

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN AN IRISH
PRIMARY SCHOOL

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by

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July 2004

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Abstract

Human rights education in an Irish primary school

Colm Ó Cuanacháin

This thesis reports on an action research study conducted with teachers and pupils in one Irish primary school. It focuses on human rights education as a framework for a whole-school approach to participative learning that promotes citizenship, justice, and equality, in the classroom. As the principal teacher in the school, the author sought to develop a more effective, inclusive and democratic learning environment for children.

The study was a response to opportunities presented for human rights education both in international human rights law, and in the Irish primary school curriculum. The needs analysis generated research aims that focused on developing a human rights school, monitoring its impact, and evaluating the outcomes. The process included the development of policies, programmes, and methodologies to achieve the identified aims.

The change process ran over the course of one year, during which the children were engaged in participative learning about, in and for human rights. The praxis based implementation model involved a series of cumulative stages of action and reflection.

Monitoring and evaluation methodologies included questionnaire based longitudinal cohort studies, formal and semi-formal meetings, and the use of teachers' diaries. The resultant data was analysed and interpreted with the participants, and resulted in findings across four areas:

- The role and function of the school leadership in facilitating, and implementing a whole-school approach to human rights education.
- Aspects of the curriculum, and the hidden curriculum, including participation, time, and evaluation.
- Professional development, including pre-service, and in-service training.
- Behaviour, and the framework for accountability, decision-making, transparency, and responsibility in the school.

The resultant recommendations point to the need for the school partners to consolidate the human rights approach through the ongoing provision of resources and time to participative methodologies, and the responsibility on the Department of Education and Science to facilitate and support schools seeking to encourage democratic education.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the pupils who participated in my study for the energy and joy they brought to the research process in the school, and the way in which they demonstrated how human rights education provides a framework for learning.

I owe deep gratitude to the seven teachers that were part of the action research project. Their commitment to embrace and shape the study actively made this process possible.

The Board of Management of the school were supportive of the project from the outset. Together with the Parents' Committee they provided the affirmation and encouragement, which made the process more rewarding and productive throughout.

My thanks to Professor Audrey Osler, whose supervision of my work has been rigorous and rewarding. Thanks also to Barbara Hall for her support, and to all at the Centre for Citizenship Studies in the University of Leicester.

Lastly, sincere thanks to my wife and family, for their support throughout the process.

Abbreviations and acronyms

CDU	Curriculum Development Unit
CSPE	Civic, Social and Political Education
DES	Department of Education and Science
ECHR	European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
EU	European Union
HSN	Human Security Network
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent
MRBI	Market Research Bureau of Ireland
MUNGA	Model United Nations General Assembly
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RSE	Relationships and Sexuality Education
SPHE	Social, Personal, and Health Education
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Education Fund
UNHCHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

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Preface

This thesis reports on an action research study conducted in one Irish primary school. It focuses on human rights education as a framework for a whole-school approach to participative learning. The comprehensive study involved the design, planning, implementation and interpretation of a human rights education programme at all levels in the school. As the principal teacher in the school I sought to improve the learning environment for pupils by developing and implementing a more inclusive and democratic learning process, and believed that studying this change process through action research would add to the efficacy of the project.

Chapter one locates human rights education within international and European human rights law, and other provisions that have been agreed at inter-governmental level, together with a review of available relevant literature.

The second chapter examines the curriculum context of the Irish primary school system from the perspective of human rights education, including an analysis of relevant academic literature.

Chapter three outlines the context within which the study took place: the subject school, its history, and development. This is followed in chapter four by the research methodology employed, and a reflection on the ethical concerns encountered.

Chapter five reflects the outcomes of the consultations with the teachers and the pupils, which took place during the initial design and planning phases of the research.

Both chapter six, and chapter seven record and analyse the participative processes used to develop the whole-school human rights education policy and programme that were implemented in the school.

Chapter eight explains the processes that were developed to monitor the overall impact and effectiveness of the action research. This is followed in chapter nine by a

detailed report on the implementation phase of the project, drawing on the data generated from the records kept by teachers, reports from meetings, and an analysis of a longitudinal cohort study with pupils and teachers.

The final chapter sets out the findings of the study and the resultant recommendations.

A note on the Irish primary school system

The Irish primary or national school system accommodates children from the ages of four years old to approximately twelve years old, over eight academic years as follows:

Junior infants	Ages 4 to 5
Senior infants	Ages 5 to 6
First class	Ages 6 to 7
Second class	Ages 7 to 8
Third class	Ages 8 to 9
Fourth class	Ages 9 to 10
Fifth class	Ages 10 to 11
Sixth class	Ages 11 to 12

A note on the Irish language

The school within which this action research project took place is an Irish language immersion primary school, where subjects are taught through the medium of Irish, and all communication is in Irish. All questionnaires, interviews, policies, programmes, and other materials generated during the research were first written in Irish and appear here, or are referenced here, translated into English. A small number of Irish language words appear throughout the text, accompanied by explanations.

Chapter 1

Human rights education: the international and national contexts

Introduction

Ireland is no stranger to the abuse of human rights and the erosion of human dignity. Throughout the years of violence the seemingly endless reports of killings, maiming, so-called ‘punishment beatings’, sectarian boycotts, bigotry and intolerance became a tragic part of daily life. Bias and apathy sadly and progressively raised the threshold of acceptance to a level where bloodshed and suffering were almost viewed as part of normal everyday living in Ireland. The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement of 1998 brought a thankful end to the most horrific abuses of human rights, but the underlying discrimination, lack of respect, and intolerance continues.

There are other changes too. The traditional, rural and introspective structure of Irish society is changing apace, and in parallel many social indicators are in decline. Examples include the growing crime-rate, with serious crime increasing by 23 per cent in 2002 alone (Garda, 2003); homelessness has doubled since 1996 (Harvey, 2002); the prison population rose from 2054 to 3366 over the past ten years (International Centre for Prison Studies, 2004). Remarkably this erosion of the social fabric has taken place at a time when the economy has been booming, with an average annual growth in Gross National Product of 9.3 per cent for almost a decade from the early 1990s, and when unemployment fell from 17.4 per cent in 1986 to 3.9 per cent at the start of 2001 (O’Toole, 2003).

This thriving Irish economy has brought unprecedented wealth for many, and little or nothing for others. The so-called ‘Celtic Tiger’ is fertilising a bipolar society, with many doing very well economically juxtaposed with a generation of new poor. The

levels of relative poverty deteriorated over the course of the recent economic boom. In 1994, 17.4 per cent of Irish people were living on less than half the average income and this had risen to 20.9 per cent by the year 2000 (Nolan *et al.*, 2003). These strains on society are having an affect on the youth of the country. Schools are struggling to manage growing learning and discipline challenges, as the problems associated with emerging social issues, such as the rise in racism, spill over into the education system. In Ireland 62 per cent of young people (15-24 years) believe that the Irish are becoming more racist (Irish Times/MRBI, 2003).

The population of Ireland has grown over recent years to 3.917 million people, up from 3.626 million in 1996 (Central Statistics Office, 2003). It remains a relatively homogeneous country by European standards with 90 per cent of the population being Irish by birth, and an additional 5 per cent hailing from England or Wales. However, the growing number of asylum seekers and migrants arriving in Ireland over recent years is changing the socio-cultural landscape. The recently found economic wealth has been associated with an unsurprising, but yet unprecedented, change to social demographics in Ireland. By 2003 there were 277,600 foreign born people resident in Ireland of which 118,700 (or 3 per cent of the population) were born outside the EU, and approximately 40 per cent of them arrived over the past six years (Central Statistics Office, 2003). 5.4 per cent of all students attending primary schools (4,340) in Ireland in the year 2000/2001 were from outside Ireland. This is up from 4 per cent in 1996/1997. Furthermore, the challenges facing the 4,000 Irish Traveller families, as a result of the 'conflict of cultures' between the settled community and the Traveller community highlight the need for an intercultural approach in Irish classrooms (Mac Aongusa, 1995; O'Connell, 2002; Harvey, 2002):

School provision that grows from a proper awareness of cultural distinction would do much to encourage school attendance and school success by the Traveller (Ó Briain, 1988: 203).

These increasingly diverse cultural influences are forcing the Irish education system to recognise the need to promote human rights in our schools. Disappointingly, the Department of Education and Science has yet to generate educational policies or strategies that are inclusive of ethnic minorities in Ireland, while there is evidence that minorities continue to experience systemic alienation. For example Harvey (2002) records that while there were 6,000 Irish Traveller children attending primary school [ages 4-12], there were only 20 in university. The absence of a comprehensive dialogue between the Department of Education and Science and ethnic minority groups is prolonging the difficulties. While this unsatisfactory situation is not unique to Ireland (Osler and Starkey, 2001a) the opportunity now exists with the current consultations such as those on revised senior cycle curricula, and the Your Education System consultation (Department of Education and Science, 2004a), to redress the failings.

In the context of this national landscape, the glaring need for mechanisms to promote citizenship, understanding, respect, and the mutual interdependence of all humankind is obvious. This is formally acknowledged in the Irish Constitution:

The State shall strive to promote the welfare of the whole people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice and charity shall inform all the institutions of national life (Government of Ireland, 1937: Article 45.1).

The primary vehicle of promotion is education, and the primary vehicle of education is the formal state-run school system. So, it is to the State, the Department of Education and Science, and the teachers they employ, that we must turn, in the first instance, for the implementation of Article 45.1. Schools, as microcosms of society, should promote “a social order in which justice and charity shall inform all” aspects of school life. In this way the very justice and charity promoted through education, can actually serve to promote the value, worth and quality of schooling in turn. The process is cyclical.

Successful education results in empowerment, and to truly empower people they must understand their rights and corresponding duties. Thus, a cornerstone for the promotion of human rights is education, and a cornerstone of education must be human rights. Indeed human rights should underpin the school system as a whole (Perotti, 1994; Looney, 2000), and provide the values for the content, structure and process of all education (Lynch, 1992). So what are these human rights and what is human rights education?

The United Nations (UN)

International human rights law has emerged since the Second World War. In response to the atrocities that occurred between 1939 and 1945 the multi-lateral system of global dialogue was re-established, and it gave rise to an unprecedented level of international productivity in the area of law. The full extent of the obligations that the State has to promote, protect and fulfil human rights, is mapped out clearly in the relevant international instruments. Indeed these human rights instruments were devised with the input of Irish civil servants and politicians, and ratified by the Irish Government. Included are numerous declarations, conventions, resolutions and recommendations that emphasise the importance of human rights education. Perhaps the most significant of these instruments is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (UN, 1948), which was agreed in 1948. Thus, the definition and quantification of human rights, with a view to their promotion and protection, is a relatively new development in world affairs.

Ireland became an independent republic in 1948 and joined the UN on the 15th December 1955. In so doing the State ratified the UN Charter and the UDHR. Article 1 of the UN Charter includes promotion and encouragement of human rights, and fundamental freedoms for all, among the purposes of the UN (UN, 1946). In ratifying the UN Charter the fledgling Irish State was bearing international witness to the promotional role it had already been mandated to fulfil by the 1937 Constitution.

The UDHR places an onus on us all to strive through teaching and education to promote respect for the rights it enumerates. Furthermore, Article 26 asks that education be directed to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (UN, 1948). This is reinforced in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which states that “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” (UN, 1966: Article 13).

As early as 1968 the United Nations General Assembly resolved to request its members to take steps as appropriate, and according to the scholastic system of each state, to introduce or encourage the principles proclaimed in the UDHR and in other declarations (UN, 1989a).

The Irish government has ratified a number of other UN treaties that reflect the importance of promoting respect for human rights and an understanding of human responsibilities through education. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (UN, 1969), and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989b) (see table 1.1).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by Ireland on the 21st September 1992, makes two explicit statements regarding human rights education. Article 29(b), in which States Parties “agree that the education of the child shall be directed to the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”, and Article 42 where States Parties “undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike” (UN, 1989b). Articles 29 and 42 combine to make human rights education in itself a right for all (Osler *et al.*, 1996; Carter and Osler, 2000).

Ireland submitted its first periodic report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child under Article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1996. The report indicates that Ireland is committed to achieving the maximum protection possible for the rights of all children (Government of Ireland, 1996), but does not mention the obligations on the State in relation to the development of respect for human rights under Article 29(b). In their concluding observations on the report submitted by Ireland the Committee set out their concern that the Irish government is not doing enough to promote human rights education:

The Committee recommends that the State Party promote human rights education in the country and create a wider awareness and understanding of the principles and provisions of the Convention. The Committee also encourages the State Party in its current efforts to develop a systematic information campaign on children's rights for children and adults alike (Children's Rights Alliance, 1998: 33).

The most significant UN text to emerge in the 1990s was the Vienna Declaration of 1993, which was agreed by all States Parties to the World Conference on Human Rights, including Ireland. The Vienna Declaration is a major international achievement, given that there was much talk of the ideological divisions in relation to human rights globally before and during the conference. This reaffirmation of the founding principles of the UN, and the human rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in international law, by more than 180 governments, is a powerful and monumental statement. The Declaration dedicates an entire section to human rights education including:

78. The World Conference on Human Rights considers human rights education, training and public information essential for the promotion and achievement of stable and harmonious relations among communities and for fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and peace.

79. States should strive to eradicate illiteracy and should direct education towards the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The World Conference on Human Rights calls on all States and institutions to include human rights, humanitarian law, democracy and rule of law as subjects in the curricula of all learning institutions in formal and non-formal settings (UN, 1993: Part II, D).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), which Ireland joined in 1961, has a central role within the UN system for the promotion of citizenship studies and human rights education. UNESCO's 1974 Recommendation Concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace, and Education Relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, was the first significant attempt to embellish the principles relating to the promotion of human rights aspired to in the UDHR (Mertineit, 1984). The first guiding principle in the text asks that education be infused with the aims and purposes set forth in the Charter of the UN, the Constitution of UNESCO and the UDHR (UNESCO, 1974, III 3). It also presents a list of the objectives that should guide educational policy:

- (a) an international dimension and a global perspective in education at all levels and in all forms;
- (b) understanding and respect for all peoples, their cultures, civilisations, values and ways of life, including domestic ethnic cultures and cultures of other nations;
- (c) awareness of the increasing global interdependence between peoples and nations;
- (d) abilities to communicate with others;
- (e) awareness not only of the rights but the duties incumbent upon individuals, social groups and nations towards each other;
- (f) understanding of the necessity for international solidarity and co-operation;

(g) readiness on the part of the individual to participate in solving the problems of his community, his country and the world at large (UNESCO, 1974, III 4).

The recommendation goes on to say “that each Member State should formulate and apply national policies aimed at increasing the efficacy of education in all its forms and strengthening its contribution....to respect for and application of human rights and fundamental freedoms” (UNESCO, 1974, IV 7).

UNESCO’s International Congress on Education for Human Rights and Democracy held in Montreal in 1993, together with the outcomes of the Vienna World Conference, informed and guided the preparations for the UN General Assembly of 1993 where proposals for a UN decade for human rights education were considered. The General Assembly endorsed the World Plan of Action on Education for Human Rights and Democracy, which had previously been adopted by the UNESCO International Congress. In addition the General Assembly was informed by Commission on Human Rights resolution 1993/56 of the 9th March 1993, in which the Commission recommended that knowledge of human rights, both in its theoretical dimension and in its practical application, should be established as a priority in educational policies (Lawson, 1996).

The following year, 1994, UNESCO member states adopted a declaration to take steps to make educational institutions ideal places for the exercise of tolerance and respect for human rights (UNESCO, 1994). Later in 1994 the UN General Assembly proclaimed the UN Decade for Human Rights Education. As a result the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) elaborated a plan of action for the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (UN, 1996) which in Article 58 states that “every state will be requested to draw up a national plan of action for human rights education” containing “specific objectives, strategies and programmes”. There have also been a number of decisions of the Commission on Human Rights concerning the importance of human rights education and the Decade.

Within the Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004) each country has been called upon to elaborate and implement comprehensive (in terms of outreach), effective (in terms of educational strategies) and long-term sustainable national plans of action for human rights education. Those plans should address all levels of society, through formal and non-formal education and through specialised educational and training programmes for vulnerable persons, professional groups and others most likely to affect human rights advocacy as well as those entrusted with upholding human rights (UNHCHR, 2000: III.41).

The resolution also elaborates a life-long learning process, and gives a detailed definition and analysis of the contents and methods of human rights education. The UNHCHR also drew up UN guidelines for national plans of action for human rights education (UNHCHR, 1997).

The plan of action has five objectives:

- (a) The assessment of needs and formulation of strategies;
- (b) Building and strengthening human rights education programmes at the international, regional, national and local levels;
- (c) Developing educational materials;
- (d) Strengthening the role of mass media;
- (e) Global dissemination of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNCHR, 1997: 3).

National plans serve to:

- (a) Establish or strengthen national and local human rights institutions and organisations;

- (b) Initiate steps towards national programmes for the promotion and protection of human rights, as recommended by the World Conference on Human Rights;
- (c) Prevent human rights violations that result in ruinous human, social, cultural, environmental and economic costs;
- (d) Identify those people in society who are presently deprived of their full human rights and ensure that effective steps are taken to redress their situation;
- (e) Enable a comprehensive response to rapid social and economic changes that might otherwise result in chaos and dislocation;
- (f) Promote diversity of sources, approaches, methodologies and institutions in the field of human rights education;
- (g) Enhance opportunities for cooperation in human rights education activities among government agencies, non-governmental organisations, professional groups and other institutions of civil society;
- (h) Emphasize the role of human rights in national development;
- (i) Help governments meet their prior commitments to human rights education under international instruments and programmes, including the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993) and the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (UNHCHR, 1997: 6).

