland, or indeed, in the UK, that explores the role of meditation in enhancing learning and other outcomes.

WHAT IS MEDITATION?

Meditation has been a feature of many different cultures for thousands of years (Holroyd, 2003). Many religions have meditation as an integral part of their practices e.g. Buddhist, Christian, Taoist, Hindu and Jewish. Indeed in our own history it is well known that many of the saints and scholars of the Golden Age in Ireland (400 A.D. to 800 A.D.) practised meditation in one form or another. For example, Colmcille, one of Ireland's best known saints and missionaries "was most strict and constant in fasting, prayer and meditation" (Flood 2008, p. 26).

The origin of the word 'meditation' appears to be dependent on one's perspective. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1964) indicated that the word meditation was derived from the Latin 'meditari', meaning 'to

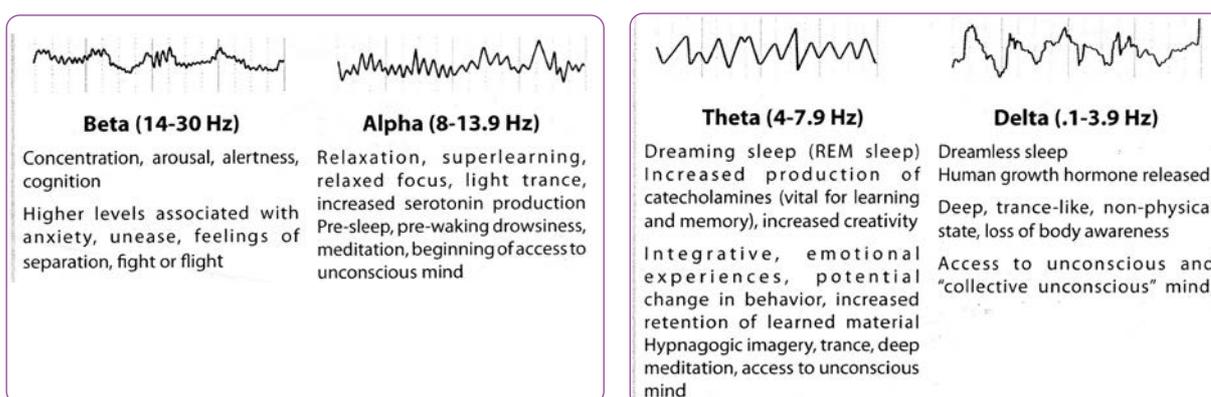
consider'. It may also have origins in the Latin word 'mederi' which means 'to heal' (New Imperial Reference Dictionary 1900). As we clearly see there are different perspectives. It is worth noting here that applying the Newtonian approach (of measuring, analysing and scientifically proving) to a personal practice like meditation may be deeply flawed as it may be one of those areas of human endeavour which is immeasurable.

There are two interesting definitions that help to illustrate the dichotomy of approaches to the practice and study of meditation. Massion *et al.* (1995) defined it as, "self- regulation of attention, in the service of self-inquiry, in the here and now". This perspective stands in stark contrast to the proposed definition by Jaseja (2008, p. 483) who observes that meditation is "a complex neural practice that induces changes in neurophysiology and neurochemistry of the brain resulting in altered neurocognition and behaviour in the practitioner".

For the casual observer any attempts at reconciling these two polar perspectives are doomed to failure. Yet, if we consider the observation of one of mankind's greatest thinkers and scientists, we may be able to position these views as complementary rather than contradictory. Albert Einstein noted "the intellect has little to do on the road to discovery. There comes a leap in consciousness, call it intuition or what you will, and the solution comes to you and you don't know how or why" (cited by Silva Quesada 2009).

What happens during meditation?

The common thread running through all forms and variations of meditation is that it leads to an altered state of consciousness that synchronises the body's natural rhythms. Arambula *et al.* (2001) found that breathing and heart rate were regulated while Holroyd (2003) examined concentration and mindfulness and their association with hypnosis. Lutz *et al.* (2004) found that the self-induced regulation of the brain during meditation resulted in both short-term and long-term neural changes. Grant and Rainville (2009) found that meditation was effective as a pain-killer. Such changes in the brain lead to adjustments in neurocognition and behaviour. Cahn and Polich (2006) reviewed neuroimaging and neuroelectric studies to show consistent results in accessing theta and alpha brainwave levels, especially in proficient meditators. One of the principal alterations that result from meditation is that of brainwave activity (Demos and Masterpasqua 2005). Recent developments in neuroimaging have opened up new avenues for investigating and examining meditation and its effect on the human brain (Cahn and Polich 2006; Newberg and Iversen 2003). There are four main brainwave levels, Beta (14-30 Hz), Alpha (8-13.9 Hz) Theta (4-7.9 Hz) and Delta (1-3.9.Hz). Within these bands there are further divisions but for now these bands represent the four main categories (Figures 1 and 2). Beta is our concentration state, associated with alertness, cognition, anxiety, and, in the higher levels of Beta, the "fight or flight" response. Alpha is regarded as the relaxation and super-learning state with relaxed focus and increased serotonin and melatonin levels (Fig.1). These are powerful antioxidants, free-radical scavengers, and they boost the immune system (Vijayalaxmi *et al.* 2004). Gordon (2000) revealed that melatonin enables children to be calmer, happier, more attentive and cognitively improved. Theta is the state of integrative emotional experience, increased creativity and increased production of catecholamines (vital for learning and memory). Davidson *et al.* (2003) support the view that meditation allows access to theta and alpha brainwave levels. Delta is the state of dreamless sleep and may be deep and trance-like with a loss of body awareness (Fig.2). It may also give access to the unconscious and the collective unconscious mind.



Figures 1 and 2: Four categories of brainwave patterns

These remarkable self-correcting and self-healing states may also be achieved through practices outside of acknowledged forms of meditation. Bernardi *et al.* (2001; 2006) showed that music, reciting the Rosary or a well-known yoga mantra replicated the synchronisation of the body's systems in the same way as meditation. Cysarz *et al.* (2004) showed remarkably similar results from reciting poetry (hexameter rhythmic verse). These and other meditation practices have been shown to have other significant benefits. Callaghan (2002) reported that because meditation produces melatonin it may be regarded as anti-cancer. Ambriz-Tututi *et al.* (2009) show that an increase in melatonin produces analgesic effects. The pain-killing benefits of meditation are supported by Grant and Rainville (2009). Karasek (2004) outlines the role played by melatonin as an anti-ageing agent. The reduction in stress associated with meditation is supported by the work of Lutgendorf *et al.* (2005), Carlson *et al.* (2007) and Conzen (2008). This emphasis on the many health benefits of meditation is important when we come to any examination of meditation and learning, as the connections between health and education are widely acknowledged, and, indeed, feature in other chapters of this volume.

MEDITATION AND LEARNING

The principal aims of primary education in Ireland are to enable each child to live a full life as a child, to realise the potential within and to become a life-long learner (Primary School Curriculum, 1999 *Introduction*, p.7). This broad embracing approach is reflected in much of what happens in primary classrooms. Learning is pupil-centred and involves co-operative learning, collaborative learning, group-work, technology, field-work, enterprise education and so on. The list is endless and involves active participation. With the advent of Active Schools, Green Schools and many other worthwhile initiatives it appears as though there is little time left for reflection, self-exploration, or quiet time. It means that there is little or no scope for children, outside of SPHE and, perhaps, Religion to explore and express their own emotions and processes. The research, outlined below, demonstrates the benefits of quiet time and meditation to children and provides a strong rationale for a greater focus on these aspects of child development.