UNESCO put in place the Permanent System of Reporting on Education for Peace, Human Rights, Democracy, International Understanding and Tolerance to monitor state implementation of all the foregoing human rights education documents agreed at UN level including the Recommendation Concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace, and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (UNESCO, 1974); the World Plan of Action on Education for Human Rights and Democracy (UNESCO, 1993); and the Declaration and Programme of Action of the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights (UN, 1993). Only

24 of 185 member states responded to the first such survey carried out in 2001 (UNESCO, 2001).

UN treaty bodies¹ have declared that if persons are to seek protection of their own rights they must be aware of what constitutes these rights. As affirmed by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights during its day of public discussion on human rights education and public information activities relating to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1996), human rights education is itself a human right.

As the Decade for Human Rights Education draws to a close we face a world reality that is very different to the situation in 1993. The UN is facing an unprecedented threat to its legitimacy and with that its priorities are under scrutiny from member states. The optimism of the early 1990s, with peace processes from Korea to the Middle East, the excitement associated with the end of the Cold War, the dramatic resurgence of democracy in South Africa, and the successful Vienna conference have all but disappeared from the global view. The backlash against human rights in the name of security following the attacks on 11th September 2001 is dominating the international discourse, and national policy reforms. In parallel with the systematic attempt to undermine human rights and erode civil liberties through security legislation in many states, there is a concern that education in human rights and citizenship is being diluted, or fundamentally influenced to become more focussed on national values and identities.

In December 2002, with the intention of building on the work carried out during the period of the Decade for Human Rights Education, a resolution on the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UN, 2002). This, at least, is a positive signal that

¹ The seven treaty bodies are the UN committees charged with monitoring government implementation of UN treaties, such as the Committee on the Rights of the Child in respect of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

human rights education and human security will remain a global focus at some level for the coming years.

Human Security Network (HSN)

Ireland is a member of the Human Security Network, an informal intergovernmental network that aims to promote human security within the UN framework. The other network members are Austria, Canada, Chile, Greece, Jordan, Mali, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, South Africa (observer), Switzerland and Thailand. The HSN is guided by the UN Charter, and by international human rights law. As a multinational think tank operating at ministerial level it has produced a number of valuable publications and declarations, and while these are not binding, they are instructive, and reflect the governmental priorities of HSN member states.

The importance being attached to human rights education by the network is most encouraging. In the Graz Declaration on Principles of Human Rights Education and Human Security (HSN, 2003a: preamble), the members affirmed “that human rights education and learning is a collective responsibility of states, peoples, individuals and the various components of civil society.” The Declaration goes on to set out a series of principles of human rights education which were adopted including:

The right to know one’s rights

HSN members underscore the importance that every woman, man, youth and child has the right to know, understand and demand their human rights, which is part of the human dignity of each individual and which forms an important dimension of ensuring human security.

The HSN reaffirms that human rights education and learning is an imperative for the promotion and protection as well as the full enjoyment of all human rights (HSN, 2003a: Arts. 5-6).

The HSN published a manual on human rights education (HSN, 2003b: 15), which declares that, “through human rights learning a true culture of human rights can be developed, based on respect, protection, fulfillment, enforcement and practice of human rights”. By agreeing to these texts insofar as its commitment to the HSN goes, the Irish government appears to be anxious to fulfill its responsibilities regarding human rights education.

The European institutions

Ireland joined the Council of Europe, and signed the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) (Council of Europe, 1950) on 4th February 1953. While it was one of the very first countries to sign the ECHR, the Convention only entered into force in Ireland in 2003 (Government of Ireland, 2003). In the preamble the Irish State accepts its obligation to promote human rights:

[States reaffirm] their profound belief in those Fundamental Freedoms which are the foundation of justice and peace in the world and are best maintained on the one hand by an effective political democracy and on the other by a common understanding and observance of the human rights upon which they depend (Council of Europe, 1950).

The aims of the Council of Europe include the promotion of European unity, democracy, and human rights, and recognise that education is the most valuable tool available to achieve these aims. The Council is convinced that education can make a vital contribution to the protection of human rights (Stobart, 1991). It is not surprising therefore that many of the Council of Europe texts include references to the importance of human rights education.

Resolution (78) 41 on the Teaching of Human Rights of the Committee of Ministers recommends that governments take whatever measures are appropriate in the context of

their educational systems to ensure that the teaching of human rights and fundamental freedoms is given an appropriate place in curricula of teaching and training, initial and in-service, at all levels (Council of Europe, 1978). This was reinforced by the landmark Resolution (85) 7 on Teaching and Learning about Human Rights (Council of Europe, 1985; Starkey, 1991; Osler and Starkey, 1996):

Believing, therefore, that throughout their school career, all young people should learn about human rights as part of their preparation for life in a pluralistic democracy:

convinced that schools are communities which can and should be an example of respect for the dignity of the individual and for difference, for tolerance, and for equality of opportunity,

recommends that the governments of member states, having regard to their national education systems and to the legislative basis for them encourage teaching and learning about human rights in schools..... (Council of Europe, 1985)

This recommendation is followed by an appendix, which provides comprehensive suggestions for teaching and learning about human rights in schools. It presents a twin-track process where the skills, and the knowledge that are needed to develop a cognitive understanding of the fundamental principles of human rights can be imparted. This should be done in a democratic setting, which creates awareness and understanding through experience and ultimately results in praxis. This recommendation is a basic

Table 1.1

International human rights standards relating to human rights education

The Charter of the United Nations

Article 1 on the promotion and encouragement of human rights, and fundamental freedoms for all.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Article 26 That education be directed to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

International human rights treaties containing internationally recognised standards

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Article 13 Education shall strengthen the respect for human rights. E/1996/2 Human rights education is a human right.

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

Article 7 on teaching and education. General Recommendations V and XIII reaffirming Article 7.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

Article 10 on education. General Recommendation 3 on education.

Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Article 10 on education and information.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 19 on educational measures. Article 29(b) on education for human rights. Article 42 on making the convention widely known.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Preamble Obligation of states to promote human rights. General Comment 3 Individuals should know their rights.

Specific international declarations, recommendations and decisions

The Vienna Declaration

The World Conference on Human Rights considers human rights education, training and public information essential.

UNESCO recommendations concerning education for international understanding, co-operation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms

...that education be infused with the aims and purposes set forth in the Charter of the UN.

Plan of Action for the United Nations Decade for Human Rights education

each country has been called upon to elaborate and implement comprehensive, effective, and long-term sustainable national plans for human rights education.

European regional human rights treaties containing internationally recognised standards

European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

Recognition that education is the most valuable tool to promote human rights.

European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights

The rights and best interests of children should be promoted.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union

EU is founded on the principles of human rights, and it reaffirms the rights and duties set out in the ECHR.

Other international norms and agreements relating to human rights education

Human Security Network

Graz Declaration on Principles of Human Rights Education and Human Security.

Council of Europe

Resolution (78) 41 on the Teaching of Human Rights. Resolution (85) 7 on Teaching and Learning about Human Rights.

UNESCO

The World Plan of Action on Education for Human Rights and Democracy.

introduction to human rights education, and the Department of Education and Science should note that other European countries, such as France (Osler and Starkey, 1996) circulated the text to all teachers.

One final Council of Europe text that is relevant is the European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights, which was signed by Ireland on the 25th January 1996. The preamble reiterates that the rights and best interests of children should be promoted, and that children should be provided with relevant information to this end (Council of Europe, 1996). The Convention codifies the judicial rights of children, and acknowledges their rights as citizens participating in democratic societies:

The European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights....is based on the understanding that children should be respected as individuals and should be assigned a greater measure of autonomy in judicial proceedings affecting them (Jeleff, 1996: 77).

These texts illuminate the full importance of Resolution (85) 7, for it provides the basic framework for the implementation of these, and other important instruments devised by the Council of Europe.

In 1973 Ireland became a member state of the European Economic Community, which later became the European Union (EU). The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union (EU, 2000) sets out clearly that the EU is founded on the principles of human rights, and like the Maastricht Treaty (EU, 1992) and other EU treaties, it reaffirms the rights and duties set out in the ECHR, and that result from all relevant EU treaties.

Essentially the draft Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (EU, 2004: Title II, Art 1.7) includes recognition of the "rights, freedoms and principles set out in the Charter of Fundamental rights", and the entire text of the Charter has become Part II of

the EU Constitution. In addition the new Constitution accepts that the EU will accede to the ECHR.

What all of this means in practice is that Irish, and all EU citizens have the most robust and clearly established legal human rights protections at intergovernmental level available anywhere in the world, and there is a concomitant obligation on EU states to promote and protect these rights, and freedoms. To fulfil its duty to promote these rights the Irish government has an irrefutable responsibility to educate citizens that they may know and enjoy their rights.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

In addition to the comprehensive definitions of human rights education set out in these intergovernmental texts, significant work has been carried out by civil society groups to stimulate governments and political institutions to define and deliver their responsibilities regarding human rights education. Influential organisations such as *École Instrument de Paix*, and Amnesty International have been actively promoting and delivering human rights education for decades. Some of these groups have set out definitions of human rights education that are helpful, and concise, including:

Human rights education is the range of activities designed to enable individuals to acquire knowledge and understanding of:

human rights concepts and the underlying values and attitudes that lead to the respect for human rights

the instruments which record and protect human rights

the skills aimed at upholding human rights and fostering values and attitudes that uphold the same rights for all and encouraging action in defence of these rights (Amnesty International, 1996: 2).

Human rights education is the effort through the combination of content and processes, to develop in school students of all ages an understanding of their

rights and responsibilities, to sensitise them to the rights of others, and to encourage responsible action to safeguard the rights of all in school and in the wider world (Development Education Association, 1998).

The national outlook on human rights education

What is disappointing from an Irish perspective regarding the above is that Ireland is not among the countries that subscribed to UNESCO's Permanent System of Reporting on human rights education, and no national action plan for human rights education was ever drawn up or implemented in Ireland. There has been no communication between the Irish government and the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights (UNHCHR) on the proposed plan since 1998 (UNHCHR, 2004), when it submitted an advisory note to the UNHCHR on its activities for the UN Decade, in which we find commentary on development education, but not on human rights education.

These gaps reflect a lack of commitment in policy and practice to human rights education in Ireland by government. The opportunity to address these shortcomings, and to fulfil its multiple obligations on human rights education as set out in UN and European human rights instruments (above) has been presented to the government over the past ten years. During this period the Irish education system has been undergoing its most significant overhaul in 150 years. The Department of Education and Science has been steering a change process that has included a National Convention on Education (1993), a White Paper on Education (1995), the Education Act (1998), and revised curricula across all levels in the system. As one might expect, dimensions of human rights and citizenship studies can be found permeating all of these elements of the new-look education system.

Charting our Educational Future - The White Paper on Education clearly reflected the government's obligations to promote and protect fundamental human rights:

The State is obliged to protect and promote fundamental human and civil rights, in accordance with the Constitution, national law and relevant international conventions, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Government of Ireland, 1995: 4).

However, after opening with such a strong reference to human rights, it is puzzling to observe that there is no mention of specific goals, policies or plans to this end in the remainder of the 235-page document.

The Education Act, which was passed by government in 1998, placed Irish educational systems and structures on a statutory footing for the first time, yet it too fell short, with no mention of a human rights framework (Government of Ireland, 1998a). In the revised primary school curriculum the issues of relevance to primary education that emerged through the curriculum review processes are listed and include “pluralism, respect for diversity and the importance of tolerance” and “the function of the curriculum in contributing to equality and fairness of access to education” (Government of Ireland, 1999a: 9). These are just some examples of how citizenship and human rights are now seen as an important aspect of education in Ireland.

Despite these changes, there is currently no harmonised or integrated government educational framework that provides an overview of policy and procedures on citizenship and human rights education, or that actively promotes child participation. Education about citizenship does not necessarily transfer into a commitment to involving children as active citizens in their own education (Devine, 2003). The Equality Authority (2003) presented the challenges facing Irish schools including the accommodation of diversity and in helping children develop ideas and values, and it highlights the role of schools in helping students to understand the causes of inequality and empowering them to oppose these inequalities. However, initiatives relating to ethnic minorities, anti-racism, discrimination, and other issues of social justice in schools are sporadic, or are generally uncoordinated. The resultant contradictions and

inadequacies are stark and include all areas of schooling. For example, there is no policy to deal with institutional racism or even official acknowledgement of a problem in this regard.

Harvey (2002: 52) points out that “education for rights and justice remains poorly developed in schools.... As a result it is possible for most children to go through the Irish education system with little or no exposure to the experiences or points of view of, for example, Travellers, minorities or loyalists.”

While that is the case, there are positive trends that auger better for the future. The Department of Education and Science introduced a new course to the junior cycle of secondary schools [ages 12-15] in September 1996 following a nationwide pilot project. The course, entitled Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), “is a course in citizenship, based on human rights and social responsibilities [that] aims to develop active citizens” (Government of Ireland, 1998b: 5).

The programme covers four units: the individual and citizenship, the community, the State - Ireland, Ireland and the world. It envisages that teachers will use a thematic approach to the subject and explore given themes, including human rights across all of the units:

Civic, Social and Political Education aims to enable and empower students to become participative, aware and responsible citizens (Curriculum Development Unit, CDU, 2002a: 5).

The subject is assessed at the end of a three-year study programme on the basis of a written exam (40 per cent) and an action project (60 per cent). The projects are based on participation in some form of civic, social or political actions at school or community level (Hammond *et al.*, 2001).

Having completed the Junior Certificate examination after three years at post-primary school students generally move on to the Transition Year [ages 15-16], which is a programme that is more activity based and aimed at developing life-skills through use of non-traditional methodologies and curriculum content. Transition Year is seen as an opportunity to reinforce and build upon the main aim of CSPE, to develop active and participatory citizenship in pupils with regard to human rights and social responsibilities. Social justice in action is a central element to the Transition Year programme. Students can opt to work in the local community with a social justice project, or alternatively the programme could involve a year-long programme of events, talks, and/or projects on social justice and citizenship.

At post-primary senior cycle level [ages 16-18] the current Leaving Certificate curriculum includes citizenship education across a number of specific syllabi. This cross-curricular approach is often uncoordinated or incoherent. In the recently launched Home Economic, Social and Scientific syllabus, for example, there are strong elements of citizenship studies, with themes on home, family, environment, and global studies presented in an interdependent framework (Government of Ireland, 2001). The Leaving Certificate Applied Support Services have produced resources aimed at helping teachers to develop understanding of human rights (Curriculum Development Unit CDU, 2002b).

Importantly, a review of the current senior cycle programme is in train and a number of contributors, notably the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU, 2000a; Ward, 2002; Hammond, 2002) are making a strong case for a continuation of a dedicated syllabus on citizenship from junior cycle into the senior cycle.

Significantly, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) set out the directions for development of the senior cycle based on the feedback they received during the consultation process. In addition to envisioning a future scenario where school management, organisation and school/community linking is more participative,

and conducive to citizenship studies, the NCCA expect that “short courses in politics and society, media studies, social, personal and health education, and European and global studies” will be part of the programme (NCCA, 2003: 6).

Another example of a positive trend at national level is the investment in development education at all levels in the system. Development education in Ireland had its origins in the late 1960s (Hicks and Townley, 1982). The Department of Foreign Affairs introduced a grant scheme for development education in 1978, which continues to this day. The Department has a dedicated Development Education Unit that works in partnership with NGOs, academic institutions, and other bodies active in development education and related areas, including human rights education. Its mission statement is that:

Every person in Ireland will have access to educational opportunities to be aware of and understand their rights and responsibilities as global citizens and their potential to effect change for a more just and equal world (Ireland Aid, 2003: 12).

A review of the Irish primary school curriculum conducted in 1985 to identify the potential for development education activities in classrooms found that the curriculum allowed to a considerable extent, for the inclusion of a development education approach (Cremin, 1985). This led to the launch of the Primary School Development Education Project in 1987 in Mary Immaculate College, which resulted in the publication of *Ar scáth a chéile* (Uí Bhriain *et al.*, 1989) and *Team planet* (Horgan, 1992). The third phase of the project, which ran from 1992 - 1995, was focussed on lobbying for the inclusion of development education perspectives into the revised curricula at national level, and to facilitate whole-school implementation at local level (Trócaire, 1995). O’Leary (1995: 24) reported that: “the project, in promoting a new curricular theme, was essentially an innovation in the primary school. As such it became part of the wider field of curriculum innovation and change.” In 1999 the project published The

world in the classroom (Ruane *et al.*, 1999) and the project remains at the forefront of development education in Ireland to this day.

Ireland's first report under the Convention on the Rights of the Child reflects the increasing interest in development education in this country:

In primary schools development education is accorded high priority. Teachers seek to cultivate attitudes of understanding and appreciation of how people live in the world today. This is being done in a formal way in religion, geography and history classes and in an informal way when dealing with current affairs issues (Government of Ireland, 1996: 88).

Development issues are human rights issues and vice versa. Themes such as housing, education, employment, and health care are human rights issues and development issues. Concepts, such as justice, equality, freedom, tolerance, interdependence, and universality are fundamental to both human rights education and development education. The struggle for development goes hand-in-hand with the struggle for human rights. Many of the themes and issues are similar and, significantly, the methodologies needed for effective development education and human rights education are identical. The attitudes and skills that are promoted in development education, human rights education, or citizenship education are the same. Hammond (1991) crystallises the interdependence:

All are forms of education which seek to be affective. The sum of their parts (the information and skills taught, concepts imparted, attitudes encouraged) should be greater than the parts themselves and produce a student affected by what they have learned. These are educations seeking to maximise the autonomous potential of students, enabling them to examine, evaluate, appreciate, criticise constructively, see, decide, judge (Hammond, 1991: 6).

Undoubtedly the evolution of development education within the Irish education system contributed in no small way to the inclusion of human rights education within the primary school system, as we will see in the next chapter.

Summary

It is recognised that a multiplicity of treaties, resolutions and binding international instruments on human rights education supported by Ireland exists. The State is committed to educating citizens about their rights, but this obligation contrasts with the absence of an official advocacy and support structure for human rights education in schools. This is changing however with the emergence of new policies and curricula in the formal school system over recent years. The increasing accommodation of development education within the education system at all levels is a good example of how progress is being made with the introduction of education aimed at stimulating attitudes and skills that are informed by a human rights approach in young people.

Chapter 2

Human rights education and the Irish primary school curriculum

Introduction

The national and international perspectives regarding human rights education, and their applicability to the Irish primary school system, were explored in chapter one. The various international instruments that are binding on the Irish State were detailed, together with an analysis of how recent curriculum change initiatives are creating an opportunity to expand human rights education in the school system. Chapter one concluded with an overview of how the expanding influence of development education has generated curriculum and school management experience that is applicable to human rights education in an Irish primary school.

This chapter will provide a detailed critique of the Irish primary school curriculum, and a thorough examination of the areas within which human rights education could flourish. It outlines why children's rights provide an educational framework through which both affective and effective learning approaches can thrive, and why human rights education should be an essential part of the methodology and content of any school curriculum. Drawing on the available research the chapter will argue that participative learning processes provide the most appropriate educational environment for children.

Human rights education

We have seen in chapter one that human rights education, and the rights of the child are enshrined in international law, and the manner in which these obligations are reflected at national level was discussed. But the question remains as to why human rights might be important to education? The fact that international treaties say that children have a

right to know their rights is probably not enough to convince educators to embrace the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Human rights have enormous potential for education generally (Lister, 1991a). It is equally true to say that education has enormous potential for human rights. Best (1991: 120) argues that “defending and promoting human rights is largely a matter of education.” Similarly (Lynch, 1992) asserts that rights inform the aims of education. This reciprocity between education and human rights is the determining factor behind my study. Davies (1994) effectively summarises the case for human rights education in the formal school system:

If children and adults do not learn in the formal education process directly and accurately about their and others’ rights, when will they? Chance and experience would seem inadequate or randomised (Davies, 1994: 111).

Ó Dálaigh (2000) argues that educators must look at how best to address the needs of students to engage with their real lives and that this is best facilitated in a school where human rights are respected. Such inclusive schools are characterized by respect and justice for individuals, and this in turn gives rise to a sense of security wherein pupils can work for their own good and the good of the school (Carter and Osler, 2000).

As children are taught about human rights violations in an historical, social or political context, across a range of curriculum subject areas, their learning is not only cognitive. Rather, the affective and cognitive learning are inextricably linked (Shafer, 1987), and the challenge to educators is how to structure learning processes to both facilitate and harness the affective or moral dimensions to education.

A comprehensive and holistic response to this analysis requires that human rights underpin a process of teaching and learning in, for and about human rights, across the school (Heater, 1984; Lister, 1984), and that concepts such as identity, loyalty, freedom,

rights, duties, justice and social justice be introduced to pupils (Heater, 1990). The experiences from schools that have adopted this approach and introduced whole-school human rights education processes show that participative approaches lead to improvements in conduct, performance, relationships and other variables across school life (Cunningham, 1991; Alderson, 2000).

Contributors to a study conducted by Trafford (1997: 71) recorded “an overwhelming feeling that the school is more democratic and that it is better” as a result of the democratic changes introduced, including a student council. Proponents of human rights education argue that children are more confident, happier, and have a stronger sense of self-esteem, when educated in a participative and democratic environment. Alderson (1997) describes how a holistic approach to schooling in a participative and just way changed one school from a violent and fearful place, to a safe and secure one, with a parallel transformation in the performance and academic achievements of the pupils.

Osler (2000) illustrates that pupils themselves can identify direct links between their behaviour and performance on the one hand, and the manner in which teachers relate to them on the other. When asked how to improve discipline in the school the pupils asked for higher standards of justice, equity and participation. Without explicitly saying so, and perhaps even without the language to explain it, the pupils were asking for a human rights school.

In a report commissioned by the Minister for Education and Science, Martin (1997) argues that the consideration of discipline in schools must go beyond behaviourism and issues of control. She suggests that issues of school organisation, curriculum pedagogy, and respect are the determining factors to the educational environment. A participatory approach that builds on students’ interests and elicits their commitment to learning is one that is democratic, rather than disciplinary (Gutmann, 1987).

Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees the right to protection from violence, injury and abuse. Schools are responsible for the security of the children, and a protected environment and atmosphere will engender a spirit of learning and growth. Schools must put in place the affective and structural approaches to protect their members (Osler and Starkey, 1998). Young people see discipline as closely linked to pupil-teacher relationships, to school structures, and to issues of participation (Osler, 1997a). Indeed there is a duty on schools to ensure that their policies and procedures in relation to conduct accord pupils the same standard of justice and fairness that they are entitled to expect from the community:

Schools are justice systems in their own right, and where teachers are the legislature and at the same time judge, jury and executioner the potential for injustice is heightened (Rowe, 1992a: 61).

The Convention provides both the rationale and the framework for the human rights school (Osler, 1994; Williamson, 1997; Osler and Starkey, 1998; Carter and Osler, 2000). For children to have respect for rights, their own and others, they must first know and understand them. There must be opportunities in the education system for children to learn about, in and for human rights. In this way the enormous potential of human rights can be realized.

As we saw in chapter one, schools clearly have an important role to play in the process of disseminating the principles and provisions of the Convention. As Osler and Starkey (1998: 313) argue, “they can do this not only by educating children about their rights as part of the formal school curriculum, but also by establishing themselves as model human rights communities”:

Education for human rights and democracy in the last analysis means the empowerment of each and every individual to participate with an active sense of responsibility in all aspects of political and social life (Osler, 1995: 13).

In Ireland, as in many countries, the government falls short of its requirements in this area. One conclusion of a significant report by the Children's Rights Alliance highlighted the situation:

There are no overall public mechanisms for the promotion of the rights of children generally...for instance, ensuring that the views of children are heard in the education system (Cousins, 1996: 69).

In Ireland's first national report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child there is a short paragraph reporting on the implementation of Article 42 (Government of Ireland, 1996: 14), which indicates that copies of the Convention were sent to every school in the country. However, in response the Committee criticized the government for not doing enough to promote children's rights (Children's Rights Alliance, 1998).

There has been a marked increase in the level of activity among NGOs seeking to distribute and promote the Convention. Both UNICEF Ireland (1998) and The Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (1997) produced excellent materials and issued them to every school in the country. Both organisations ran publicity campaigns and produced booklets and posters in the run up to the tenth anniversary of the Convention in 1999. Teaching manuals such as the *The Rights Stuff* (Quigley and Kelly, 1998) are designed specifically for the Irish primary school curriculum. In addition the Children's Rights Alliance have increased their human rights education activities on the Convention. These materials have proved invaluable when teaching about the Convention. All of these resources served to inform the programme.

Democratic education

Harber (1995a) spurns any suggestion that primary school children are too young to be exposed to education for democracy:

The argument that pupils of primary school age are too young to be involved in democratic participation at school misses the key point that the reason for involvement is the importance of beginning to learn democratic values and skills through experience (Harber, 1995a: 20).

Brown (1995: 62-3) develops this further with the observation that children in a democratic classroom “would develop a sense of responsibility for their own learning, and more importantly they would be responsible for each other’s learning”. McAuley and Brattman (2002) argue that consultation and the right to be heard are central to an environment where children are encouraged and facilitated in their development.

Democracy is central to human rights and citizenship. It is the system of participative interaction within which the concepts of justice and equality that underpin human rights can flourish. Democratic education is built on the values and principles of human rights and responsibilities. Education in democracy and through democracy is education in human rights:

Basic rights and fundamental freedoms are one of the twin notions on which human rights are built. The other notion is fair treatment and due process. These procedural values of human rights overlap with the procedural values of democratic education – freedom, toleration, fairness, and respect for reasoning (Lister, 1991b: 141).

That democratic learning is the core of a school system which promotes human rights, and that it must be experiential if it is to have meaning, are understood in the revised primary curriculum:

Concepts of democracy, justice and inclusiveness are nurtured through learning experiences offered and through the attitudes and practices inherent in the organisational structures of the class and the school (Government of Ireland, 1999a: 57).

To give effect to this emphasis the importance of developing democratic processes as part of school planning is highlighted in the curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b).

This “democratic conception in education” draws on the writing of John Dewey (1916: 81) who proposed that in a truly democratic society schools must be democratic. It is not enough to teach about democracy but we have to teach democratically, in democratically managed schools. To learn about democracy through participation, for example through school councils, is to learn about rights and responsibilities through experience. Democracy, like human rights, is not just about knowledge and information. It is about attitudes and values, and has to be experienced to be understood. It cannot be learned in a hierarchical and autocratic teaching environment, but rather it will thrive in a democratic environment (Council of Europe, 1985; Williams, 1989; Kelly, 1995).

Research into the effectiveness of school councils confirms that democracy is best learned in a whole-school democratic setting (Inman and Burke, 2002). An increasing number of secondary schools have been developing school councils since the publication of the Education Act (1998), which obliged secondary schools to encourage the establishment of student councils:

Article 27(3) Students of a post-primary school may establish a student council and ...a board of a post-primary school shall encourage the establishment by students of a student council and shall facilitate and give all reasonable assistance to (a) students who wish to establish a student council, and (b) student councils that have been established (Government of Ireland 1998a: 26).

However, the Education Act does not call for such structures at primary level, but states that "...procedures...shall facilitate the involvement of the students in the operation of the school, having regard to the age and experience of the students.." (Government of Ireland 1998a: 27). Accordingly, and not surprisingly, at that time there was only one recorded example of a functioning school council in a primary school in this country (Irish Times, 19th May 1998). The project involved parents, teachers and pupils and it succeeded in formally integrating the views of children with the decision-making processes in the school. According to one child:

Students feel more comfortable speaking about things because of the council, and it gives us a way of bringing up problems. We want to make the school a better place for everyone, so everybody has to have a say (Irish Times, 19th May 1998).

The role and function of school councils as vehicles for the promotion of democracy and participation are well documented (Cunningham, 1991; McLoughlin, 2002). They play "an effective role in promoting a maximalist model of citizenship" (Inman and Burke, 2002: 70).

Harber (1995b: 7) berates the authoritarian style of education as "an education in domination and submission, not one of enquiry and independent critical thought". The dated notions of the all-knowing teacher as transmitter of knowledge, the all-powerful principal as supreme commander, and the authority-centred school administrative systems are outmoded.

To evolve away from this traditional model, the promotion of democratic education requires a multi-pronged strategy. Firstly, the curriculum must emphasise human rights education and, more importantly, promote an inclusive democratic style of learning. Secondly, the school must be organised and managed in a democratic way, as a human rights school. Thirdly, the 'hidden curriculum' wherein the culture and ethos of the school are sustained, must become overtly stated, and transparent.

1) The primary school curriculum and education for democracy

Kelly (1995) stresses the need to shift away from the view of the curriculum as a body of knowledge that must be imparted to all children. Rather it must focus on the way we teach, the experiences we create for young people, the principles upon which we relate to students, and not just what we teach:

In essence ... we must conceptualise curriculum as process rather than as content and education as development rather than as the assimilation of knowledge (Kelly, 1995: 108).

The human rights friendly teacher in Ireland can take heart as the revised primary school curriculum heralds the reconceptualisation that Kelly calls for. The curriculum encourages democratic learning, sets out expectations in relation to democratic planning, and provides the scope to facilitate educational processes about, in and for human rights:

Experiencing the democratic process in action at school and in the community can help children to develop an understanding of democracy and how it is practiced in everyday life (Government of Ireland, 1999b: 3).

2) Democratic management and organisation

Schools are partnerships. Pupils, parents, teachers, classroom assistants, board members, patrons, administrative staff, and the community are working together to the same end - the provision of the best education possible for the children. For a school to fulfill its responsibilities to promote human rights and citizenship it is necessary to adopt partnership approaches (Brown, 2000). If school authorities are to take the partnership model seriously then inclusive management systems based on communication and consultation are more conducive to the successful organisation of the school. Trying to run a partnership in an autocratic way simply can't work. Williams (1989: 75) argues "that where school management does not admit to democratic control, the educational enterprise is more likely to be frustrated and subverted."

Harber (1992) contends that rules are better kept, communication improves, the sense of responsibility increases, and decision-making is improved, in schools that promote democracy and participation. A range of democratic systems that can be put in place for the various education partners is listed in table 2.1. A number of these suggestions might be unrealistic aspirations for some schools, but any system that introduces the democratic ground rules of consultation and consensus for the entire school community will be taking steps in the right direction. The commitment to listen to children through democratic processes such as these is set out in the National Children's Strategy (Department of Health and Children, 2000) further demonstrating formal government recognition of the need for inclusive systems in schools.

Table 2.1

Organisational systems that are being used to promote participation in schools

<u>Children</u>	<p>Classroom charter or contract</p> <p>School charter</p> <p>Class courts</p> <p>School council</p> <p>Class committees</p> <p>Suggestion box</p> <p>Rules agreed with children</p> <p>Participative methodologies</p>
<u>Parents</u>	<p>Democratically elected parents committee</p> <p>Written policy on parental involvement</p> <p>Parents' room in the school</p> <p>Regular parent/teacher meetings</p> <p>Parents involved in classroom activities</p> <p>Sharing the school plan with parents</p> <p>Newsletter for parents</p>
<u>Teachers</u>	<p>Collective management model</p> <p>Delegation of responsibilities</p> <p>Emphasis on participation in school planning</p> <p>Regular staff meetings which anyone can call and where responsibilities rotate</p> <p>Effective internal communication systems</p> <p>Transparent feedback system</p>
<u>Board of Management</u>	<p>Democratically elected</p> <p>Open meetings</p> <p>Regular meetings</p> <p>Effective communication of decisions with appeals process</p> <p>Regular consultations with staff and parents</p> <p>Collective management</p> <p>Regular review and evaluation</p>

3) The 'hidden curriculum' and the democratisation of schooling

Teachers have become increasingly aware of the hidden curriculum, and the values, messages, and understandings imparted to children through tacit rather than public processes (Cremin, 1993). There are linkages between the school ethos that is experienced in this way by children, and human rights (Cunningham, 1992)

The organisation of the school, including processes and practices relating to discipline, communication, relationships, management and much more, shapes the education provided to children. Yet these practices are largely implicit and inferred, and socialized into the school's working methods and procedures in a way that goes unquestioned. The institutional education systems, often based on powerful myths (Macpherson, 1995), can be inert and fixed to a point where they become the very antithesis of creative learning for life. Institutional discrimination is often so pervasive, historically reinforced, and common that even those experiencing it may not be fully aware of how it operates (Taran and Gachter, 2003).

Teachers' own value judgements about social relationships and society, and issues such as obedience, authority, fairness, hierarchy, equality, relations between the sexes, and so on, are often implicit and unacknowledged. Yet their treatment of individual pupils is heavily dependent on these value judgements (Hargreaves *et al.*, 1988). These formative yet covert institutional dimensions to learning are part of the influence that shapes the experiences and lives of people. In this way schools inculcate the accepted "moral-social code" (Williams and Rennie, 1970: 160) in pupils.

Transparency is a cornerstone of a human rights based approach, and it challenges educators to be more open, expressive, and critical in analyzing and implementing their classroom management processes. If they are not, these hidden yet determining forces, risk contradicting and undermining any messages on children's rights being imparted through the formal school curriculum (Osler and Starkey, 1998).

Encouragingly, these processes are becoming more open. Schools are now required to draw up a code of conduct and a policy to counter bullying, with the involvement of all the school partners. This obligation is undoubtedly encouraging greater conscious consideration of positive classroom management techniques and teaching in human rights. This has resulted in a palpable shift in favour of the “just school” (Lynch and Smalley, 1991: 98) where children’s opinions are respected, and where responsible behaviour is encouraged.

Ginnis and Trafford (1995) caution that it is not enough to create democratic structures without empowering attitudes and skills. Pupils, parents and to some extent teachers and board members, have traditionally been disenfranchised from democratic control of their school. Most of the school related experiences they had as young people will probably have been undemocratic. Indeed, a significant challenge to the development of the democratic role of parents in the school is, ironically, the dearth of understanding and interest in democracy amongst them. Of course one reason for this is the lack of exposure to democratic education in their own childhood, and the resultant social conditioning to expect, nay demand, that schools retain an authoritarian structure.

To break this cycle schools must heed the directions in the revised curriculum and ensure that the democratic structures and tools put in place, become meaningful stimulants to school life with an impact on the school community, and the school ethos.

The Irish primary school curriculum

The curricula at primary [ages 4-12], and post primary junior cycle [ages 12-15] have been revised considerably over recent years (see chapter one), while the post primary senior cycle [ages 15-18] programme is currently being revamped. This review has been stewarded by the governmental NCCA. The curriculum reform processes adopted by the NCCA and the output it has generated have been very encouraging for educators

dedicated to participative learning and citizenship studies. Notably the Chief Executive of the NCCA, Anne Looney, set out a robust understanding of human rights education:

..the stratification of knowledge within the curriculum creates abstractions and compartmentalisation which inevitably favour certain sectors of the population. Add to this an assessment system which supports this stratification of knowledge, and curriculum becomes not a site for human rights education but a source of human rights concern. Equality is not possible when knowledge is this stratified (Looney, 2000: 20).