THE STUDY

The study involved 69 pupils from two rural four-teacher schools. In one school, 36 of the pupils, having completed the Maths (Sigma-T) and English (Micra-T) tests, were asked to meditate twice daily over a period of 6 weeks. In the other school, 33 of the pupils took the tests but did not meditate. Both schools were of a similar size and profile. The pupils who participated were from 3rd Class to 6th Class in both schools with an age range of 8-13 years. The average age of the participants was 11 years. The study was undertaken during the months of May and June in 2009.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations of conducting this research were addressed in a number of ways. Initially the approval of the Board of Management was sought and obtained. Parental consent forms were issued to all prospective participants. An outline of what was involved was provided in these forms. The rights of pupils and parents to withdraw at any time were clearly stated. Teaching colleagues were also informed of the proposal. Pupils and parents were given time to discuss the study at home following discussion of the proposal. Guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity and their right to withdraw at any time were clearly outlined. A further ethical matter was the processing and discussion of any issues arising from the meditation. This approach enabled the participants to explore if (and how) the meditation might affect them. This was an area where McLean (2001) observed that such a practice would help to connect the practice of meditation to learning.

The Intervention

The meditation was done in the morning and in the early afternoon. The meditation involved the pupils sitting comfortably in desks or chairs. They were invited to close their eyes and to listen to sounds similar to that of a running stream with intermittent faint chiming of bells in the background. The sounds lasted for an average of 10-12 minutes. Towards the end of the meditation, and as the sounds faded, the pupils were invited to keep their eyes closed for a brief period. They were then asked to slowly open their eyes. The purpose of the gradual reawakening is to reduce or eliminate the risk of shock to the system. This may occur if a person were to suddenly be awakened from a deeply meditative state. At this point pupils were given an opportunity to share the experience in pairs, in small groups, or occasionally with the whole group. As a result of what began to emerge in this processing other methods of processing were also used. Use of colours, pictures, drawings and written words were used over the six weeks to help in processing.

A further test within a test was also conducted. This compliance check involved closely observing the meditation group to see if there were some who did not appear to be meditating. Observable behaviour, such as fidgeting, attempting to look around and movement in the desk, was used to divide the group into those who appeared to meditate and those who did not appear to do so.

Research Methods

A number of tests were conducted with the pupils. All the pupils, i.e. those who meditated and those who did not meditate re-sat the Micra-T for Reading and the Sigma-T for Mathematics. The pupils who meditated were also asked to fill in a questionnaire. A similar questionnaire was also sent out to the parents of the pupils who meditated. Focus groups were also used. A Creative Writing exercise titled "What Easter Means to me" was given to the pupils before the meditation practice commenced. After the six weeks of meditation the same participants were asked to write a piece on "What Summer means to me".

RESULTS

Reading and Maths Tests

The results of the Reading and Maths Tests were then analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 16). A significant improvement was noted in the Reading Test for the meditation group. There was no significant improvement for the group which did not meditate. The Mean score for the meditation group increased from 102.5 to 104.9, an increase of 2.4 (Fig.3). In the non-meditation group the same score decreased from 105.4 to 103.7, a decrease of 1.7 (Fig. 4). In the Maths Test a significant improvement was noted in the Meditation Group, rising from a Mean score of 96.3 to 104.7, an increase of 8.4 (Fig.5). However, the non-meditation group also improved from 106.2 to 110.3, an increase of 4.2 (Fig. 6). It is important to note the initial higher scores of the control group and it is generally accepted that it is more difficult to increase higher scores. The decrease in the Reading scores of the control group

is difficult to explain. Two possible explanations are lack of concentration and gender influence (see Fig.8).

Reading and Maths Results in Meditation Group (MG) and Control Group(CG).

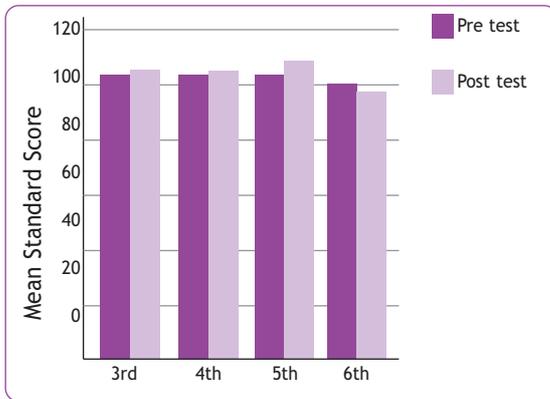


Figure 3: MT (Reading) Results by class for MG

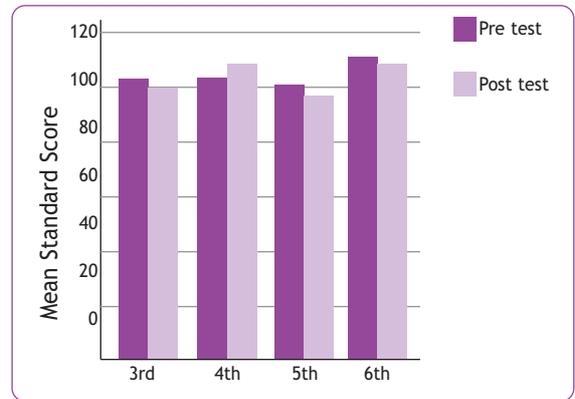


Figure 4: MT (Reading) Results by class for CG

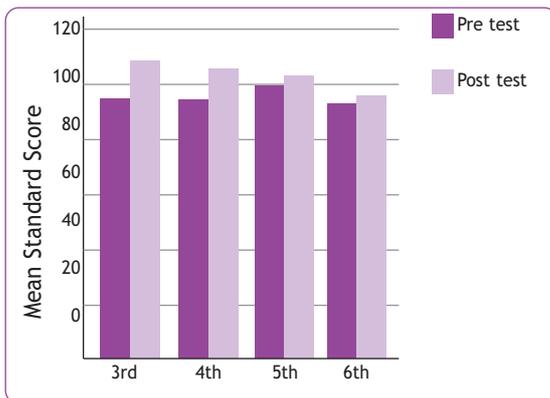


Figure 5: ST (Maths) Results by Class for MG

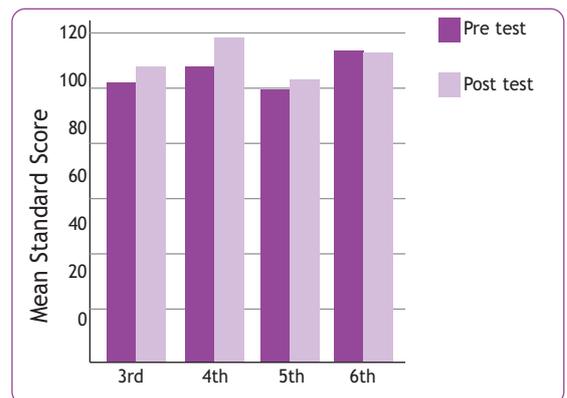


Figure 6: ST (Maths) Results by Class for CG

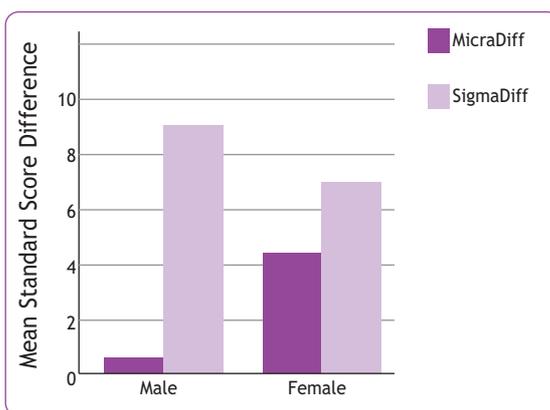


Figure 7: Difference by gender from pre to post test in MG

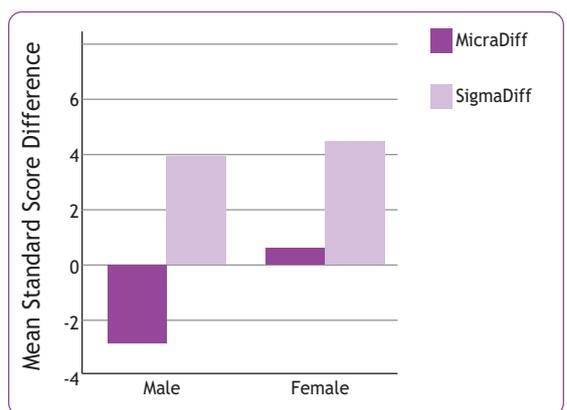


Figure 8: Difference by gender from pre to post test in CG

Within the meditation group the scores of those who appeared to meditate were compared to those of the group who appeared not to meditate. Before the meditation intervention, there were no significant differences between the groups in their Mean scores in Reading and in Mathematics. Following the six

weeks of meditation their scores were again analysed and compared. Those who appeared to meditate significantly increased their Mean score in Reading from 104.53 to 109.67, an increase of 5.14. The children who did not appear to meditate decreased slightly from 100.76 to 100.65. In the Maths Test those who appeared to meditate increased their Mean score from 100.27 to 109.8, an increase of 9.53. Those who did not appear to meditate increased from 92.82 to 100.24, an increase of 7.42 (Table 2). While this appears to be a significant increase the data analysis revealed no statistical difference in this group between the Maths scores before the six weeks of meditation. It did reveal a significant difference between the groups after the six weeks. One possible explanation for the increase in the Maths scores for this group may be in terms of gender. The compliance check revealed that there were twice as many girls as boys in the group that appeared to meditate. In the group that appeared not to meditate there were twice as many boys as girls.

It is noteworthy that the boys in the meditation group (Fig.7) significantly increased their scores in Maths compared to Reading. Girls showed a greater improvement in Reading than did the boys.

This discussion previously acknowledged how it may be more difficult to increase a higher score, yet this is what happened in the Maths Test Compliance Check (Table 2). Another interesting aspect is that some of these results tend to support the oft-aided view that boys fare better at Maths and girls do better at Reading. In the Control Group a similar pattern is evident where the boys' poorer scores in Reading are in sharp contrast to their improvement in Maths. However, in the Control Group the girls' scores in the Maths (Fig.8) tend to nullify that hypothesis with a higher score in their Maths than in their Reading.

Table 2: Compliance check on Intervention

Test	Group	N	Mean	Std. Error Mean
PreMicraStandard	A	15	104.53	3.192
	B	17	100.76	2.838
PostMicraStandard	A	15	109.67	2.702
	B	17	100.65	2.870
PreSigmaStandard	A	15	100.27	2.964
	B	17	92.82	2.926
PostSigmaStandard	A	15	109.80	2.632
	B	17	100.24	2.658

Group A = Appeared to meditate
Group B = Do not appear to meditate

Questionnaires, Focus Group and Creative Writing

The responses from the questionnaires revealed parallel associations from the results of the standardised tests. 89% of pupils reported that they found Maths easier following the six weeks of meditation. 71% reported that they found writing stories easier. Both parents and pupils reported a significant improvement in levels of concentration. Both also found that the children shared their feelings much more.

The responses from the Focus Group re-affirmed many of these reported improvements with comments such as "It helped me concentrate", "I had more energy", "I slept better" and "I felt fitter." Reports of pain relief were mentioned a number of times.

Independent judges were asked to scrutinise and compare the two pieces of Creative Writing from all the participants. The assessors looked at items including content matter, development of ideas, structure, vocabulary, descriptive language and length of essay. They found a significant improvement in the results for 83% of the children who meditated. The control group showed a slight improvement for 28% of the children.

Overall the results of the standardised tests measures, the questionnaires, the Focus Groups and the Creative Writing showed a very significant improvement in learning outcomes for the children.

A few other interesting outcomes are worth noting. One of the children reported on the disappearance of stomach pains during meditation. Another reported no pain in an injured finger while he meditated. One other child reported how she used to be nervous and anxious and used to worry about everything. Following the meditation intervention she didn't worry as much. This would corroborate one of the findings of Beauchemin *et al.* (2008), where improvements were recorded in trait and state anxiety scores following meditation. Fisher (2006) presented a strong case for practising meditation with children. He pointed out that positive outcomes might not be scientifically proven but children with attention problems could especially benefit from meditation. All of the above findings and results are particularly relevant in the SPHE context. In SPHE lessons there was a greater willingness of pupils to share and express themselves in a hitherto unseen open manner. This was evident in circle-time and in exploring experiential learning where all pupils made more frequent and more revealing contributions than heretofore. This had a very positive impact particularly in exploring areas of RSE, in resolving conflict and in the area of reduced worry especially among those who would have been known to fret over the everyday events in life.

CONCLUSIONS

The study presents considerable evidence to support the role of meditation in enhancing learning. The Maths and Reading improvements, the predominantly positive experiences of the children and the improvements in creative writing indicate that not only are there benefits in academic achievements but also in broader terms. Undoubtedly, the reported improvements in concentration would yield all-round benefits. The improvements in creativity, anxiety levels, in developing self-esteem and confidence certainly provide much food for thought.

While it may be tempting to attribute all the improvements to the daily practice of meditation it is important to bear in mind that other factors outside of the study may have had an influence. The time span between tests may have allowed for some natural improvement. However, this did not occur with the control group in the reading test. Two areas of reported significant improvement were in concentration and attention levels of the pupils and in sharing feelings, evident from both pupil and parent questionnaires. It is difficult to identify any other factor, from within or outside the study, which may have had an impact on a willingness to share feelings.

One important point to note is the key area of allowing for processing at the end of meditation. If one were to undertake strenuous physical activity it would be prudent to identify any underlying conditions that may impinge on the benefits associated with such exercise. Similarly in an area like meditation any significant underlying issues may need to be addressed in order to benefit from the practice. This is why it is so critical to allow the children to process what may happen for them in their meditation. This is very relevant to the SPHE strand of 'Myself' and getting to know myself.

Finally this maiden study in Ireland on meditation and learning supports the view that meditation has the potential to improve academic performance, increase attention and concentration and to develop

creativity. It may also promote emotional development through sharing feelings and has primarily a positive influence on those who practise it. For those interested in promoting Social, Personal and Health education and well-being in our people this study presents a starting point for discussion and debate.

Since this study was carried out there has been a noticeable trend towards developing meditation in schools and in the workplace. Almost 100 schools are currently participating in a Christian Meditation with Children project with well over 10,000 children involved. Conferences (INTO, IPPN) now feature either workshops or talks on Mindfulness, Well-Being or Self-Care. Many of these focus on meditation or meditative practices. It appears that meditation and its benefits are being rediscovered.