The NCCA has consistently sought to design curricula through processes of wide and in-depth consultation with all stakeholders, generating content that is integrated and a holistic structure where the methodological, management and structural dimensions to schooling are interdependent. The work of Lister (1984) has informed an approach to education in, for and through rights that has found its way in to some aspects of the revised Irish curricula. Any Irish educator seeking to implement this method in an Irish classroom would find ample scope in the current curricula.

The revised primary school curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999a) is based on the 1971 primary school curriculum. The 1971 curriculum defined civics as a stand-alone subject, within which issues relating to citizenship and human rights could be advanced. One exemplary feature of the 1971 curriculum was the high degree of autonomy that the teacher retained:

The various syllabuses have been so drafted as to allow the greatest degree of flexibility in selecting the programmes most suitable and feasible for each school, and perhaps, for each pupil (Department of Education, 1971, part 1: 20).

The 1971 curriculum pointed to general aims and objectives, and gave suggestions for classroom work, while teachers were expected to mould and shape these suggestions to

suit their skills, the needs of the class, the resources in hand, and many other variables, with the ultimate aim of providing the most creative and beneficial learning experiences possible. In general, teachers were encouraged to integrate civics lessons into other subjects such as language classes or geography, particularly with younger children. This overall approach was retained in the revised curriculum of 1999.

This sounds like a perfect atmosphere for the promotion of human rights education, and indeed any progress made in the primary school system, through development education for example, is a result of such an enlightened construction of the 1971 curriculum. However, in reality teachers tended to rely heavily on textbooks, and the concept of integration was not exploited to the full. This was unsurprising given that teachers received little or no in-service support or training in the years between 1971 and the late 1990s. As a result civics tended to be sidelined, particularly since it was only timetabled for one hour per week, and given the enormous breadth of the subject, no formal texts were prepared, and no formal course was laid down. So, the very advantage of having the freedom to cover a varied ambit of issues may have turned into a disadvantage. The result was that civics floundered somewhat and human rights education never took hold.

The report of the review body on the primary school curriculum, which was a guiding source of information for those drafting the revised curriculum, noted that:

There is a need to think of new ways of bringing about the desired outcomes, at a time when there is a great need to promote positive civic attitudes including the concept of civic responsibility (NCCA, 1990: 58).

The revised primary school curriculum aims “to enable children to develop an appreciation of civic responsibility” (Government of Ireland, 1999a: 34). It includes social, personal and health education (SPHE) as the core subject area through which citizenship is driven in the primary school.

The SPHE curriculum fosters in children respect for their own dignity and that of others and promotes a healthy lifestyle and a commitment to the democratic process (NCCA, 1998). Teachers involved in drafting the programme described it thus:

Social, personal and health education is concerned with a number of interrelated human qualities....These qualities are life-enhancing, prosocial, promote a healthy lifestyle, are respectful of human dignity and diversity and foster the democratic way of life. As children develop these qualities they are given a foundation of values, attitudes, skills and understandings about themselves, other people and the society in which they live (Kavanagh and Sheils, 1997: 71).

A particular feature of the curriculum is the importance it places on the concept of interdependence of individuals, groups, and peoples. In the context of social, economic, cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, it seeks to foster in the child attitudes and behaviour that are characterised by understanding, empathy, and mutual respect. It addresses, too, the issues of equity and human rights, and fosters in the child the realisation that rights have associated responsibilities (Government of Ireland, 1999a).

SPHE provides opportunities to help the child become “an active and responsible citizen” through a “framework of values, attitudes, understanding and skills” (Government of Ireland, 1999b: 2). It includes a unit on developing citizenship where children “learn about individual and group rights and responsibilities, particularly in the context of their school and local community” (Government of Ireland, 1999b: 17). The revised curriculum was introduced on a phased basis, and SPHE came on stream for the 2003/2004 school year.

SPHE is supported by in-service training, teacher guidelines, and full-time staff development teams (Government of Ireland, 2004). There are ten support staff in the team providing training and mentoring services for teachers. Clearly with 3,157

primary schools (DES, 2004b), and more than 20,000 teachers in the system, and given that the team is supporting the entire SPHE programme, it is obvious that the in-service support is inadequate, all the more so given that this is a new subject that makes new demands of teachers.

Pre-service training has been almost non-existent to date, though the rollout of the new SPHE curriculum in schools from 2003 should drive the teacher-training colleges to provide pre-service training in human rights and citizenship for the future. For example, a new initiative, the Development and Intercultural Education project, launched in 2003, aims to incorporate development and intercultural education into undergraduate teacher training at primary level.

The churches and school management

Democratic structures include school governance and management systems, which in turn define the school ethos, and all of which are, as we have seen, intrinsically linked to human rights education. The Irish primary school system is church managed, church owned and denominational in nature, with the notable exceptions of the multi-denominational Educate Together schools and some of the newer *gaelscoileanna*².

The system allows for primary schools to be established by a patron, understood to be a church leader such as a bishop. The patron is endowed with the responsibility for managing the school, including an influential role in the appointment of board members³, setting up interview panels, and the sanctioning of appointments.

² There are currently 149 *gaelscoileanna*, Irish language immersion primary schools, in the country. *Gaelscoileanna* established before 1993 come under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Church. Schools established since then have opted for independent patronage with a multi-denominational, inter-denominational, or denominational ethos.

³ Boards of management consist of two nominees of the patron; two teachers, the principal and an elected staff representative, both of whom effectively represent the patron as employees; two parents' representatives elected democratically; and these six people jointly appoint two other agreed candidates to make a total of eight. The patron appoints the chair, and patron's nominees can veto candidates for the two additional positions.

Educational establishments are built with taxpayers' money, usually on a site that is owned by the relevant church. The title for the property, on which schools have been built, is held by the patron who appoints trustees on behalf of the church. Thus schools are effectively owned by the churches:

The structure of the education system in the Republic of Ireland is unique among the countries of the European Union. At primary level, all schools are privately owned and publicly funded. The majority of these schools are owned and controlled by the churches (Hyland, 1996: 1).

There are 3,157 primary schools in Ireland, the vast majority of which are Roman Catholic, 190 are Church of Ireland (Anglican), 18 Presbyterian, one Methodist, one Jewish, and one Muslim. The fascinating aspect of this highly denominational structure is that the national or primary school system was set up in 1831 with an objective "to unite in one system children of different creeds" (Hyland, 1989: 89). The express intention of the Whig government at the time was that primary education would incorporate children of all denominations (Maddock, 1988). However, the main Christian Churches decided against establishing schools in partnership, with the result that by the mid-nineteenth century only 4 per cent of primary schools were under mixed management. Provision was never made for a separate system controlled by the local authorities, largely because the Powis Commission concluded in 1870 that voluntary effort had adequately met the demand for elementary education in this country (Hyland, 1989).

In the Irish Constitution *de facto* denominational status was granted to the national school system (Maddock, 1988) by supporting, albeit ambiguously, the denominational character of the primary school system in Article 42.1 in which the State guarantees the right of parents to provide for the religious education of their children (Government of Ireland, 1937). Whyte (1992) points out that the Constitution was drafted at a time when there was little or no demand for non-denominational education. He contends

that the provisions in Article 42 reflected Roman Catholic social teaching by enshrining a principle of parental supremacy in respect of the education of children. Libreri (1989) also reflects this:

It is in the area of parents' rights that we find an apparent justification for State supported denominational schooling: parents, as the primary educators of their children, have a right to provide for their children's religious education in accordance with their own beliefs and the provision of church schools is seen to be facilitating the exercise of this right (Libreri, 1989: 115).

The constitutional ambiguity is reflected by Whyte (1992: 94) when he outlines the internal tension within the Constitution "with some provisions justifying State support for denominational education while others point towards a policy of State neutrality towards the financing of religion generally". Article 44.2.2, "The State guarantees not to endow any religion" (Constitution of Ireland, 1937) is the clearest statement in this regard.

Libreri (1989) contests this system where the religious ethos of the school, the religious education taught in the school, and all the structures associated with the school are focussed on one denomination. She argues that denominational education, by definition, undermines the child's deferred rights by constraining the young person's capacity to develop rational thought and independent action.

Educate Together was established in 1978 to promote multi-denominational education in a democratic system at primary school level. The first multi-denominational primary school was established in Dalkey, near Dublin, in 1978 (Hyland, 1993). Since then the organisation has grown substantially, and there are now 31 multi-denominational schools throughout the country. Educate Together has a full time secretariat which aims to further develop and expand the movement in the Republic of Ireland. All Educate Together schools subscribe to four fundamental principles; the schools are

multi-denominational, child-centred, co-educational, and democratic. The patron body⁴ of the school is a democratically elected group that is normally made up of parents. Similarly, the Board of Management is elected, and there is a democratically elected parents' committee. Through their organisational and management policies, and their religious education curricula, the Educate Together schools seek to provide education in and for human rights.

The Education Bill (Government of Ireland, 1997) was heralded as a flagship of change and renewal in the educational system by the then Minister for Education, however she found it necessary to caution that "the process of defining rights, roles and responsibilities of all the partners in education is not an easy task" (Bhreathnach, 1997: 3). She was referring to the legal quagmire of constitutional challenges and objections which had befallen the Bill as the churches, in an unprecedented show of unity, lined up to condemn aspects of the Bill. In the event the Bill was challenged by the President and was found to be unconstitutional.⁵

In the final analysis a completely redrafted Bill was passed into law as the Education Act 1998 by the succeeding government. The Act made no challenge to the status quo in relation to school management. Despite the slow emergence of the multi-denominational school sector, there is little to indicate that the denominational nature of the national school system will change in the foreseeable future.

Religious education

In keeping with the denominational structure of the school system, all primary schools in the Republic of Ireland, including multi-denominational schools, are obliged to teach religious education, and the Department of Education and Science allocates two and half hours per week for religious education (Department of Education, 1965;

⁴ In the case of multi-denominational schools a democratically elected body takes on the role of patron. The functions of the patron relate mainly to trusteeship, approval of appointments, and the regulation of the school ethos.

Government of Ireland, 1999a). Churches devise their own curricula, and have their own systems for inspecting pupil performance and achievement in religious education. Moreover, the relevant religious ethos permeates the school life. Thus it is very difficult to facilitate parents who wish to exercise their constitutional right to withdraw their children from religious education.

Ray (1994) reminds us of the importance that religious obligations and systems of rights had as foundations of the international instruments developed by the UN. Watson (1993) presents an understanding of religious education that is in keeping with the development of broadminded, critical, and considerate young people. Williams (1992: 56) goes further and argues that “no subject is more likely to contribute to the humane, spiritual and civilizing characteristic” of liberal education. A significant proportion of Irish primary school teachers would identify with this thinking as they seek to facilitate broadminded and holistic life experiences for children through religious education. Indeed Davies (2000) recognizes the importance accorded to human rights education in Ireland in the context of the values promoted by teachers within religious education. There are good examples of strategies where the Roman Catholic Church, for example, is seeking to make these links through the facilitation of human rights education within religious education (Trócaire, 1997).

However, almost all Irish primary school teachers have a contractual responsibility to teach religion, they all graduated from denominational teacher training colleges, and the vast majority of them work in denominational schools. Thus, contrary to Watson’s aspiration, they certainly find themselves in a position where they are telling young people what to believe, and there is at least the fear that the subject is far more conservative than it is liberal. The key question that this presents is whether a denominational school with denominational religious education can be compatible with the cultivation of a democratic human rights school? Kelly (1995: 178) thinks not:

⁵ The Bill was rejected by the Supreme Court due to inequities in relation to people with disabilities.

... a curriculum which offers knowledge as dogma and discourages challenge to what is offered will have the effect of eroding democratic values, since it will reflect an implicit denial of the human right to freedom of opinion. It will promote passivity rather than active participation.

Issues like freedom of thought, religious freedom, freedom of expression, and equality could be undermined, perhaps unwittingly, by an eager teacher, one serious result of which could be a situation where religious instruction would not be compatible with human rights education.

Arguably it is only in a multi-denominational school, where a multi-denominational religious education curriculum can be taught, that we can truly educate in and for human rights. In the first instance the concept of equality is a fundamental cornerstone of the multi-denominational school. All religious belief systems and none are seen as equal, regardless of whether they are represented in the school community or not. All the teachers and families subscribe to this notion before joining the school community and contribute to the ethos. All school plans, and policies must reflect this principle.

Secondly, schools with a multi-denominational ethos have a democratic management structure. They are managed by a patron body that is in fact a democratically elected board of directors. Open management structures, a free-flow of information, and transparency characterise the Irish multi-denominational school. Ironically just about the only thing that is not open to democratic debate is the ethos of the school, for in a country which is very homogenous and largely Roman Catholic it would be too easy to erode the delicate principle of multi-denominational education if it were challenged regularly.

The main vehicle for developing the multi-denominational ethos is the religious education core curriculum. All of the partners in the school community take an active interest in moulding and shaping the religious education curriculum. The development

and implementation of a religious education core curriculum was a challenging and often exciting process in which parents and teachers participated (Hyland, 1993). Careful consideration has to be given to ensuring that thought is given to all faiths, even those not represented in the school, but yet ensuring that the curriculum is real and relevant to all the children. The degree to which the various partners can be involved or may wish to be involved will vary considerably. This should not matter however, so long as everybody feels that they own the end product, and that all feel they have a real voice, which will be listened to if not acted upon, when they want some aspect of the curriculum changed.

Singh (1994) might not agree with this however. He wrestles with one of the many complex challenges facing teachers in multi-denominational schools when he asks:

If education for human rights requires a multi-cultural curriculum for all pupils, how, in the midst of conflicting value perspectives of the various groups in a pluralist society, are the contents of this multi-cultural curriculum to be selected to ensure justice for all (Singh, 1994: 94)?

The only good answer to this question that the Educate Together schools have come up with is, democratically.

Change and the curriculum

Change is a fact of life. Our families, our work, our friendships, and every other interpersonal dimension to our lives are in constant flux. The more adaptable and open we are, the better our capacity to benefit from these changes. Equally societies and nations are fluctuating continually. The onward march of European unity, the globalisation of industry and commerce, the genome project, and the information revolution, are just some of the rapidly changing rubrics that society is struggling to absorb.

Every school should be flexible and innovative so as to reflect the dynamic and change within society. Such flexibility and innovation is not only a hallmark of a successful school, but it serves to prepare young people to live in a world of change. Just as schools should be pioneering, the curriculum must be continually updated and revised to reflect our changing society. "Curriculum development, like any other area of human endeavour, is never static. It is constantly evolving and changing, accommodating new ideas and thinking about how children learn, and responding to the ever-changing requirements of society" (Fallon-Byrne, 1997: 4). The innovations that human rights education can bring to the curriculum are one response to our ever-changing society.

Alas, change is often difficult and institutions in general, including schools, tend to react poorly and slowly to new ideas and processes. The experience here in Ireland where aspects of the 1971 curriculum, such as group teaching and integrated learning, are still resisted in many quarters, is an example:

..in preparation for a productive role in a changing society, young people need to be made aware of the fact of change and all its implications. They need to be discouraged from viewing anything, and especially the knowledge and values the school curriculum exposes them to, as fixed, permanent and unchangeable (Blenkin *et al.*, 1992: 20).

This argument is extremely significant in terms of human rights education in the Irish primary school. Resistance to change is a considerable obstacle to the promotion of human rights in schools. In the first instance considerable change is needed to create a climate where democracy and human rights prevail in classrooms. Secondly, change is an element of democracy. Thus, a true human rights school is not only a community of change, but also a community that embraces and encourages change as society develops around it.

If we accept that knowledge is a sea of change, then we must accept that the curriculum should be flexible and pliable, so that it can be adapted to changing circumstances. The revised Irish primary school curriculum is adaptable and has been successfully fashioned to meet the times we live in. However, it is up to individual teachers, and schools to explore the limits of this flexibility, but sadly some schools are bastions of inertia and adhere to traditional methods and content, seemingly oblivious to the changes of time. Such schools could not be compatible with the inclusive dynamic needed in a human rights school.

Doll (1989: 249) asserts that “by its nature, education, and the curriculum which guides it, is committed to change - directed, purposive, intentional change”. However, we must accept that change is difficult for people, and even more so for organisations. People are rarely confident about change as it can yield unknown quantities and unanticipated pressures. Ball (1987: 32) illustrates this difficulty when reflecting that “change in an organisation is almost certain to produce dissonance among individuals or groups within the membership”.

If change is an essential aspect of knowledge, then it has to be an essential part of the school. If change is an essential part of life, then it must be an essential part of education in human rights. A climate where change is welcome will only exist where people feel confident that they have a real voice in all aspects of school life. This confidence is fostered and encouraged in a human rights school. With such confidence people will always feel that they can influence prospective innovations, and so will cease to fear change.

The current curriculum change process in Irish primary schools has been influenced from at least three different policy trends that are of relevance to human rights educators over recent years. All provide opportunities for the introduction or expansion of human rights activities in primary schools.

Firstly, there is an increasingly overt recognition of the historical problems in Irish society that impact on the lives and development of children. One example is the horror of child abuse, which often took place in schools and educational institutions, and the acknowledgement of the importance of sex education. This has led to the introduction of relationships and sexuality education (RSE), the Stay Safe Programme, which is a life-skills course for young children, and the Walk Tall programme on drug abuse, focussing on self-esteem and confidence building, which was introduced to primary schools in 1999. These programmes draw on the concepts outlined by Thorne in her school's 'Encouraging Positive Behaviour Policy':

- A 'telling school': Children must be encouraged to tell, if they experience problems, if they have been bullied, or if they witness bullying.
- A 'listening school': Children must know that we care, that we will listen, and respond (Thorne, 1995: 177).