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Cyber-bullying Among Irish Teenagers

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INTRODUCTION

'In cyber-space no one can hear you scream'

(O' Moore & Stevens 2013, p. 291)

Bullying has been part of life since time began. Although once dismissed as a routine part of growing up (Feinberg 2003; Samara and Smith 2008), the issue of bullying among school children has detrimentally affected a significant number of students (Baldry and Farrington 2004). It can be verbal, psychological or physical in nature. Bullying is always wrong and is deemed unacceptable behaviour, which should never be overlooked or easily dismissed. Bullying has been shown to have negative effects on the victim, impacting on their cognitive, psychological, and emotional well-being (Beran 2005). Irish victims identified emotions such as misery (57%), loneliness (57%), anger (45%), depression (44%), powerlessness (43%), and vengefulness (10%), when questioned about how being bullied made them feel (UNICEF Ireland 2011).

DEFINING BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING

The most recent anti-bullying procedures published by the Department of Education and Skills includes an updated definition of bullying as:

Unwanted negative behaviour, verbal, psychological or physical conducted by an individual or group against another person (or persons) and which is repeated over time.

(Department of Education & Skills 2013, p. 8)

The following types of bullying are included in the definition of bullying: deliberate exclusion, malicious gossip and other forms of relational bullying, cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying such as homophobic bullying, racist bullying, bullying based on a person's membership of the Traveller community and bullying of those with disabilities or special educational needs (ibid). This research focuses on cyber-bullying, which is a relatively new form of bullying.

Cyber-bullying is a form of psychological bullying, created in real space but transmitted through cyber-space. Also known as electronic or e-bullying, it is carried out using the Internet, mobile phone or other technological devices. It can be defined as:

Deliberate, malicious and repeated use of information and computer technologies (ICT) by an individual or a group to hurt and/or manipulate and/or exclude another person or persons

(O' Moore & Stevens 2013, p. 293)

The issue of repetition is contentious in cyber-bullying. An act of cyber-bullying may be instigated only once but because it can be sent to multiple recipients many times, it can have the same devastating effects as that of repeated acts of traditional means of bullying (ibid). Bullying traditionally has generally been recognised as a face-to-face encounter, where the victim knew the perpetrator and therefore there was some hope of naming, shaming and confronting the problem. What makes cyber-bullying different is

that it is often anonymous. All that is required is a computer or a mobile phone and a desire to humiliate and terrorise. These are new tools with which to bully. They can cause extreme distress to the recipient and yet, the bully can remain unknown, undetected and 'faceless'. Bullies who once cornered their victims in the playground are now tormenting them in cyber-space. Traditionally, children were bullied at school or going to or from school and home was always a safe haven where no-one could taunt or torment them. When victims are bullied through the medium of cyber-space, there are no safe places left. Home is no longer a safe haven.

The Question of Anonymity

The phenomenon of cyber-bullying takes advantage of the wide range of technologies that are readily available to young people such as e-mail, text, chat rooms, mobile phones (especially those with cameras), and websites (Campbell 2005). More often than not, this form of bullying is anonymous, that is, it cannot easily be traced back to a specific person. In most online cases, this occurs as a result of the bully using a pseudonym (Shariff 2008). In other cases, the bully masquerades as the victim or as another person, sometimes gaining access to their e-mail accounts or mobile phones in order to pose as the victim (Bamford 2004), thus stealing their identity. In a survey, conducted by this researcher in 2010 on the prevalence of Cyberbullying among Irish teenagers, more than half of the respondents strongly agreed that being anonymous online makes it easier to cyber-bully (Flanagan 2010). Therefore, we can conclude that anonymity is one of the motivating factors of cyber-bullying (Johannessen 2006).

Furthermore cyber-bullying has no closure. There is "permanence of expression" (Shariff 2008, p. 34). Hurtful material can be disseminated widely and quickly and once it is forwarded to other people, it can be downloaded and saved on computers indefinitely. While one can walk away from a physical bully or from verbal abuse, there is no avoiding a mobile phone or computer, on which you can read, re-read and internalise an abusive message.

THE GLOBAL STATISTICS ON BULLYING AND SUICIDE

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people, resulting in about 4,400 deaths per year. For every suicide among young people, there are at least 100 suicide attempts (Dickinson 2010). Over 14% of high school students have considered suicide, and almost 7% have attempted it. Bully victims can be up to nine times more likely to consider suicide than non-victims, according to studies by Yale University (ibid). Furthermore, a study in Britain found that at least half of suicides among young people are related to bullying and 10 to 14 year old girls may be at even higher risk for suicide (ibid). According to statistics reported by ABC News, nearly 30% of students are either bullies or victims of bullying, and 160,000 children stay home from school every day because of fear of bullying (ibid). Irish clinical psychologist, broadcaster and author, David Coleman stated that 10,000 Irish children dread going to school daily as a result of bullying (Coleman 2012).

Some schools or regions appear to have more serious problems with bullying and suicide related to bullying. While this could be attributed to bullying, it could equally be related to the tendency of students or family members who are exposed to suicide to consider it themselves (Dickinson 2010).

'Bullycide' is a word coined by Neil Marr and Tim Field (2001) to describe when bullied children choose suicide rather than face another day of bullying, harassment and abuse. In their book entitled: *Bullycide: Death at playtime*, they state that 16 children commit bullycide in the UK every year but the scale of misdiagnosed bullycide could be many times that:

Each bullycide is an unpalatable fact that a child has died as a result of the deliberate actions of another in an environment where the responsible adults have failed to provide a mechanism for reporting, intervening, and dealing with physical and psychological violence.

(Marr & Field 2001, p. 278)

In recent years in Ireland, we unfortunately have begun to create our own alarming statistics on bullying /cyber-bullying related suicides (O'Moore 2012)

Cyber-bullying and Suicide

Authoritative figures in the field of bullying who have regarded its effects on both victims and perpetrators have indicated a range of negative outcomes. Targeted victims were more likely to be depressed and have poor self-esteem (Olweus 2001) with bullies and victims both at an increased risk of depression and suicide (Kaltiala-Heino *et al.* 1999). In recent years, a series of cyber-bullying-related suicides in the US, UK and Ireland have drawn attention to the connection between cyber-bullying and suicide (O'Moore 2012). It is now widely accepted that this cyberbullying can lead to many negative effects for victims, including suicide. However, the link between the bullies themselves and suicide has been a significant revelation (Bullying Statistics 2010). Bullies themselves have reported feeling lonely and lacking close friendships (Mash & Wolfe 2007). Rates of depression and ill-health among bullies are considerably higher than those among peers not involved in bullying, and both bully and victim groups have equally high rates of suicidal ideation (Kumpulainen *et al.* 2001; Roland 2002).

RESEARCH RATIONALE

The rationale for this research is that cyber-bullying is spiralling out of control (McDougall 2011) and that so many parents, teachers and other significant adults are unaware of its existence and even if they are, many are powerless to intervene due to lack of resources and knowledge of technology (Kidsafe: Online Protection 2010), particularly in the area of social networking sites (O' Moore & Stevens 2013). They are not 'tech savvy' (Heffernan & Donnelly 2012). There is considerable urgency in finding effective preventative and intervention measures in view of the anonymous, instant and far-reaching communication capabilities of this form of bullying. The threat which it poses to schools has already been noted (Flynn 2012).

The intention of this research is to explore the prevalence and consequences of Cyberbullying, including its links with suicide.

METHODOLOGY

A mixed methods approach was undertaken for this research study. A comprehensive questionnaire was compiled and distributed to three large secondary schools, one of which was an all girls' school, the second an all boys' school and the third a mixed community school. For triangulation purposes, a focus group of Irish teenagers from a fourth school was also conducted. The majority of students interviewed were sixteen years of age.

Research Questions

The questions posed by this research were:

- Is cyber-bullying becoming a serious social issue?
- Is it a problem among Irish teenagers?
- Does the question of anonymity online contribute to the problem?
- Do parents, teachers and other professionals have the awareness, skills and knowledge of how it operates and of how to intervene in it or prevent it?
- Is there evidence that bullying is linked to suicide?
- What about bystanders, who know it's going on and yet do not try to stop it?
- Will the new Anti-bullying Procedures make a difference?

Ethical Issues

Having been granted permission from the three Principals to proceed with the research, those Principals were then formally contacted in writing. The Principals were assured of confidentiality and that any information pertaining to bullying/cyber-bullying recorded in the questionnaires from their particular school would not in any way be traced back to them or used against them. Neither would anyone except this researcher have access to the data. The participants would be given anonymity. They would not be required to name themselves, their school or any of their teachers.

A guarantee was given to all participants that any data gathered electronically would be stored on a password-protected computer and that any data gathered in paper form would be retained in a locked filing cabinet until final analysis was completed. Participants were reassured that all data gathered would be deleted/shredded when the data analysis was completed. When each participant had completed the questionnaire, they were given a hand-out with helpline telephone numbers and a list of relevant websites they could access if they experienced any negative effects or symptoms of unresolved trauma as a result of reflecting on and completing the questionnaire. It was acknowledged that answering some of the questions could raise sensitive issues or memories of bullying for some students.

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The survey results provided many insights into the prevalence and nature of cyber-bullying. They also raised many questions about roles and responsibilities in the intervention and prevention of this worrying epidemic.

Prevalence of cyberbullying

Regarding cyber-bullying and gender breakdown: 6.5% of the boys said they were cyber-bullied compared to 30% of the girls. This difference is statistically significant and supports other research that states that girls tend to become victims of cyber-bullying while boys tend more towards physical bullying (Flanagan 2010). This research also found that 62.5% of all participants knew someone who had been cyber-bullied via social networking sites and 87.5% had received unpleasant mobile phone text messages in the past two years (ibid).

Computer access and the role of parents

Eighty-six per cent (86%) of respondents used social networking sites yet one third did not know how to contact their service provider if they experienced cyber-abuse and wished to close down their accounts. Over 89% of respondents are allowed unlimited Internet access by their parents. This is a very significant finding which begs the question of where the computer was situated in the home. It is likely that the statistic is so high because young people were accessing the internet from the privacy of their bedrooms, unknown to their parents.

Only 11% of respondents' parents monitored how much time their teenagers spent online. In the focus group, all students use the computer every day and 50% of students use it more than once a day. Fifty per cent (50%) of students had computers with broadband in their own bedrooms and 62.5% had unlimited access to the Internet. They were neither timed nor in any way monitored by their parents. Only 37.5% of students were reminded to log out when other family members needed to use the computer. The roles and responsibilities of parents, educators, and the bystander are explored and the findings yield some interesting and significant findings that may have implications for further research. Due to the centrality of their roles, parents are the greatest single influence on the psychological and social development of their children (Lawrence 1998). Respondents related that many parents knew very little about technology and didn't monitor Internet access. This raises the issue of parental responsibility and prompts a look at the different types of families and styles of parenting that exist. Some parents may be more interested than other parents in socio-emotional development. By not paying attention to this area of development,

some parents could be raising children who lack social skills, empathy, warmth and respect for rules and authority. Research tells us that monitoring is vital (Shariff 2008; Trolley & Hanel 2010). Yet, 41% of respondents agreed and 27% strongly agreed that parents don't know what children do online. This concurs with the opinions of many researchers who feel that parents need to monitor technology and if they don't know how, then they need to inform themselves (Shariff 2008; Carpenter 2009). The responsibilities of parents and indeed, the students themselves, are underlined in the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools:

In addition to the role of management and staff, parents and pupils have a role and responsibility in helping the school to prevent and address school-based bullying behaviour and to deal with any negative impact within school of bullying behaviour that occurs elsewhere.

(DES 2013, p. 5)

The role of schools

Thirty-one per cent (31%) of participants said they didn't know if their schools had an anti-bullying policy or not and 26.9% thought bullying was not treated seriously at their schools. When asked if the subject of bullying was discussed in class, 69.2% of respondents said it was but 30.8% said that it was not. This finding indicates that bullying is not discussed adequately or often enough in schools, despite the fact that there are specific areas of the SPHE programmes in both primary and post-primary schools that deal with bullying issues. Schools are in the best position to raise awareness of bullying and school violence (Cowie *et al.* 2006). We rely on teachers to deliver the content of anti-bullying programmes, such as *Stay Safe* (Lawlor & MacIntyre 1991) and *Walk Tall* (Hegarty & O'Sullivan 1999) at primary level. In post-primary schools the curriculum framework for Junior Cycle SPHE (Department of Education and Science, 2000) is an enabling curriculum. It is built around ten areas of learning. These are: 'Belonging and integrating', 'Self-management: a sense of purpose', 'Communication skills', 'Physical health', 'Friendship', 'Relationships and sexuality', 'Emotional health', 'Influences and decisions', 'Substance use' and 'Personal safety'. The SPHE Support Service supports the development and provision of SPHE in post-primary schools. Its website includes links to resources, guidelines and exemplar materials and provides information for young people about the different issues that affect mental health including stress, anxiety, bullying and suicide (NCCA 2014). Unfortunately the findings in this survey on cyber-bullying awareness in schools do not tally with advice from researchers who insist that awareness is essential (Willard 2007; Kowalski *et al.* 2008). Research indicates that a whole school approach is the single most effective action a school can take to combat bullying (Smith & Sharpe 1994). This should include raising awareness among pupils, parents, teachers and all ancillary staff but also the use of effective, updated policies.

The Role of the Bystander

The respondents who knew victims of cyber-bullying, were asked what they did to help the victims. A minority (6.2%) of them reported it to an adult, 36.5% helped the victim to report it to their service provider but 56.4% of these bystanders did nothing.

This survey yielded worrying statistics on the number of students who do not try to help a victim of bullying. It appears that nothing has changed since the nationwide study in Irish schools where it stated that the reluctance of the peer group to intervene on the victim's behalf was a cause for considerable concern (O' Moore *et al.* 1997).

A follow up study could seek to establish the motives for the inaction of the bystander thus providing greater understanding as to why bystanders do what they do and how they can be educated to think and act differently to break the cycle of violence. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said that in the end we will remember not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends (Halligan 2013). We need to teach young people not to stand silently by while others are being tormented. Silence speaks volumes as Kowalski (2008) states in his research on the role of the bystander.

ONGOING DEVELOPMENTS

The Action Plan on Bullying was launched by the Irish government on January 29th 2013. In September 2013, the former Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn T.D., published new anti-bullying procedures for all 4,000 Irish primary and post primary schools, in which he stated that schools will be required to publish education and prevention strategies for cyber-bullying. The new Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013) are welcomed and their underlying principles of restorative justice as a means of discipline are acknowledged, accepted and agreed upon

Among the 12 actions recommended by the working group were proposals to support a media campaign focused on cyber-bullying, specifically targeted at young people as part of Safer Internet Day 2013 and to establish a new national anti-bullying website. It promised to begin immediately the development of new national anti-bullying procedures for all schools, to be in place by Easter 2014 and to devise a co-ordinated plan of training for parents and for school boards of management. The *Stay Safe* (Lawlor & MacIntyre 1991) SPHE programme currently in primary schools is to be updated to include cyber-bullying. The DES also pledged support for the *Stand Up!* Awareness Week against Homophobic Bullying organised by BeLonGTo, the organisation which supports LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender) people.