Secondly, a significant number of teachers are committed to human rights, justice and peace, and they strive to promote development issues and social justice through their work with young people. They are working within the system to generate change towards a school environment based on mutual respect and understanding. While it is recognised that human rights friendly teachers are a minority there is an interest among some NGOs in the provision of resources and publications to support them. These include, for example, the materials published by the Children's Rights Alliance, and the Irish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children, on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Amnesty International newsletter for teachers.

Thirdly, the peace process in Northern Ireland, and the ever-growing awareness of global issues has brought increased emphasis on citizenship education, development education, peace education, environmental education and human rights education. The revised curriculum provides space for this range of subjects (NCCA, 1998). A number of significant human rights education projects in the formal sector have emerged from

the momentum created by the peace process including the Cross Border Primary Human Rights Education Project (2003) and Transform Conflict (2004).

On the other hand, there is also one significant negative trend, which the movement in support of human rights education must contend with. There are many for whom curriculum change is synonymous with curriculum overload as teachers find themselves striving to maintain a high academic standard in their classes, while trying to match expectations in relation to the broader expanse of 'new' subjects. The range of diverse lobby groups competing for the engagement of teachers in subjects such as environmental education, peace education, citizenship education, intercultural education, development education and human rights education has added to the feeling of congestion (Cremin, 1996). Few teachers understand the inter-linkages and overlap between these subjects and the consequential reluctance means that the vast majority of the children are not informed about their rights and responsibilities. While this unsatisfactory situation is not unique to the Republic of Ireland (Bourne *et al.*, 1997), it is a significant obstacle and must be overcome.

As we have seen, the revised curriculum structure is integrated and teachers are given autonomy to select and prioritise from units in different subject areas. In an analysis of the junior cycle Osler and Vincent (2002: 84), report that "within these broadly defined units teachers have much scope and flexibility to select and deal with specific issues such as gender equity, racism, interculturalism, work and unemployment, poverty, homelessness and the environment." In this context the scenario foretold by Cremin (1996) in which the stresses of curriculum overload could be addressed through emphasis on areas of overlap is becoming a reality.

But yet the problem remains, and perhaps the starkest illustration of this comes in Kenny and O'Malley (2002: 38) who report that despite almost thirty years of investment "development education has only a tenuous link with mainstream education...and there is little evidence of recognition of development education as

being an integral part of integrated education”. Despite the fact that almost a decade has passed, their study mirrors the findings of Kirby (1994) that development education in Ireland is seen as something additional to the curriculum in the formal sector that is to be practiced by the dedicated few.

Summary

The revised primary school curriculum presents a structure that could readily accommodate a rights based education system, and a human rights schooling system. The latitude given to teachers, the ongoing curriculum innovation processes and the policy supports in place are good responses to the input and contributions of teachers and parents anxious to democratize learning in Ireland. However a number of major obstacles are stifling possible progress at primary level. These include the inherently anti-democratic and exclusive educational management structures intrinsic to the church-run system, and the resistance of this structure to absorb new thinking as evidenced in the area of development education. Against this backdrop the author set out to implement an action research project on human rights education in one Irish primary school.

Chapter 3

The research context

Introduction

The opening chapter highlights the importance of human rights education, and details the internationally agreed standards and instruments that underscore the necessity for human rights education in all schools. The research arguments for strengthening children's rights in school, to improve the efficacy of learning are set out in chapter two. It also provides an outline of the curriculum taught in Irish primary schools, and illustrates aspects of the curriculum that could be used by teachers seeking to promote human rights in their classes.

This chapter will provide relevant background analysis on the subject school, and outlines the context within which the research process was grounded.

The focus of this research project is to use children's rights as a framework for learning in my school. Drawing on the research that endorses the positive impact of learning in, for and through human rights set out in chapter two, and the curricular opportunities that are being provided for educators in Ireland, I seek to study human rights education as a developmental, participative, collaborative learning process.

The objective of the study is to develop and implement a holistic human rights education approach across the school and to record the experience with a view to improving learning practice.

This research is significant as it is the first qualitative analysis of the human rights education process in an Irish primary school. There is a dearth of indigenous writing to draw upon in support of this research project, though studies conducted in other countries are relevant, in part at least, and will be drawn upon regularly. Given that

this is the first time that such research has been undertaken in this field in Ireland, the possible range for the study is ample indeed. Thus it is essential that the aims of the project and the research questions be brought into focus to provide direction for the work in hand. This is developed further in chapter four.

The school

The focus of this research in human rights education is one multi-denominational co-educational primary school, *Gaelscoil*. The school is also an Irish language immersion school and was established by the Department of Education and Science in the early 1990s in response to parental demand in the locality. It is one of 139 such Irish language immersion primary schools to have been established outside the Irish speaking regions of Ireland since the 1970s.

When a group of parents came together to work for the establishment of the school they agreed five basic organisational and educational principles. These principles were informed by the Educate Together movement - the umbrella body for all multi-denominational schools (see chapter two) - and are listed in the school policies as follows:

1. The Irish language is the primary means of communication.
2. The school is open to children of all religions and none, and the social, cultural and religious background of each child is equally respected.
3. The school is open to girls and boys on an equal basis. Every effort is made to ensure that boys and girls are actively integrated and gender stereotyping is avoided.
4. The school is child centred in its approach to education.
5. The school is democratically run with active participation by parents in the daily life of the school, with due regard however, for the professional role of the teachers.

Gaelscoil is located in the suburbs of a large urban area. The catchment area covers a diverse social and economic base, while the children come largely from middle class homes. The school has grown from an enrolment of 33 children and two teachers on opening day to a population of just over 200 children and eight teachers at the time of my study.

The fact that *Gaelscoil* is a new school lends greater purpose and meaning to this research project. During the development of the action research project the school was an emerging social entity with fluid policies and practices. Resultantly there were no institutionalised traditions or practices that had to be altered or adapted. The newness of the situation ensured that staff were enthusiastic and open to novel ideas and influences. The sense of camaraderie and spirit that can be found in any new initiative was also present.

From the outset the Board of Management was striving to ensure that *Gaelscoil* became a working democratic school. The aim was to develop a school that would be built on the principles of accountability and transparency (Osler and Starkey, 1996). A key element of this was the Board's interest in facilitating a participatory approach to learning where the children felt empowered to control their own school environment.

My role was that of school principal. In addition to my paramount responsibility for educational and organisational leadership in *Gaelscoil*, as the founding principal, I was ever mindful of my responsibility to successfully nurture a unique learning environment. Like Lyseight-Jones (1991: 73), I believe that 'the primary school is a fertile base for the building of human rights in education and human rights education'.

Provision for human rights education in the school

A number of human rights education initiatives were already in place in the school as part of the effort to establish an enabling environment through which a human rights school could emerge and succeed. While these will be analysed, refined and improved during the action research process, it is worthwhile looking at them in brief at this stage. Since it is essential to define the research questions as accurately as possible, it is helpful to acknowledge that some human rights education was already ongoing in the school.

Lessons about human rights were already in the school plan, a formal document that all schools must prepare pursuant to national education directives, which includes school policies, procedures and curriculum.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child, human rights organisations, human rights activists, responsibilities and so forth were included in the core curriculum for religious education for senior classes (see chapter two). For example, third and fourth-class children [age 8-10] were learning about the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the United Nations. Children in fifth and sixth classes [age 10-12] covered human rights, the UDHR, and conflict resolution skills.

The school already had a number of fledgling mechanisms in place on teaching for human rights:

The teacher will want to begin, and never to finish, teaching for human rights. Students will want not only to learn of human rights, but learn in them, for what they do to be of the most practical benefit to them (UN, 1989: 6).

Various policies in place in *Gaelscoil* prior to the commencement of the action research were based on the concept of teaching for human rights. Reference is made to international standards and the concept of rights and responsibilities as they relate to social interaction. For example, the opening clause of the school policy on bullying is “Under Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, schools have a duty to protect the children in their charge from physical and mental violence”. Similarly the school code of conduct begins as follows:

This code of conduct is based upon a principle of respect for the individual, both in its content and implementation.

It is an aim of the code of conduct that each child will be given the opportunity to develop according to his/her own ability and ensure that (s)he benefits from the education available at the *Gaelscoil*.

Every person, and every child, has rights. With these rights come certain obligations and it is important that every member of the school understands this.

Hand in hand with the formal policies comes the informal day-to-day atmosphere in the school. It is hard to quantify the relevance of some aspects of the hidden or non-formal curriculum to human rights education before the action research process commenced. However, attempts were being made to create a learning environment based on equality, justice, and participation. Examples of the more obvious, or stated, expressions of this attempt were:

- everybody, including teachers, was on first name terms
- there was a positive approach to behavioural management
- praise and rewards were used to reinforce good behaviour
- class contracts, developed by the children, were used in senior classrooms
- there was an emphasis on respect, responsibility and the development of self-esteem

These mechanisms were regarded as essential first-steps in ensuring that the instructional values of a human rights approach to education took hold in the school. There was recognition of the belief that “human rights education serves larger instructional goals than the mastery of skills or the understanding of concepts and perspectives” (Shiman, 1991: 193). Even before the action research commenced, there was an understanding in the school that:

Learning for rights means working towards achieving them rather than offering the subject as an area of knowledge. It is, essentially, an approach to education encompassing the curriculum, the classroom organisation and teaching methodology as well as the school’s ethos and organisation (Klein, 2001: 11).

Despite these innovations it is worthwhile noting that one might have found it hard to distinguish between *Gaelscoil* and any other primary school when walking through the classrooms. Just because policies and plans reflect a certain ethos there is no guarantee that the reality reflects the theory. There were clearly gaps that needed to be addressed, and questions that needed to be answered if a co-ordinated and structured effort to establish a human rights school was to prove successful.

The dynamic and ethos in the school

Given the close involvement of parents in the school, the special cultural and linguistic diversity, and the school’s inclusive learning environment, it is important to consider the relationship between human rights education and the school mission (see chapter six and table 6.1).

It is all too easy to assume that just because internationally agreed standards, and related missives, regularly extol the virtues of human rights education, that all members of the school community would automatically accept this. Parents may have been unaware

of, or unconvinced about the need for democratic schools since they themselves may have had no such exposure to education in a collegiate atmosphere. Teachers may not have been convinced that the time and energy needed to debate and discuss a bubbling issue with children, rather than to quickly truncate it, was warranted. Indeed teachers may have feared that their rights might conflict with the children's rights (see chapter two). These are serious questions that need to be analysed during the course of the study.

Martin (1997: 3) reports that one of the purposes of education is "the preparation for citizenship involving a sense of responsibility, a sensitivity to the needs and rights of others, and the requirements of the common good." The question therefore was, did the school accept this thesis, and if so how does the school ethos give effect to it? Did the dynamic and ethos of the school allow space for the implementation of effective strategies to create an enabling environment for a human rights school (Osler, 1994)? To what extent did the ethos of the school influence human rights education, or vice-versa; did human rights education influence the ethos of the school?

By 1999 *Gaelscoil* had a cultural and linguistic dynamic that was rich and vibrant. As a multi-denominational school it attracted children from a number of minority religious traditions, those with no formal religious affiliation, and a proportionate number from the majority tradition. As an Irish language immersion school it attracted the small number of local families that were Irish speaking, and a large majority that were not, but wanted their children to be fluent in the language for a myriad of reasons. This cultural and linguistic diversity created an opportunity for the staff to engage with many of the issues that come under the umbrella of human rights education:

Cultural and linguistic diversity is frequently considered to be a negative element in education. However, such diversity can be a resource in classroom activities if teachers are capable of accepting pupils' conceptions and knowledge and stimulating pupils to share them. Pupils' family life, cultural background

and experiences can all be important resources for teachers. Viewing them in this light stimulates pupils' self-esteem and can help to surmount shyness and discriminatory feelings by developing mutual understanding and solidarity between pupils from different communities (Gagliardi, 1995: 2).

One highly significant influence in any school is the self-perpetuating nature of the school value system. *Gaelscoil* had developed a reputation in the locality over its early years as a place with a non-traditional outlook on education. People may not have been sure what the difference was, but they knew that the school stood as a challenge to some of the more traditional organisational aspects of the primary school system. As such the school may have attracted teachers and parents who, by virtue of their own values, beliefs and experiences, were searching to become part of an innovative process. This was the effect of setting up a two-way dynamic. The new teachers and parents tended to bring their own, invariably compatible, values to bear on the school. Simultaneously the school value structure tended to permeate through to the school community.

The need to attract and employ teachers who are completely cognisant, supportive, and even passionate about the school ethos cannot be underestimated. This is especially so in a school as small as *Gaelscoil* with a teaching staff of eight. Teachers' own value judgements have tremendous ramifications in the classroom and can have a ripple effect which serves to constantly realign the school ethos in one way or another in the eyes of the children they teach:

Among teachers, these value judgements about obedience, authority, fairness, hierarchy, equality, relations between the sexes, and so on, are often implicit and unacknowledged - certainly to colleagues, and often to those teachers themselves. They are private and tacit rather than public and openly discussed. Yet they have immense implications for the kind of personal and social education that teachers support and encourage (Hargreaves *et al*, 1988: 11).

The same can be said for the families joining the school community, though obviously to a lesser extent, for one individual family's influence could not be as profound as a teacher's impact on the school. New families joining the school can sway policies and procedures in a democratic environment. This could raise some stressful anomalies where, by virtue of democracy, the majority community could undermine the position of a minority community. This is especially so in a situation where the majority community represent 90 per cent of the school population. This would obviously run contrary to the multi-denominational ethos of the school, so parents joining the school have to sign the school policy statement indicating their support for the democratic, multi-denominational, and multi-linguistic principles of the school.

In Ireland today the success of the movement towards peace between our divided communities depends to a large extent on the ability of all people to reach out across the sectarian divide and grapple with the prejudices and insecurities that such contact provokes. These contacts are particularly important among young people. Given the unfortunate labelling of the two communities along denominational lines there can be no greater manifestation of this cross-cultural outreach than the integrated multi-denominational school.

All schools should be havens of equality, justice and non-discrimination. However, education is provided on denominational grounds to the vast majority of primary school children north and south of the Border in this land where denomination brings division. This can only serve to place education at the very heart of the struggle between the nationalist and unionist communities in Ireland:

Schools should not simply reflect the existing divisions, prejudices and injustices, for in doing so they legitimise them; instead they should take a lead in providing a working model where every structure and activity is permeated by the concepts of justice, equality, democracy and fairness (Rowley, 1993: 53).

In a school like *Gaelscoil* the efforts to break down any enmity and build on a more pluralist value system are part and parcel of the school ethos. In such a school, education for human rights, education for democracy, and education for justice cannot but form part of the ethos and value system of the school.

Attitudes to human rights education across the school community

Did the school community accept the notion that children should be empowered to think critically and to understand issues of justice, responsibility, and fairness so that they might challenge and defend issues as they see fit? Would every partner in *Gaelscoil* have agreed that:

The whole ethos of the school or institution should empower pupils and students to stand up for fairness and what is morally right for self and for others, as well as taking responsibility for their actions (Singh, 1994: 98)?

Two issues emerged in response to this challenge. Firstly, it was necessary to research this question, and establish the degree to which the school community was in favour or against human rights education. Secondly, it was necessary to challenge people on their preconceptions about human rights and human rights education. Some members of the school community may have manifested fear or reluctance about the project; a teacher or a parent who feared that the project would lead to indiscipline, for example.

The challenge when dealing with this is to reconceptualise human rights for people. In some circles the notion of an individual's rights is overemphasised to the detriment of the associated obligations. Human rights education can address many of the emerging needs in schools today if we are willing to adapt it as necessary to the reality of our school:

[There is]..a fear among teachers that children's rights may be seen in opposition to the rights of teachers. Not only is this a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of children's human rights, which are based on the principle of reciprocity, that is to say respecting and upholding the rights of others, but it is also, perhaps, to underestimate young people's capacity and willingness to acknowledge their responsibilities (Osler, 2000: 55).

It is possible that this fear, albeit ill-founded does deter some would-be democratic teachers, restricting their pedagogical approach to a more traditional autocratic style. This issue was monitored with teachers in the school throughout the project.

Discipline should not be seen as a form of control. It should come from within, not without. Discipline is about socialisation, understanding, and taking responsibility. It's about understanding rights and responsibilities:

The balance between rights and responsibilities is of great importance in schools (Cunningham, 1991: 91).

The suggestion that a human rights school is a place where teachers should fear indiscipline is unfounded. But this is the reality for some teachers so they may need to be brought to a level of understanding that helps them to engage with human rights issues in their classrooms:

At one level discipline in schools is linked to the creation of an orderly environment that permits teaching and learning to occur, but, at another more fundamental level, it is certainly linked to issues of social cohesion, justice and equality (Martin, 1997: 1).

A related concern for teachers was the issue of time, a perennial problem in schools. Teachers fear that indiscipline, or approaches that require participative responses to

misconduct, will waste their contact time with the class. Trying to create the time for the formal lessons on the one hand, and more significantly the time to develop a shared and democratic learning environment on the other, was an ongoing challenge. Developing a human rights school demands a significant amount of non-contact time for staff in-service training, staff meetings, and discussions with parents and board members. Time is required with the class to provide for the discussions and analysis that are needed to work through difficult situations with the children. Summary and snap decisions in relation to discipline, for example, do not take any time in the short term but may cost the teacher in the long term. Conversely a slow and deliberate approach to resolving conflict absorbs valuable class time but may avoid problems in the future. In short, teachers need to feel that they can justifiably spend substantial time resolving class conflict or similar issues.