In a critique of the new Anti-Bullying Guidelines and Procedures, launched in September, 2013, the principles of restorative justice as opposed to punitive methods of discipline were welcomed. It was noted that the procedures contain the words "respect" twenty four times, "empathy" four times, "restore" five times and "resolve" seven times. Conversely, the word "sanction" is utilised only once and "punish", "suspension" and "expulsion" are never used (Flanagan 2013). This is in line with the current guidelines which state that the primary aim in investigating and dealing with bullying is "to resolve any issues and restore as far as is practicable, the relationships of the parties involved (rather than to apportion blame)" (DES 2013, p. 6). The rationale for promoting restorative rather than punitive approaches is also proposed by Mona O' Moore, Anti-Bullying Centre, Dublin City University, who states that instead of punishment, ways must be found in which corrective action is constructive and rehabilitative. The wrongs committed must be acknowledged and their impact understood. Closure only comes when there is a fair and satisfactory outcome (O'Moore 2010). The principle of collective responsibility in dealing with bullying is restated in the conclusion of the plan, when it says that preventing and tackling bullying requires support from parents and wider society and is not a problem schools can solve alone (DES 2013).

CONCLUSION

There is a clear need for intervention by means of awareness, education and legislation around the area of cyber-bullying in Ireland. Nelson Mandela said that we owe to our children - the most vulnerable citizens in society - a life free from violence and fear (Clifford & Slavery 2008). Yet today's technological advances have opened the doors to a new form of abuse and contributed to the already existing cycle of violence that permeates society. If the use of technology for communication purposes continues to grow in popularity then the dangers of misuse will also increase, thus potentially escalating the prevalence of cyber-bullying and its tragic consequences. There is no single solution to the problem as it is a live and ongoing issue. However, much can be done at the preventative stage and the launch of the Action Plan (DES 2013) and the accompanying procedures to counter bullying, offers much hope. Intervention by means of awareness, education and legislation is paramount. Similar intervention and prevention plans are already in place in Norway and Finland with good success. In Norway, the Olweus programme has been shown to reduce rates of bullying by 50% or more (Olweus 2001). Most subsequent whole school programmes share the core features of the original Olweus intervention such as activities for the whole school, increased adult supervision and establishment of an anti-bullying committee. Teachers develop codes of behaviour with the help of the children and integrate the theme of bullying into other curricular

areas. Information about the school's goals and initiatives is sent to all parents and they, along with community leaders and organisations, may be encouraged to get involved directly in some initiatives. In the senior classes, peer mentors are trained in conflict resolution and befriending techniques under adult supervision. Targeted interventions are also included for children directly affected by bullying (Olweus 1993; Smith *et al.* 2005; Orpinas, Home & Staniszewski 2003). In Finland the KiVa programme (Slamivali, Kärnä, & Poskiparta 2010) encourages bystanders to support the victim and not the bully. Like the Olweus programme KiVa becomes an active part of a school's anti-bullying policy. It involves student lessons which include discussion, group work, role play, and short films. KiVa also places a strong emphasis on technology and includes computer games and an online environment, KiVa Street. Staff are heavily involved and teachers' perceived competence in handling bullying has increased using this programme (Ahtola *et al.* 2012). Slamivali and Poskiparta (2012) found that, when KiVa was implemented, 98% of cases showed improvement and 86% had eradicated bullying completely.

Further research into the success of these international programmes would enhance the implementation of our own Action Plan and perhaps steer it in the right direction but what is abundantly clear already is that a partnership between school, parents, the students and the community is central to the effectiveness of any anti-bullying programme (Sullivan 2013, as cited in O'Moore & Stevens 2013), and that all programmes, policies and procedures will be merely aspirational unless they come alive in the hands of people who are caring, empathic and creative enough to take ownership of this very destructive phenomenon.

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Beyond the Jigsaw Approach: Problems and Possibilities for SPHE

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INTRODUCTION

As Rapporteur for the conference, 'The Future of SPHE: Problems and Possibilities', my task was to listen to as many presentations as possible and contribute a reflection by way of a summing up. In this paper, I recall my thoughts at that time and share my ideas on reading the papers in this volume, one year on. In doing so I am aware that my listening and reading are shaped by my own experiences, values, knowledge and biases and that anyone else charged with this task might well have identified different themes. It is not my aim to offer a comprehensive summary but rather a situated reflection, which I hope might raise some questions about the way forward for SPHE.

I must begin, however, by recalling that there was a powerful energy present on that day in Limerick in September 2012; a spirit of sharing, of curiosity and of hope. While critique was present, it was there in the spirit of collaboration. It was the first Irish SPHE Network conference and the seventy-five people who attended were clearly very committed. This in itself offered a sense of possibility.

In this reflection I offer some of the thoughts and questions which emerged for me during the day and on reading the papers. In this way, I hope to support continuing reflection, conversation and energy in the future development of SPHE.

SPHE - PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES

I will suggest three challenges for SPHE, using the metaphor of a jigsaw to explain how its role has been seen in the past and how it might be redefined. The first challenge then in attempting this redefinition is to overcome a certain mismatch between how society understands SPHE and how SPHE understands itself. The second challenge concerns the value given to SPHE in a culture of competition, performativity and measurement, which poses challenges of visibility for the affective domain. The third challenge relates to the need for further practitioner skill development in order to carry out the work.

I also see three possibilities for the future of SPHE. One involves the development of theoretical frameworks to support the field in a way that includes all, but does not demand consensus: a framework which might offer a metaperspective on the work. The second possibility is to commit to a radical approach of consulting the children we work with and to continually question the dynamics of power in this consultation. Thirdly, I suggest we 'walk the walk' in teacher education, offering our students an experiential education and a continual invitation to critical consciousness.

PROBLEMS

A well-intentioned jigsaw

Carol O'Sullivan explains how our national SPHE programmes, several of which were in place before the official inclusion of SPHE in the curriculum, were developed in response to concerns in society at large;

child abuse, substance misuse and sexual health issues in particular. If these were the concerns of the 90's, childhood obesity, homophobia, racism and cyberbullying are joining the list in more recent years. Carol suggested that SPHE is often seen as the site where these problems might be addressed and where children might be provided with the understandings and skills to prepare them to cope with societal challenges.

I was struck by the number of presentations at this conference which specifically addressed these social concerns. We heard passionate presentations about hunger and obesity, food and nutrition, sexual health and parenting, meditation, homophobia and cyberbullying. I have an impression of many initiatives being rolled out around the country with commitment and zeal, involving parallel research examining the effectiveness of these approaches, with students ready to participate and value the programmes. These initiatives seem to me like separate parts of a jigsaw, fitting together very well and valuing each other, but perhaps only aware of the pieces beside them in the jigsaw.

In the call from society to the teaching profession to address these social issues, I fear there is an assumption that children can be equipped with certain knowledge, which will prevent them from falling prey to these problems in society. Teachers know that SPHE is more complex than imparting good advice; that learning is not simply about accessing information but exploring attitudes and values, developing interpersonal skills and living life in keeping with the values we choose. As long as the complexity of that task is misunderstood in society at large, the work itself will be devalued.

Paulo Freire (1970) understood education as a call to transform our lives, community, environment and society. Education is rooted in dialogue around the themes about which a community care. Freire rejected the "banking" concept of education; the idea that knowledge can be passed from the well-informed teacher to the passive pupil. Instead he suggested a "problem-posing" model where participants are active in describing, analysing, suggesting, deciding and planning and therefore actively involved in the construction of knowledge. His method involved conducting surveys to identify the themes which concern communities, devising "codes" or stimuli to begin dialogue around the themes and facilitating people to work together to connect the issues in the codes to their lives, trace their roots and take action to improve their lives (ibid). Action and reflection continually inform each other.

The teacher is never neutral and needs to check if his/her work is liberating participants to be critical, active members of society or domesticating them to fit into the roles of the dominant culture (Hope and Timmel, 1995). This approach offers a lot to SPHE, as the pupils are empowered by constructing knowledge together, by questioning at a deep level and taking actions which have been informed by and further inform critical thought.

Facilitating the work, however, demands critical reflection on one's styles of leadership, skills for creating a safe learning space, time to develop good codes and skills for evaluating one's work. This is the complexity which is not always understood by those who charge teachers with addressing concerns in society.

Our first challenge then might be to signal in a more public way the complexity of good SPHE; the nature of transformative education with its demand for critical consciousness and community focus, with all its Freirian roots. Perhaps the recent raising of the professional status of teaching, offers possibilities for teachers to be heard with more authority.

The challenges of the affective domain in a culture of performativity

Moynihan has clearly outlined the barriers to SPHE achieving high status. SPHE involves situated learning rather than abstract and theoretical knowledge. It is not easily measurable in exams and so tends to be dismissed in a second-level system focussed on points. It does not generate statistics of success for a school, or for the nation. It is not subject-specific, as it involves relationships across all areas of life. Therefore SPHE finds it difficult to be placed in a system where teachers develop subject specialisms. It

is orientated towards collaborative learning, though we live in a culture of competition. The link between health and education has not been taken seriously in many schools, where cognitive development is prioritised without account of the whole ecology of a child's life that supports it.

However there are signs of change. Several chapters in this volume speak to holistic and health-based models. The breakfast clubs described by Flaherty, addressing not only nutrition but also nurture, are becoming popular. Meditation and Mindfulness are being taught to children (Ó hAonghusa). Schools are eagerly embracing resources to teach about diet (Kelleher) and whole school approaches to health promotion are developing (O'Beirne).

Morgan's article reports that specific, sustained teaching which focusses on self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, self-management and emotional regulation has significant impact on learning in both the short and long term. These can have as much impact on academic outcomes as academic interventions themselves. Specific learning in self-regulation offers a way of 'learning to learn'. This impact depends on active, sequenced and coordinated learning. It involves the development of personal and social skills but also requires a consistent supportive environment. Morgan cites the work of Roorda *et al.* (2011), which shows that a teacher/pupil relationship where social and emotional skills are modelled and a supportive environment is sustained, has a positive impact on student achievement. This impact is more apparent at second level, with boys and with students from lower socio-economic groups.

Zita Lysaght writes about the continuum of support for children with a diagnosis of EBD/SEBD and claims that if we adopt an eco-systemic interpretation of the causes, the style of management and communication in the classroom is crucial. I have seen teachers who are skilled in creating good relationships, and in supporting emotional regulation and self-management. Such teachers can be critical partners in the child's support system, retain children in a mainstream classroom and halt the escalation of antisocial behaviour and the need for further specialised teaching interventions.

The work demands of the teacher are more than cognitive competence and learning; they require advanced skills in self-awareness, social awareness, relational management and professional decision-making. Teachers need advanced SPHE skills themselves and a language and ability to reflect critically on the process of their work.

The need for further practitioner skill development

Several papers in this volume suggest that SPHE is transformative (O'Sullivan, Collins, Kavanagh, Moynihan). I suggest that teachers need to have experienced such education themselves to be convinced of its value and only then can they draw on these methodologies with skill and commitment to accomplish transformative education in schools. This is not always the reality on the ground.

The commitment is present in many schools, as was attested to by the participants of the conference. However both DES (2009) and NCCA (2008) studies and many papers in this volume report that SPHE is not consistently offered nationally. In many schools it is not offered at Senior Cycle. It may even be dropped from some second level schools, as Moynihan warns, in the restructuring of the Junior Certificate.

At the conference there was general agreement that that SPHE is process-orientated and is best delivered as participative workshops. This approach demands of teachers that they mediate the discussion, so that children and young people make meaning of their dilemmas in ways that clarify values and support agency. They can then take action in the sense that Freire intended.

There are questions which need to be asked about the nature of these mediated conversations. Firstly they demand of us that we think about the role of the school within society; to what extent school should

transmit cultural norms and to what extent it should challenge and transform them. Secondly, we need to ask ourselves how we view children and young people; to what extent do we see them as preparing for adult life or to what extent as active democratic citizens in the present? Finally we need to be accountable to the children and young people in the way we structure these discussions. We need to ask ourselves how knowledge is constructed, who is allowed to raise questions, if we can disagree or if we must seek consensus. We need to challenge ourselves to create the safety for all to participate, and to develop our cultural competence so we can really hear what every child is saying. We need to evaluate the quality of the education we are offering.

I raise these questions because there are, I believe, tensions and dilemmas that frequently present themselves to the educator. If I introduce a school council in my primary school and then limit the issues the children can raise, I must ask myself where and why I draw those boundaries, so that I empower pupils and avoid disillusionment. If I introduce discussions on safe food and nutrition in a class where obesity is clearly present it is a huge task to keep the discussion inclusive and safe in a way that will prevent insensitive comments flying on the school bus or on Facebook afterwards. Marion Flanagan's paper alerts us to the prevalence of cyberbullying and the damage that interactions between our pupils can have in spaces where we have no control. This adds complexity to the decisions we make about mediating discussions.

This is the reality for teachers on the ground. They are conscientious professionals who do not want to make things worse and are very aware of the sensitivity of the work of SPHE and their own lack of clarity or competence. Among the questions I heard asked during the day of the conference were;

- " Will I be able to cope with the reactions of children?"
- " What do I do when children respond inappropriately to each other?"
- " Am I asking children to go against the culture of their home?"
- " Can I teach RSE if I am uncomfortable talking about it myself?"
- " Can I tell my colleagues I am gay?"

These concerns of teachers are valid. When teachers shy away from aspects of SPHE, however, it may well be more motivated by a refusal to offer a less than quality experience for students than a questioning of the relevance of the subject. Perhaps we should recognise their caution. Perhaps we should develop more compassion for the very junior teacher at second level doing her/his best in this challenging area, sometimes without adequate support. Perhaps we could think about the training and the support such teachers need in order to enable them to follow through on what they know is important and commit to asking them to identify their training needs on a regular basis.

Smith's paper takes us into the territory of dilemma when she describes some of the unhelpful ideas and sensitivities that can emerge when exploring the lives of migrants and how stereotypes may be reinforced if the teacher is not culturally competent and skilled in creating safety. In her paper the complexity is named; teachers work out an approach and continue to learn. Many teachers, however, avoid these subjects because they anticipate these dilemmas and are afraid they will offend.