The gap between rhetoric and reality

There appears to be a voluminous gap between the rhetoric of internationally agreed, government endorsed, calls for human rights education on the one hand, and the day-to-day reality of the Irish primary school curriculum on the other. The extent to which this gap can be closed in *Gaelscoil* by identifying and exploiting opportunities for human rights education within the education system must be examined.

Given the relatively autonomous nature of each school a degree of latitude exists within which new approaches can be explored. Every Irish primary school has autonomy when interpreting and adapting the curriculum to make it relevant to the individual context, ethos and reality of each school. This autonomy can be used to insert aspects of human rights education into the school plan.

However, it is not simply a matter of creating slots on a timetable. Any serious effort to introduce human rights education must involve a whole-school approach where school policies, school organisation, and school curricula reflect an atmosphere of respect,

justice and democracy. It is through experience and practice that the children will learn human rights and human responsibilities. "Human rights education presents important concepts, skills and perspectives which any young person should encounter while attending school" (Shiman, 1991: 190). Rote learning, formal lessons, and texts may have some place in the formal consideration of international instruments, or the history of human rights, for example. Beyond that, however, it is the ethos and atmosphere that permeate the learning environment which are crucial:

Responsibilities and rights are not learned in a discrete slot once a week but stem from a range of learning experiences. Classrooms that empower pupils to take responsibility for their learning and work collaboratively play a key role in this apprenticeship. These processes will only occur in institutions where concepts of fairness and justice are pivotal to the ethos. This climate will give a high priority to equality of opportunity and will help all concerned to value and celebrate the pluralism of our global community (Gyte and Hill, 1991: 76).

The very fact that it is necessary to create these opportunities for human rights education is indicative of one challenge facing the human rights friendly teacher in Ireland. We may, quite successfully perhaps, identify and use opportunities to create a learning environment that values, promotes and imparts an understanding of human rights and human responsibilities in this individual school during the course of the study. However, it is not for one school to embark on such a course alone, all schools should be involved if we really believe in the multiplicity of internationally agreed norms set out in the opening chapter. It is worthwhile reflecting on whether it is governments, and not individual schools that should be formulating policies in relation to values education:

...the government burdens the individual schools by overstressing the autonomous character of the individual school with having to formulate their

own policies relating to values education. I would maintain that this is the government's responsibility (Pouwels, 1997: 152).

One last issue to be considered here is the relevance or otherwise of human rights education for young children of primary school age.

Piaget (1932) contends that the attainment of an autonomous level of moral judgement, based on the concepts of rules, justice and equality is not possible before the age of 11 or 12 years due to the lack of cognitive functioning. Kohlberg outlines his stages of moral judgement as a movement from the preconventional level to the postconventional level where moral decisions are generated from rights, values or principles (Kohlberg, 1981; Chazan, 1985). Thus, very young children at Piaget's first stage and Kohlberg's first stage would not be judged capable of understanding concepts such as equality and justice.

Papoulia-Tzelepi (1997: 99) contests this view and concludes, from her research in Greece, "that children's concepts and behaviour related to justice and authority, which are the premises of human rights, showed that the roots of these concepts and behaviours start forming at an early age." Perotti (1994: 100) concurs and argues that "the important point is to begin early, education in human rights must begin right from the start of primary school". The early years of a child's life are extremely important in the overall process of social maturation, and it is at this early stage, contends Reardon (1995), that human rights education should be introduced. Thus, while Piaget has had a major influence on the thinking that permeates the Irish primary school curriculum, there is an emerging view that very young children have a strong sense of fair play, justice and what is right or wrong.

Teacher education - pre-service and in-service

Osler and Starkey (1996: 119) reflect on the commitment almost every government in the world has made in Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to directing education “towards the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations”:

This undertaking by governments implies that teachers should know what is meant by ‘human rights and fundamental freedoms’ and indeed, that they are familiar with the content of the Charter of the United Nations. Our experience is that few teachers would claim to be confident in the first area and that to find someone with even a passing knowledge of the UN Charter is very rare indeed (Osler and Starkey, 1996: 119).

Despite this, and somewhat incredibly, there is no formal pre-service education for primary school teachers in the area of human rights education in Ireland. A number of interested lecturers provide information but there is certainly no organised and concerted effort by the Department of Education and Science, the teacher training colleges, or the universities, to ensure that teachers are equipped to teach human rights education. This seems remarkable in the face of such eloquent and oft-repeated endorsement of the merits of human rights education in all major international instruments.

There was no in-service course on human rights education available to primary school teachers up until the summer of 1997, when a one week in-service course was provided for primary school teachers for the first time, by the Amnesty International/Trócaire human rights education project. The very limited resources and capacity of this project ensured that it could only cater for thirty teachers. Participants attended the courses voluntarily, often at their own expense. The structure of the courses available from

Amnesty International and/or Trócaire has changed, but it remains the case that only NGOs have provided such training to date. This dearth of training and preparation creates a challenge to the introduction and development of a human rights school which is worthy of analysis. Even in *Gaelscoil*, where three of the eight teaching staff had attended a summer course, there was still a long way to go to realise the aspirations set out in Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The in-service training programme for SPHE which has now been introduced (see chapter two) has made a very limited guidance programme in human rights education available to all teachers for 2004/2005.

Summary

The subject school is a relatively new school, having been established in the early 1990s. There is a commitment to the development of a human rights approach, at least from the level of the Board of Management, and from me, as the school principal. On analysis a number of human rights education initiatives had already been established or attempted in *Gaelscoil*. These included human rights education lessons within the core curriculum for religious education, and basic efforts to use a human rights approach to school organisation.

Despite these positive initiatives there remains a significant gap between the theoretical commitment to human rights education set out in the curricula, education literature, and international treaties, and the reality in the Irish education system. A significant factor in this dichotomy is the dearth of training and capacity building available to teachers seeking to employ participative learning approaches.

The research process was conceived as an internal exercise and would focus on specific research questions relating to the development and implementation of a human rights approach within this one school. The intention was that all teachers and other partners in the school community would be involved in the project. The ultimate aim is to

positively influence the school by increasing the level of teaching about and for human rights, and in this way to improve overall educational practice in the school.

Chapter 4

Methodology and ethical issues

Introduction

Chapter three set out the educational landscape within which the action research project was located in detail. *Gaelscoil* was described, together with an analysis of the context that led me into the research. The educational dynamic, and the attitudes to human rights in the school, were considered against my reflections on the gap between theory and practice, and the emergent educational needs.

This chapter establishes the research aims. Considering these aims, the chapter identifies action research as the most appropriate methodology through which to mediate the study. It provides a detailed analysis of action research as a methodology, and why action research was appropriate for this project. There is an in depth account of the specific action research methodology employed to underpin the work, and the chapter gives an account of the stages in the process, and the manner in which my responses and ideas were structured to bring coherence to the project.

The chapter outlines the whole-school approach that was envisaged, and considers the multiple relationships, and different methodological phases that were involved in my research. It goes on to structure and clarify the procedures and processes employed. The cumulative cycles of reflection and action are framed progressively and chronologically.

The participants in the research process are introduced and their roles explained. As an eclectic approach rooted in participation and experience the interplay and dynamics between the various partners in the process is considered.

Towards the end of the chapter I consider the ethical dilemmas that were confronted and considered throughout the process.

The aims of the research project

The aims of the project emerged from the analysis of the needs and issues set out in chapter three, and through a process of reflection and discussion with the staff in the school. The interest in human rights education in *Gaelscoil*, together with the national curricular approach to participative learning, presented me with the opportunity to turn the rhetoric into reality. I saw a chance to give effect to the international and national provisions for human rights education in a way that would stimulate the educational dynamic and ethos in the school. My role as principal of the school presented me with a unique opportunity as a researcher seeking to improve educational processes, and the aims of the research project emerged in response to this opportunity.

The aims can be presented in two, quite different categories; the primary school-based aims which provided the focus for the overall structure of the action research project; and the secondary aims which the project serves by contributing to the national discourse on human rights education in Ireland.

The school-based aims related specifically to *Gaelscoil* and sought to infuse the content and methodology of human rights education into the school curriculum, and the school society. These school-based aims were the primary aims of the research project, around which the research methodology was designed.

The school-based, or primary aims were:

- **to provide an insight into the knowledge and attitudes about human rights education which prevail within the school community**

- to establish what opportunities and obstacles could serve to help or hinder the development of human rights education in the school
- to provide a framework of methodologies and practical approaches which could facilitate the development of a human rights school in *Gaelscoil*
- to equip and empower the teaching staff to implement this framework by providing them with the necessary support, training and resources
- to monitor, and evaluate the successes and failures during the implementation of the agreed approaches
- ultimately to improve educational practice in the school through the implementation of human rights education

While noting that within action research “it is not possible nor desirable, to aim for replication or generalisation, since the aim is to understand rather than to predict” (McNiff, Lomax, Whitehead, 1996: 106), nevertheless, it was hoped that a body of knowledge would be developed which may achieve other external aims. While setting out to effect change to the educational and social environment of one school, there was a consciousness that other socially motivated teachers and researchers may want to build upon the understanding generated through the experiences in *Gaelscoil*.

In the process of realising the primary aims at school level the project would, it was hoped, achieve a number of secondary aims that could be said to have national significance. The secondary, national or indirect aims did not influence the structure of the project at the planning stage. Rather they were seen as additional benefits of the action research process that could influence educational thinking and practice at national level if the primary aims are achieved.

The national, or secondary aims were:

- **to provide the first example of scientific educational research on the subject of human rights education in an Irish primary school for the benefit of research and practice**
- **to provide an analysis of the Irish primary school curriculum from the viewpoint of the human rights educator**
- **to provide qualified data that may be of relevance to interested parties seeking to promote human rights education in Irish primary schools**

When planning the study initially it was envisaged that answers to the research questions would move the school some way towards the following:

- encouraging the teaching staff to more actively promote a human rights friendly environment
- developing a programme of professional development to meet the specific needs of the staff
- changing the methodologies and approaches used towards a more participative and inclusive structure
- creating the enabling plans, policies and processes that support a human rights friendly environment
- continuing the innovative and participative approach to learning in the school
- addressing the relevant challenges which emerged during the programme

Action Research

The enquiry was conducted using the action research paradigm. My study was situational, critical, reflective, and action oriented. It involved a collaborative effort

between me as researcher, the other staff members, the parents, the pupils, and the entire school community. The study was “a collective and self-reflective enquiry undertaken to improve the rationality and the justice” of the school (Kemmis and Mc Taggart, 1988: 5):

The practitioners as well as the researchers participate in the analysis, design and implementation processes and contribute as much as the researchers in any decision-making (Avison, 1997: 196).

This mediation of a dynamic, through action research, was concerned both with challenging the orthodoxy and culture being manifest through the school, and with change as a process, as an objective, and as an experience. It was a project that sought to build organisational and pedagogical change founded on development of the professional skills and knowledge of teachers (Stenhouse, 1975).

We were mindful that a school initiative of this kind would be somewhat unpredictable (Posch, 1996), but this was a purposeful study, focussed on the specific aim of improving practice in one school. It was essentially about improving the quality of my work, and of my school. As a participative and collaborative project, the action research methodology was best suited to this research situation. The solutions sought would not fit with other situations, nor will they ever again fit exactly within this same set of circumstances. It was about teachers’ involvement in their own practices (McNiff, 1988):

The principle justification for the use of action research in the context of the school is improvement of practice (Cohen and Manion, 1994: 192).

The study was experiential in essence. It was about the experiences of a group of teachers and the children they work with over a period of time in one school: the knowledge generated, the understandings that emerged, the relationships that

developed, the complexities encountered, and the journey they travelled together. The process was constructed so as to give voice to the experiences of the pupils and the teachers. The understanding of teachers' perspectives in this way is crucial to the effective reform and improvement of educational practice (Ryng, 1999).

Action was the essential component for the genesis, the implementation, and the outcome of my research. My work was rooted in an educational change context where action had to bring us beyond systems, and practices. The goal was to generate analysis and reflection that would stimulate activity, impact, and change. It was a process rooted in praxis - action based on reflection that is informed, committed and intentional. Action that would give rise to knowledge:

To be action research, there must be a praxis rather than practice (McNiff, Lomax, Whitehead, 1996: 8).

The project was driven by my own convictions in relation to participative education and my desire to see the school I worked in develop and flourish as a human rights school. This commitment to action, based on personal vision was, I am confident, a positive and driving force in the project. My actions were rooted in a commitment that would serve to bring about the improvements I was seeking (McNiff, Lomax, Whitehead, 1996). What was envisaged was "a self-reflective enquiry" (Blenkin *et al.*, 1992: 118) which analysed, modified and redirected the teaching style, methodologies and content that were being practiced.

Action research engages with real-life, and the capacity to examine interventions in the functioning of the real world (Halsey, 1972). Through a process based research concept, it provokes, and exposes a learning environment that is more participative, transparent, and reflective.

Action research contributes to practice in the school, and also to the theoretical framework for learning. In my study I used action research as both a means to give effect to human rights schooling, and as a methodology to generate a theoretical context within which a human rights school could emerge. In this way I sought to record a model of practice, which would be accessible to other teachers, and informative for those seeking to embark on a similar process in other schools.

These various elements of the action research project can be summarised simply as steps towards improved educational practice in the school. By recording these steps as they were taken, monitoring the changes as they happened, and evaluating the impact of the innovations, it was hoped that the project could eventually contribute to improved educational practice in my school and in other Irish primary schools. Ultimately, I imagined that these improvements would have the potential to contribute to social change:

Action research has substantial attractions for a socially committed researcher because it enables her/him to work towards social change as well as the expansion of knowledge (Burgess, 1985: 143).

The action research approach has been critiqued as lacking some of the scientific rigour that is a fundamental part of applied research. Action research takes a “more relaxed view of the scientific method” (Cohen and Manion, 1994: 193), and resultantly has less validity outside the research context (Stenhouse, 1992).

Those seeking a more scientific analysis could see the very advantages to the action research model for this project as flaws. The specific and focused nature of the project, which cannot support general analysis and theory, or the subjective involvement of the researcher in the totality of the research environment, would be just two examples of these anomalous questions. Applied research provides detailed and tested theories,

which could by virtue of the impartial analysis, be transferable from one educational environment to another.

However, I would argue strongly that the very systems, structures, and rigidity of the applied research approach render it antipathetic to the research dynamics that framed my study. I was seeking to provoke and measure qualitative change in people, processes and practices. Applied research focussing on systems, structures and strategies, would clearly be of limited benefit to this research context in *Gaelscoil*.

In the first instance the school is a unique social community enjoying a range of variables that do not match other schools, and can't ever be replicated exactly. Secondly, given the dearth of educational research in this field at a national level it would be an enormous undertaking to embark on a research project across the range of differing primary schools in the country. Thirdly, as a researcher I was primarily concerned with the educational environment in which I myself was practising. Lastly, human rights education is process driven, experiential, and linked to ethos, and culture in ways that limit the transferability of any research findings.

Whole-school approach

The approach inherent to human rights education, and arguably the only approach to schooling that will not impede human rights is based on learning about, for and through human rights (Lister, 1984; Brown, 1996). It is a participatory process that embraces how children 'think, feel and do' which is pivotal in developing mutual understanding and reciprocity (Starkey, 1987; Carter, 2000a).

The environment, the atmosphere, the structure, the curriculum content, the methodology, the decision-making processes, and virtually every dimension to the experiences of children in the school dictate the degree to which any school will successfully advance human rights education. In this scenario the most appropriate

method to progress human rights education is the whole-school approach (Cunningham 1991 and 2000).

Democracy is imperative to human rights (see chapter two), and creates the enabling environment within which human rights can thrive. Democracy cannot be learned in theory, but must be lived and experienced by the children, through the whole-school dynamic. The whole-school process is the methodology through which a participative and just community can emerge (Starkey, 1991).

Cycles of action and reflection

Action research is continuous in nature. It is an ongoing cyclical process involving action and research, followed by action (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). There is a diagnostic stage in which problems are analysed, and hypotheses developed, and a therapeutic stage in which the hypotheses are tested through experiment (Blum, 1959). Implementing change through an eclectic approach that could truly be said to embrace the whole-school requires coordinated stages of diagnostic analysis and therapeutic testing: thinking and doing.

This considered delivery of experiential change requires a cyclical approach based on progressive stages of action and reflection (McNiff, 1988; Elliot, 1991; Carter, 2000b). Lewin (1946) describes it as a spiral of steps. This ongoing cycle does not end when the study has been completed. As an experiential process it is, by its nature, open-ended. The participants continue to reflect, evaluate and improve practice as an ongoing task (Bell, 1987).

If my vision of a democratic human rights school were to be realised, it would evolve against the reality of an unaccommodating educational system, structural rigidity, and ambivalent societal expectation. The cumulative cyclical action research methodology would be the most appropriate to sustain a change agenda in the face of such

impenetrable structures. Drawing on comments from the staff during the course of the study:

The step by step planning was useful to maintain focus. It is too easy to get distracted from understanding what is going on in the school.

Taking time to stop and think about what was happening around us before going on again worked. Things could be adapted in a way we were not used to just because we were thinking together.

The process of action research, through which solutions are imagined, implemented and recorded, demands a subjective and an objective analysis. These reflective methods must be ongoing, dynamic, and are inherent to the overall process. The impact of every stage in the process will have variable outcomes, as each child and each teacher responds to change. Practice is non-linear, due to the unpredictable nature of people (Carter, 2000b). I, my colleagues and the students become both the agents and the subjects of change; we become at once the orchestrators and the observers.

The application of this process of action and reflection in the school is explored in-depth later in this chapter.

Data collection methods

As developmental action research my project was concerned with describing how experiences, relationships, expectations, attitudes, and other variables evolved in the school as a whole-school human rights education process was introduced.

As a whole-school initiative, the project would necessarily engage all groups that are actors in the school community affectively; pupils, parents, teachers, and the Board of Management as interdependent actors in the control environment. The task was to

jointly consider the institution, the groups and individuals in order to describe and analyse unfolding events. Collectively and simultaneously these groups shaped and experienced the developing learning environment from different perspectives.

The primacy of pupils and teachers as the groups with living experience of the school resulted in a decision to prioritise these two constituencies. It was necessary to gather and record data on the school-based experiences from the children and the teachers over the course of an eighteen-month period. Unlike Trafford (1996) I did feel that I could seek the support and involvement of colleagues in the process of data collection, and the methodologies used to collect and interpret the data reflect this. Indeed as a developmental change process, which we sought to experience and monitor, it would have been impossible to give full effect to the aims without collegiate engagement at all stages.

As an attempt to generate a holistic educational outcome, and to explain what were complex phenomena across a range of variables, it was necessary to organise a triangulation of analysis, or a multi-method approach (Cohen and Manion, 1994). I was concerned that reliance on one method would not comprehensively reflect the experiences of children at different age levels, the teachers with their different styles and approaches, and indeed my own understandings of what unfolded.

I was seeking to analyse change at three levels – the experience of the individual pupils and teachers, the interaction of the class groupings and the staff as a group, and the impact on the school as a society and an institution. Mindful of the breath and depth of the process I was anxious to ensure that the data collection processes would be manageable for me as a researcher. I was reluctant to embark on a series of comprehensive recording procedures which might deter participants from the real focus of the process, and which might generate an enormity of information, which I wouldn't have the capacity to assimilate.

Firstly, the teachers were the centre of my study, and methodology. A combination of research methodologies were employed with colleagues; questionnaires as part of a longitudinal cohort study; regular monthly meetings; one-to-one interviews and discussions; and the use of diaries. The monthly meetings became a central element to the entire process, evolving into a series of regular action inquiry seminars (McKernan, 1991). The meetings became a forum for collaborative reflection, for the discussion of lesson notes and diary records, and critical analysis of the process. They became fora for the emergence of a critical community (Lomax, 1991).

Secondly, the longitudinal cohort study was also undertaken with all pupils in the senior half of the school at the beginning of the academic year, and again at the end when the project had been implemented. Based on informal consultations with teaching colleagues and students it was decided to use a large group, and to focus on the older children.

The action research monitoring process with the teachers and the pupils is discussed in greater detail in chapter eight.

Using this approach I sought to chronicle the relationships, dynamics and other variables in the situation, and to account for the changes in those relationships as a function of time (Cohen and Manion, 1994).

The researcher

Action research is necessarily subjective, and about one's self as a shaper, actor, and beneficiary of the research process. Self-evaluation of one's own role, bias, and value system is a necessary part of the action research process (Cohen and Manion, 1994; Winter, 1987). Direct personal participation in the research permits the researcher's experiential learning to become part of the study. Acknowledging and working with the subjective reality rather than creating artificially objective methods makes for more

meaningful analysis. Indeed education processes are based intrinsically on value judgements (Whitehead, 1989):

It is more important for the researcher to identify their own value position than to adopt an artificial distance either in the empirical research or in the way it is reported (Osler, 1997b: 69).

In reflecting on my own role in the process there were a number of dynamics at play. As an individual teacher I was seeking to improve my own practice (Elliot, 1985). As a colleague I was concerned that my peers would promote children's rights, rather than fearing a conflict with the rights of teachers (Osler, 2000). As principal of *Gaelscoil* I sought to manage and oversee the effective delivery of the school curriculum across the board and was mindful of the many pressing demands on the school. As a human rights activist my belief in the fundamental importance of schooling to the emergence of a culture of citizenship and human rights (Osler and Starkey, 2000) also informed my judgement.

Indeed the two dimensions to the project aims – school based primary aims with national secondary aims - reflected my complementary interests in the project. As principal I was keen to establish educational processes that would have a positive impact on the pupils' lives, and would contribute to the vision of a participatory school set out by the Board. As a human rights activist I was mindful of the impact that an action research project such as this could have in terms of influencing educational policy at a national level.

The action research stages

The methodology involved four phases; planning, design, implementation, and interpretation (see table 4.1).

Phase 1: Planning – the statement of inquiry

Identification of the problem

In the foregoing chapters I have drawn on a comprehensive body of educational research, a national curriculum, and a series of international human rights provisions, all of which strongly advocate participative democratic learning processes. As an individual teacher I am convinced that educational approaches informed by and mediated through human rights are effective. Despite this the system, the school and the classroom in which I was teaching often reflected the antithesis of a human rights approach.

The problem exposed in chapters one and two, and named in chapter three, is that while believing that teaching in, for and through human rights is the means to most effectively educate the children under my care, I was presiding over a system that was orientated to constrain and undermine a human rights approach.

The question to be answered

The objective of my research was to investigate the application of a whole-school approach to human rights education in my school (see chapter three). The ultimate question was how could educational practice in my school be improved through human rights? The enabling secondary questions related to what the opportunities and obstacles pertaining to the emergence of a human rights school might have been; what methodologies and processes were required in this context; and what tools were required to equip the teachers and the school to put these processes in place?

Table 4.1 Design overview of the action research process

Phase	Task	Questions	Methods	Expected outcomes
Phase 1 Planning	Needs analysis Identification of the problem The questions to be answered Statement of assumptions	What is the problem to be addressed? What questions must be asked to identify solutions? What assumptions are being made in choosing these questions?	Literature review Preliminary discussions with interested parties	Clear agreed statement of inquiry
Phase 2 Design	Identify research procedures Identify evaluation and monitoring procedures	What information and training do the teachers require? How will the pupils, parents, and others be informed and involved? What ethical issues must be addressed?	Use of a human rights approach Initial meeting with teachers Consultation with individual teachers Questionnaire survey with teachers Questionnaire survey with the students Consultation with the Board	Framework for the action research process
Phase 3 Implementation	Implementation of the project Cycles of action and reflection Data collection Monitoring and feedback	What policies need to be amended or put in place? What curriculum programme needs to be included in the plan? How will it be implemented as part of a continuum of action/reflection? How will data be recorded?	Policy development cycle Programme development cycle Classroom based implementation Ongoing meetings with teachers Lesson notes, and classroom diaries Second questionnaire survey with pupils Second questionnaire survey with teachers	Statement of school policy Agreed human rights education programme Implementation of process across the school Record of data
Phase 4 Interpretation	Evaluation Analysis	Has the problem been addressed? What answers to the research questions have emerged?	Data analysis Cross-checking with colleagues Writing up	Statement of findings and recommendations

Phase 2: Design – preparedness through action and reflection

A process of action and reflection was put in place to design a research environment within which the necessary levels of trust, understanding, and ownership could be encouraged. This period of action planning was a fundamental part of the action research (Whitehead, 1993), through which I sought to stimulate the thinking, the relationships, and the confidence among participants to undertake the action research. The aim was to ensure that the process was constructed and interrogated through a human rights approach based on concepts of equality, indivisibility, and solidarity (Starkey, 1992). Such questioning and critical analysis would serve to verify and affirm the research plan.

In keeping with a human rights approach the consultation and preparation phases would be democratic and transparent. As researcher I was accountable to the teachers, as the key actors in the process, and to the children.

Accepting that “innovation processes in schools frequently take the form of political conflict” (Ball, 1987: 32), I sought to create a communications mechanism which would allow staff and students to shape the project, and that gave them a controlling interest in its realisation. By allowing them have a say in shaping the entire process I sought to develop a “system of exercising authority in which all who are subject to its decisions have a voice” (Williams, 1989: 82).

The action planning process involved shaping the participation of the teaching staff and the pupils in the process. It also required that the implementation plan be finalised including action research procedures and monitory procedures through these participative arrangements.

Teachers

The first step in the process was a half-day meeting with the entire teaching staff (see appendix A). The aim of the meeting was to interest the teachers in the project and hopefully to get their support and backing. It involved presenting an analysis of the problem, and the proposed solution; that the absence of a human rights approach in our school was a problem, for the children and society, and that a whole-school integrated response would be the most effective solution. The meeting served to inform the teachers about the proposed action research project, and to set out in some detail what it would involve for them, the children, and the school. The discussions were facilitated and participative, with a view to encouraging dialogue. The level of engagement and interest was high, and colleagues were very positive about the proposal.

This was followed by consultations with individual teachers on a one-to-one basis. These interviews served two purposes, and in some instances took place over a number of discussions. Primarily they served to engage each individual teacher in the research idea, and an analysis of the need to teach in, through and for human rights. In effect it was an opportunity to converse on their views, suggestions, and concerns about the project. Secondly, the interviews provided an opening to discuss practical arrangements including training needs, materials, resources, timing and so forth.

The third step was a survey conducted with a cohort group of teachers as part of the longitudinal study to extract more detailed specific information on their experiences with teaching about and in human rights and their training history in this area. The process involved two questionnaires; one completed before the human rights education process was developed as part of the planning phase, and a second was completed after the year long study of the human rights education process was carried out (see appendices B and C). A total of seven teachers were involved in the programme, and as the number was manageable I decided to include all of them in the cohort study. This

had the added advantage of presenting a complete range of all the learning, views, and experiences, of the entire staff. The process recorded the changes that the teachers themselves experienced, and the successes and failures that they believed they had overseen.

Regular updates and discussions were convened formally at the monthly staff meetings. In this way an opportunity was created for all teachers to discuss and analyse progress with the action research regularly.

I aimed to make the process of experiential planning energising, hoping for full engagement by all in the process of shared problem solving. Ultimately, through the progression of this dialogue the staff agreed together that we would jointly construct and deliver the implementation phase.

Pupils

A cohort of over fifty pupils was surveyed by questionnaire before and after the realisation of the programme (see appendices D and E). Initially I considered using a representative cross-section of children from all classes as an option for the longitudinal analysis. This proved to be impractical as the younger children would have experienced difficulty in responding to the questionnaire and considerable time would have been required to get the necessary feedback from them. Instead a cohort of children from the senior half of the school, that is third, fourth, fifth and sixth classes [ages 8 to 12] were surveyed by questionnaire before and after the project.

The initial survey provided insights and information that guided the design and implementation of the action research. The questionnaire served as the first part of the longitudinal analysis that would be completed after the action research process.

Research plan

The implementation process was defined through agreement on a human rights education policy (see appendix F) and a programme (see appendix G), which were the subject of consultation among teachers, and discussion with the Parents' Committee before being decided upon by the Board of Management and incorporated in to the school plan.

The process involved a commitment from all teachers to formally teach up to ten lessons, on a human rights theme, in their classroom. On a broader level it involved each class becoming involved in a series of whole-school initiatives such as a school court and a school committee. It involved teachers infusing human rights methodology into their broader teaching programme and integrating human rights themes with other subject areas.

The preparations for the implementation phase focussed on three major areas, the staff, the organisation of the school, and the curriculum. The research plan was developed based on inputs received from the school community at large, with consideration for the over-riding framework of the school principles and ethos. This information was used to assess the current situation regarding human rights education in the school at the three levels of curriculum, staff, and organisation. Following from this assessment the needs were identified, again on the basis of interaction with the school community. The strategies to address these needs – the imagined solutions – were then discussed and agreed across the three focus areas. The final outcome was an implementation plan for the overall action research process, and the plan itself was generated through an action research methodology of reflection and action (see chapter seven and table 7.1).

Phase 3: Implementation – action and reflection

The whole-school process was led by the teaching staff as a unit. Early in the planning phase the teachers agreed on the key issues and research questions. During meetings and discussions with colleagues as part of the design phase, issues of process and structure became paramount.

Logistics

Colleagues agreed to the idea of a collective process of brainstorming and design to create the framework for the project. This early need for structure arose partially through concern for the impact of the research on teachers' time and class time, and partially in an effort to clarify for colleagues what exactly a human rights approach to schooling might look like in practice.

Colleagues were anxious to find opportunities to address issues such as:

- agreeing a time-frame for the project
- establishing opportunities and obstacles that could serve to help or hinder the development of human rights education in the school
- providing an insight into the knowledge and attitudes about human rights education which prevailed within the school community
- providing resources; manuals, texts, videos, for example
- training, professional development and capacity building
- starting to plan the lessons and methodologies that they would use
- agreeing a system for observing, recording and evaluating the process

Policy

During the consultations with teachers the need for a whole-school policy on human rights education was identified. The policy statement was devised with the teachers

based on discussion with individual members of the Board of Management and representatives of the Parents' Committee. It was presented to the Board and formally adopted as school policy. It set out the over-arching mission statement, school based aims, and outlined the school plan in relation to human rights education (see chapter six).

Programme

It was agreed that staff would work together to design and develop the human rights education plan for lessons and approaches that would be taught and implemented as part of the action research process. The overall programme was to be a joint piece of work shared by all and was to be approved collectively at a staff meeting.

The work scheme included agreed goals for each class. We also considered and standardised approaches to questions such as the:

- number of human rights education lessons during the period of the action research project
- strategies for integration of human rights education in to other subjects
- processes to facilitate a participative/democratic learning environment
- mechanisms to nurture relevant skills in the class, such as understanding, conflict resolution, equality, and responsibility
- ways to involve parents in the project, including classroom assistance, giving talks to the children, and involving parents in research at home.

Despite the interest and commitment from colleagues, the effort to involve them centrally in the drafting process proved to be an unrealistic expectation. While they were willing and enthusiastic about the project, it was extremely difficult to make time for drafting meetings, given the other school-based activities that were in hand. In addition colleagues reported that they would not feel confident about designing lesson plans and similar detailed activities. As it proved impossible to involve the staff in the

drafting process in any comprehensive way, I agreed to design the draft programme. During the development process I relied heavily on the input from teachers received during the consultation process. The final drafts were circulated to all staff and comments were sought. The feedback from the teachers confirmed that the basic format incorporated the comments made during the consultation and addressed the needs of the school.

The human rights education plan was implemented as a continuous series of thinking-doing-thinking steps. Colleagues taught at least one lesson per month, sometimes over two or more days. In addition they oversaw parallel initiatives to integrate the methodologies into other subjects, and to organise the whole-school activities. Lesson notes and written diaries were prepared after each lesson. Teachers found the recording process time-consuming and burdensome, sometimes to the point where little or nothing was written up, but in the main a series of helpful and reflective records was amassed.

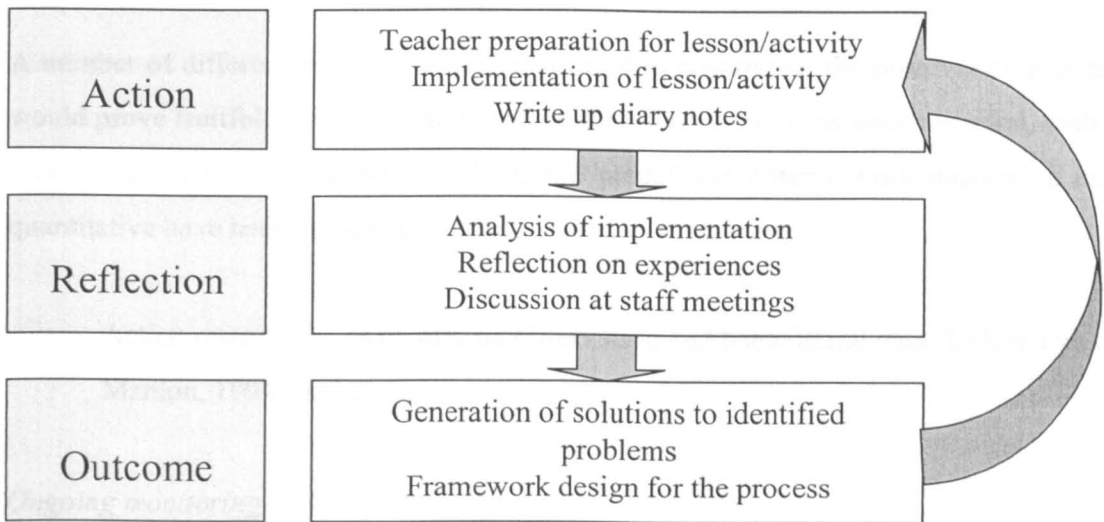
Implementation cycles

Once a month the teachers held open discussions at staff meetings where critical evaluations of the outcomes of their lessons and interactions took place and where necessary, collective decisions were taken to revise or redirect activities. In addition, where specific issues arose the use of one-to-one meetings, to utilise the information collected to revise and redirect the process, became a common and positive occurrence.

I also noted that teachers engaged in informal bilateral discussions among themselves in small groups. Most of these exchanges were ad hoc, sporadic, and short. Colleagues did not generally refer to these meetings in their diaries, however I observed that teachers used these exchanges regularly to test ideas, and to seek affirmation from peers. The thinking that emerged from the reflections of colleagues as individuals, in these small chat groups, and in the more formal one-to-one and monthly meetings, combined to help re-imagine and redirect the implementation process. It became an action and

reflection cycle of implementation, as set out in table 4.2, that was continuous throughout the process.

Table 4.2 The action/reflection cycle of implementation



Phase 4: Interpretation - evaluation procedures

The overall importance of monitoring school responsiveness to a human rights culture is argued in Osler and Starkey (1998 and 2000). In the context of action research the importance of reflection, monitoring and ongoing evaluation is critical to the process (Cohen and Manion, 1994).

Monitory action research

The situation in which the action research programme in *Gaelscoil* was implemented presented many advantages that facilitated the monitory process. The fact that I, as the researcher, was based in the school provided immediate access to the cohort of teachers involved. Thus, there were no gatekeepers or stakeholders who might present barriers to access. Successes and failures were reported almost immediately, most often informally in the staff room. Communication lines were informal, very open and fluid.