Devaney's paper is instructive here. Her research indicates that 58% of student teachers worry about the responses of their pupils during RSE and 75% are concerned about conflict between their teaching and the culture of the home. I understand this concern of teachers as arising from care and accountability. Eva's proposal is that teachers need "pedagogical content knowledge"(Shulman 1986) . This blend of subject content knowledge and pedagogical skills is reflected in the design of the module she presented at the conference. The module combined significant content in the area of RSE, which may be instructive in their own lives, exercises in values clarification and specific methodologies for the classroom. I suspect that if the subject of the module had been substance misuse prevention, health promotion, anti-bullying, human rights education, or any other theme within SPHE, her findings might have been similar.

Where in teacher education in Ireland have students developed this pedagogical content knowledge? There is no subject specialism in SPHE for second level teaching. Rather there is an assumption that any teacher can do it. Before the revised BEd programme at primary level was introduced, student teachers received less than 20 hours training in SPHE. We cannot say that there is a highly skilled teaching profession offering transformative SPHE, because that only exists in some places. And where the dilemmas I have raised earlier are not addressed, teachers may return to the 'banking' method.

However there are reasons to be optimistic. The demands for Continuous Professional Development on the Second Level SPHE Support Service are great, and the demand is often for a whole school approach to learning and developing practice. Revised B Ed courses at primary level are giving more time to SPHE and its status is increasing. Undergraduate students taking SPHE topics as a focus for their research is increasing. So change is upon us.

POSSIBILITIES

Articulating theoretical frameworks

As SPHE has developed in response to societal problems and has been fragmented at times, the opportunity now exists to further develop the theoretical framework for the work. Some papers in this volume (Collins, Kavanagh, Morgan) call for more of a metaperspective on the nature and role of SPHE and theoretical frameworks, which could bring unity to the field.

One way forward would be to take a critical look at the discourses which permeate SPHE: to deconstruct some of the assumptions under which teachers operate, and seek to understand the effects of these assumptions. We could look at competing discourses in education, all of which make demands on teachers and shape their identity. We could interrogate how these competing demands impact on SPHE. We could commit to talking together about our practice without a need for consensus but rather with a recognition that there are differences in approach, all of which have their histories and contexts and underlying values. We could seek to make those values more explicit.

Underlying our work are theories about personhood and identity. We might benefit from paying attention to those theories and allow them more articulation. Schön, (1983) argues that in times of dilemma, what he calls the "swampy lowlands", the practitioner always draws on theory. As SPHE often finds itself in the "swampy lowlands", sharing experience, negotiating dilemmas and clarifying values, a greater awareness on the theories that inform us might be instructive.

A focus on power relations might also offer us a lens through which to view the social aspect of the work. An exploration of the tensions between societal norms and the agency of children might offer a critical lens through which we evaluate our work.

How we understand and respond to the health problems, including mental health problems of pupils, is also guided by our understanding of health. It shapes how we conduct relationships and what counts as SPHE. Schools can examine their structures to see in what ways they are promoting health as several papers in this volume suggest. (O'Beirne, Moynihan, Kelleher).

So without losing the situated nature of SPHE explorations and our reliance on the local knowledge of our pupils to construct knowledge, we can also engage with some theoretical questions and ask ourselves 'what are we about?'. We do not need to demand that we all agree. We can engage in reflection, in the same spirit that we expect of our pupils.

A time to radically consult our students

Several of the papers here express a satisfaction with SPHE, as a place where children's voices are privileged. However there is also a question of the extent to which this is true. Kavanagh reports that in Rushgreen school, where a very conscientious effort is made to give children a voice, there are still limits to the range of topics that emerge or the extent to which that voice challenges the structures of the school.

Collins cites Holden's (2007) research which shows that while Circle Time offers a beginning for personal and skills development, it does not develop into citizenship education or a focus on global issues. I do understand it however as a consistent attempt to live up to the democratic ideal of participation and freedom of expression. I wonder if teachers underestimate children's ability to question and articulate concerns; particularly on global issues. Holden's own research demonstrates that children have a keen engagement with global issues (Holden 2007).

Before children use their voice they must trust that it will be heard and valued and that there is no expected right answer. They must also know that there will be consistent time allowed for the hearing of their ideas. In this regard Circle Time functions well in many classrooms. Teachers need to listen in a radically child-centred way, which, at times, will challenge their practice. The responses to Circle Time questions can function as an ongoing assessment of the concerns of children and can invite teachers into real dialogue.

Children need to experience active citizenship in schools, as schools may be their first meaningful encounter with democracy. Not all schools have a Student Council or Students' Union. More can be done to support school communities in this regard. The Green Schools project has demonstrated the capacity of students to assume leadership and responsibility. It has also demonstrated that students can use questionnaires and other research methods to make space for the opinions of their peers.

The classroom is not the only place where the voice of children can be heard. Dáil na nÓg (2010) is another conduit through which children's views are heard. The "Growing Up in Ireland" (2009) research is also instructive. Perhaps teachers have to engage more with social media to take the pulse of what is happening for children around the country.

We must acknowledge that in the school, teachers are in a position of power. Part of our reflective practice then has to involve an interrogation of how we use that power and how the effects of our actions open up space or close down space for children to tell us about their lives and their concerns.

A new place in Initial Teacher Education

I have suggested that we need a theory for SPHE; one that includes questions of personhood and identity, childhood, society and norms, relationships and justice. Those of us working in Teacher Education might link more with our colleagues in the foundation subjects of Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology, and History of Education in order to support a dialogue between theory and the lived experience of children. Such collaboration could deepen our reflections in SPHE, open up multiple perspectives and ultimately afford SPHE a greater status.

We could commit to transformative education in our own work with students, returning to Freire and continually invite our students to critical consciousness. We can keep a global focus in our work, as both NCCA (2008) and DES (2009) reports show that the Myself and the Wider World strand is neglected nationally in SPHE.

We can look at our own practices of power within teacher education and ask ourselves how often we radically consult our students. We can ask ourselves how we understand health in initial teacher education and how we are inviting students to co-create a health promoting college experience. Mindfulness and

meditation could be part of the journey in self-awareness. We need to consider how we explore substance use and sexual relationships in lectures as these are significant sites for decision making in students' own lives. Surely our colleges should aim to model the good practice we are asking students to develop in their own careers.

The SPHE network has developed a real collaboration across the providers of initial teacher education (ITE). While its brief is wider than ITE, it is a forum where ongoing reflection on ITE provision can be facilitated.

CONCLUSION LEARNING FROM THE BEES

There was a sense of possibility in Limerick in September 2012: a sense of community or emerging community. Let us nurture each other in that community.

Perhaps it could be understood as a complex adaptive system (see O'Beirne). It certainly has 'fuzzy boundaries'. A challenge would be to remain non-hierarchical and non-linear. Another would be to make community central to the operations of the colony and resist a focus on the individual. We will need to develop systems of communication and feedback so that we can continually learn and adapt to a changing environment. Perhaps the tensions and paradoxes we encounter could produce novel behaviour. We will survive by orientating ourselves to the future.

In his address to the conference the President of Mary Immaculate College, Professor Michael Hayes, left us with the words;

"I hope that you will leave this conference today as champions of SPHE."

In this article I have tried to imagine aspects of that task. I have suggested that we define SPHE assertively as transformative. I suggest we seek to raise its status. The same pupils who come to SPHE class in schools around the country are negotiating identity, friendships, stress, sexuality and prejudice on a day to day basis. I have suggested we embrace theory and unify the field yet commit to radically consulting our students and pupils. I argue for greater education and support for teachers on the ground.

Everyone who reads this volume will imagine something different. We can continue to share these imaginings. If the task seems daunting we might remember that there was a lot of commitment evident in Limerick in September 2012. We might also remember the words of Margaret Mead.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." ®

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