The challenge, on the other hand, was the breath of the project and the need to monitor a learning process involving up to eight teachers, two hundred pupils, over seventy lessons, and a wide range of activities over a full academic year.

A number of different techniques were identified to ensure that the observation process would prove fruitful. The aim was to ensure that the observations were recorded, with a view to analysing the degree to which the predefined criteria, both qualitative and quantitative have been achieved:

Action research relies chiefly on observation and behavioural data (Cohen and Manion, 1994: 192).

Ongoing monitoring

Ongoing monitoring was recognised as the critical dimension to ensuring that the project was re-evaluated on a continuous basis, to monitoring implementation of the programme across the school, and to recording progress throughout the year:

[The] process is constantly monitored over varying periods of time and by a variety of mechanisms (questionnaires, diaries, interviews and case studies, for example) so that the ensuing feedback may be translated into modifications, adjustments, directional changes, redefinitions, as necessary, so as to bring about lasting benefit to the ongoing process itself rather than to some future occasion (Cohen and Manion, 1994: 192).

At the initial meeting with colleagues to discuss the project we identified three methods for monitoring, regular meetings, diary keeping, and a longitudinal cohort study.

Meetings

The teaching staff agreed early in the process that the action research initiative should be a standing agenda item at the monthly staff meeting. Records were kept of these monthly meetings at which we discussed the teachers' notes, experiences, problems, or successes. Similarly notes of any follow up bilateral meetings with individual teachers were usually kept. The programme was adapted based on this feedback as we moved through the process, and the notes reflected these adaptations and decisions. All of this information served to shape the evaluation at the end of the year based on the outcomes of these meetings and the teachers' notes.

Diaries

As indicated above the diaries and notes kept by the teachers throughout the implementation year became a helpful written record of the process. Colleagues had requested a standard record sheet that they could use with predetermined de-briefing questions listed, and a request that no more than one page be expected of them. In response to this I drew up standard diary sheets for all teachers matching their respective programmes (see appendix H). The benefit of keeping a diary was that it compelled the teachers to reflect, describe and evaluate their experiences (McKernan, 1991). In addition the diaries provided a structured bank of written data, which was analysed and interrogated when compiling the action research outcomes. It was not comprehensive by any means, with some teachers making only scant comments, while others produced substantive information. I too, kept a diary of my experiences in class, and with the teachers.

Longitudinal study

As noted earlier under phase two, in seeking to monitor, and evaluate the successes and failures during the implementation of the human rights education programme, I utilised longitudinal recording mechanisms. This ongoing collection of information over a period of time helped identify trends and patterns (Cohen and Manion, 1994), which were used to inform the outcomes of the action research project. Ultimately the project would change the teaching approaches and the pupil experiences if implemented successfully, and in line with the aims. In this way the research was developmental in nature, and sought to create an environment in which change could be generated, and recorded, with a view to verifying the research aims, and providing data that could facilitate replication of the programme in other schools.

The second part of the longitudinal study was completed using a further round of questionnaires during the fourth phase in the process. This contributed to the analysis of the overall impact and change. This process was confidential to facilitate openness and engagement, and while this made it impossible to track attitudinal change at the level of the individual, it undoubtedly added to the quality of the information made available.

Indicators of achievement

In preparation for the year-end evaluation, colleagues discussed the idea of more specific indicators of achievement linked to the aims, so as to help them provide an overview at the final staff meeting. In response I developed a series of reflective questions in consultation with colleagues. These questions were based directly on the aims of the project, and sought to generate a qualitative analysis of the degree to which colleagues felt that we had achieved our aims at the levels of the school, the group, and the individual. There were also a series a quantitative questions relating to expected outcomes. Chapter eight deals comprehensively with the issue of evaluation, and the

qualitative and quantitative questions used for guidance. The responses generated by these questions were discussed with the staff and the findings recorded.

Processing of data collected as part of the longitudinal cohort analysis

The questionnaires (appendices B to E) were planned with three purposes in mind. The initial round would provide information which would inform the overall preparation for the implementation, the final round would serve as an evaluation tool, and the combination of both would provide a longitudinal change analysis. The questions were structured around these three intentions. I used open-ended questions as a technique to maximise the information gleaned through the process.

The completed questionnaires were read a number of times and response patterns were identified. The fact that the cohort groups were completely accessible and involved meant that I would inevitably get close to a one hundred per cent response rate, and that is what happened in practice.

Processing the information from the first questionnaire, which would inform the design process, involved extracting the key messages that were of relevance to the design phase. I sought guidance on what should be done, or what should not be done as part of the process. The key messages identified were tested with colleagues at a staff meeting to check the accuracy of the signals that had been extrapolated from the sample.

The second questionnaire served a stand-alone purpose as an evaluation technique for the cycle of implementation. A series of findings were interpreted from the data, which gave information on the positive outcomes of the process, and the complications that had arisen. A number of technical problems were reflected which gave cause to restructure elements of content and methodology. Secondly feedback on the process itself, and how it was recorded gave direction that will be useful as the process is developed further into the future.

The comparative analysis between the data collected in the first questionnaire, to that from the second, generated a picture of the changes which participants perceived. These were many and varied, and the data proved interesting in this respect (see chapters nine and ten).

Processing of data collected during meetings and from diaries

The meetings, at all levels – formal monthly sessions with all staff, formal one-to-one meetings, and informal conversations – served a number of purposes. They had a catalytic affect on implementation as formal reporting points. As a framework for mutual accountability colleagues knew that if progress had not been made they would have to talk about why in conclave. Teachers were energised and positively affirmed on the one hand, while experiencing some sense of pressure from the process on the other.

Secondly, the meetings were a review and planning opportunity. They fitted into the action research cycle as part of the ongoing process of action and reflection. They became opportunities for collective thought in the process. They became at once the time of analysis, questioning, hypothesising, cross-referencing, and planning anew.

Data generated in these fora was recorded in the meeting notes, and this complemented the records kept in diaries by colleagues. This information was processed at two levels; in an ongoing way as part of the cyclical process of action and reflection throughout the year, and as an overall evaluation exercise at the end of the year.

The continuum of data processing and analysis involved ongoing reflection on the meeting notes and diaries to get an understanding of the significance of the information for the process, and discussing those meanings with colleagues with a view to reformulating our thinking, and our approach. I did this as researcher and teacher, while in parallel my colleagues were similarly critical, though with different degrees of

intensity. Within weeks of commencement this regular cycle of interaction with information, and with one another, became accepted.

Validity

The compiled feedback and outcomes that were generated during the year were processed collectively through a series of discussions based on structured qualitative and quantitative questions. The resultant information from meeting notes, and diaries, was processed, and a series of findings were agreed. The validity of these findings was vital to the study, and three stages were used to corroborate them, self-validation, learner validation, and peer validation (McNiff, 1988).

Firstly the information was assessed against the project framework of aims, methods, and action research monitoring that I had put in place.

The findings were then crosschecked against the outcomes of the longitudinal cohort study that had been conducted with the pupils and the teachers, and other data collection methods, as part of the triangulation process. This resulted in a series of clustered findings that address the aims of the project.

Thirdly, these findings were tested with participant teachers, as a final stage in ensuring that their understandings and perspectives were accurately captured in the outcomes.

Ethical issues

Ethical issues in both research, and in education, can be complex. Where the two are combined there emerges a range of dilemmas, conflicts of interest, and sensitivities.

As author of a project concerned to advance human rights in education, there was an inherent methodological obligation on me as the researcher to uphold the rights of the

subjects. An ethical approach must be part of the process if participation, inclusion, and democracy are to be fostered.

The ethics of whole-school approaches

The imagined solution central to my study involved a whole-school approach. In order to put a participative and experiential learning environment in place, to give meaning and life to human rights, there was no other imaginable solution as has been argued in chapter two.

The dilemma this posed was that a whole-school approach would be necessarily collective – all or nothing. Teachers and students would unavoidably become players in a process to which they or their parents might have objected. This was, of course, the stuff of democracy. Inclusive and democratic consideration of the decision to embark on the process in the first instance was essential.

It was important to monitor people's varying levels of engagement and willingness to participate, and to do so with understanding, as individual informed consent by all staff and all students/parents was not possible.

Researcher and principal teacher

The fact that I, as principal, was both the primary innovator promoting human rights education in the school and also the 'boss' had obvious advantages. But there were less obvious and potentially difficult disadvantages. As a teaching principal in the school I participated directly in the study environment. My work with the class, and my management of the school would form part of the total picture that would emerge from the study.

The main advantage was the fact that I had immediate access to teachers, children and parents to introduce new curricular initiatives or research projects. As one's own gate guard formal access is never a problem. As a committed researcher who was striving for an innovative approach to learning and in-school organisation, there was also considerable advantage arising from my position of influence within the school. I was an essential part of the process, and the engagement of the participants with me was a significant barometer during the study (Trafford, 1996).

One potential disadvantage concerned my relationship with colleagues in the school. Teachers might have aligned themselves with my areas of pedagogical interest simply because it was something they felt they had to do out of a sense of professional obligation to management. At worst a situation could have emerged where a teacher felt his or her rights were being undermined, by the imposition of a new teaching framework, or by the effort to magnify the rights of the children, but might not have felt able to express this.

Moving from an abstract notion of rights to their positive application in the classroom was difficult. An acceptance of the challenge in principle does not mean that one feels comfortable as it comes to pass in practice. Teachers could have been expected to shift in their levels of openness to the action research as it progressed.

This was considered openly with the teachers, and was monitored during the study and discussed at various stages throughout, both collectively and bilaterally. Teachers were given the choice to opt out at any point, and this happened for one class, more for logistical reasons than personal concerns. Three different substitute teachers taught fourth class during the year, and so it proved difficult to integrate these teachers into the action research project with any consistency.

A second set of concerns related to the asymmetric relationship between the pupils in the school and myself. If the aims of the study were to be achieved it would affect the

power dynamics in the relationship between the children and the principal, and between the children and the teachers. Therein lay a range of conflicts of interest, which challenged my colleagues, the children, and me as principal. Observing how these inter-relationships unfolded and recording discussions as issues arose yielded important information.

Issues relating to consent

As a multilayered and broad study it became necessary to gain consent from a range of actors. The Department of Education and Science were informed through the local school inspector, who visited the school to discuss the proposal and was entirely supportive of the study. Secondly, the Board of Management discussed and approved the human rights education policy and plan, which were developed as part of the study. The school community was duly informed of this decision through the regular communications from the Board.

Thirdly, the Parents' Committee, though not a formal decision making body in the realm of school curriculum and programming, were involved in the consultations on the policy and plan, and were part of the discussions with the Board which resulted in the positive decision to embark on the study. As the democratically elected parents' body I saw their involvement as the most manageable and effective way to gain parental co-operation at some level.

The teaching staff, as the dynamo for the project, were given the opportunity to opt out, as discussed above. As a small group of just eight people, all of whom knew one another well, and in the context of a Board decision to take on human rights education as part of the school plan, there was an element of peer pressure at play, and which I sought to monitor.

Lastly, and crucially, the children themselves were not formally consulted on whether they wanted to be part of the study and indeed there would be an unethical dimension to asking children (or their parents) to opt out of a whole-school project which would inevitably impact on their learning environment in some way.

As the project aimed to infuse democratic values into education this was an undoubted irony, perhaps something to be regretted. On the other hand one could take the theoretical view that as willing participation, critical thinking, and empowerment were intrinsic elements to the study, the children would have a *de facto* right to withdraw from the lessons if they so choose by simply opting out. Records were kept on children's levels of engagement with the process to monitor this.

An atypical school

The subject school, *Gaelscoil*, is unusual. It is the only Irish language immersion primary school in Ireland that is also affiliated to the Education Together multi-denominational school movement. This exceptional educational environment is central to my study, and not an aspect of the school that could be ignored in my research. I have not named the school as a purposeful attempt to maximise the level of privacy afforded to the participants. Neither have I given the exact location, or the year in which the school was established. However, it would be difficult to avoid a situation where the school might be identified, precisely because it is atypical.

Individual teachers are not named, but in a small school there is the risk that people will be identified by their comments, and so a number of additional steps were taken to protect the identities of individual teachers, for example, the exact school year during which the study took place is not recorded.

Privacy

Children and teachers alike were informed that their contributions to the longitudinal cohort study would be treated as private. Names were not sought on the questionnaires as a tactical strategy to encourage openness through guaranteeing confidentiality. No attempt was made to match the questionnaire to individuals afterwards.

As a process involving experiential change in attitudes and understanding there could have been a significant level of personal reflection, some of which could be sensitive for each individual. While disclosures of private emotions and feelings among the children or the staff occurred more in one to one conversations, the use of participative methodologies did inevitably result in some quite public disclosures.

The records kept of meetings, lessons and conversations do capture some of these interpersonal experiences. Teachers were assured that at no point in the writing up process would their names be linked to specific comments, revelations or observations. Teachers undertook not to record the names of individual children beside specific attributable comments.

Summary

The research questions upon which the study was based were identified, and included how the school was providing for, or failing to provide for human rights education? How was the dynamic and ethos of our school affected by emphasising human rights education? What opportunities and obstacles existed to the advancement of human rights education in our school? A series of research aims focused on developing a human rights school, monitoring the impact and evaluating the outcomes were developed arising from the process of reflection on these questions.

These aims informed the overall action research methodology. The four phases of the project were set out in detail. The planning approach, considered together with outcomes of the initial consultations, which resulted in the identification of the problem. The design phase, which sought to imagine solutions and outline the school policy framework, together with the research methodology plan within which these solutions could be achieved. The implementation process during which a series of cumulative stages of action and reflection were put in place over a year was explained in detail. The fourth phase involved interpreting the data that was recorded through a range of evaluation and monitoring mechanisms.

A range of ethical dilemmas in relation to privacy and confidentiality, consent, and the challenges of a whole-school initiative for a human rights approach were discussed. In addition the likely conflicts of interest associated with the roles played by the author as researcher, principal and teacher were considered.

Over the coming chapters the design, implementation, and interpretation will be reported in detail.

Chapter 5

Consultations with teachers and pupils

Introduction

Chapter four sets out the methodology that I used to underpin my research. Consultation and information exchange mechanisms were central to the process. As part of the action research a series of consultations took place with both the teachers and the pupils (see table 5.1). In this chapter the overall consultation process is set out. The data generated during these meetings, one-to-one discussions and questionnaires is analysed as part of the introductory action-planning phase.

This information was interrogated through a process of reflection and dialogue with teaching colleagues. The resultant key messages received from the pupils and teachers are reflected here, and they served to inform the design of the action research process.

Consultation with individual teachers

A series of semi-formal one-to-one meetings were organised with individual teachers to expand on the introduction that was given at the initial meeting (see chapter four). These meetings served to reiterate and consolidate the messages from the initial gathering including discussion of concerns or worries the teachers might have about the project and their willingness to be a part of it, and secondly, to get more detailed information about the experiences and attitudes of individual teachers vis-à-vis human rights education, and their comments on the proposed aims of the project.

All of the teachers were happy with the introduction they had received and wanted to proceed with the project. Colleagues were positive about the initiative in the light of their experience with the core curriculum for religious education and felt that it was entirely in keeping with the school ethos and the school plan (see chapter three). The

staff felt quite confident and enthusiastic about the project and agreed that we should have formal discussions on a monthly basis as part of the staff meeting agenda to discuss the project. As colleagues reported:

This is similar to the ideas we have for the school, and our multi-denominational approach.

Teaching like this is what it should be all about. We should be doing this all the time.

Human rights education should fit well with the approach we are trying to develop here.

By involving the staff in the project in an ongoing participative way I sought to develop shared responsibility for achieving the goals of the project. As Trafford (1997: 9) suggests:

Leadership, which embraces a participative approach, leads to shared vision and goals throughout the school.

Given the high level of agreement and interest in the project the main focus of these individual meetings became information gathering about experiences and attitudes with a view to finalising the situational analysis and refining the aims of the project accordingly (see chapter six). The overall approach was to locate the action research project within the daily reality of our school by identifying the problems we wanted to overcome, and the challenges we sought to tackle:

Situational analysis can also be considered as the recognition of some school problem which then becomes a springboard for the curriculum development (Marsh, 1992: 79).

Table 5.1 Consultation and communications mechanisms used throughout the action research process

Phase 1: Planning

- Introductory half day meeting with staff
- Semi-structured interviews with each teacher
- Informal follow-up meetings with some teachers
- First questionnaire with teachers
- First questionnaires with pupils

Phase 2: Design

- Formal monthly staff meetings
- Informal follow-up with some teachers
- Informal dialogue with the Parents' Committee
- Formal meeting with the Board of Management

Phase 3: Implementation

- Formal monthly staff meetings
- Diaries kept by all teachers
- Periodic informal meetings with individual staff

Phase 4: Interpretation

- Second questionnaire with teachers
- Second questionnaire with pupils
- Analysis of diaries
- Final staff meeting

Each teacher was given a questionnaire (see chapter four) as the first part of the longitudinal study. Teachers were informed that the questionnaire would be used to help analyse the current situation regarding human rights education in the school and to revise the aims of the project. In addition the information gathered would form the basis for the programme of work to be developed in the school.

Analysis of the results of the questionnaire and feedback on the semi-structured interviews with the teachers

As outlined in chapter two, the human rights education process involves teaching about human rights, and teaching in human rights across the school (Heater, 1984; Lister, 1984; Cunningham, 1991). Questions on both were included in parts 1 and 2 of the questionnaire respectively, while part 3 dealt with training.

Part 1 Teaching about human rights

The entire teaching staff of eight teachers agreed to become involved in the project. While three of the teachers had not taught human rights education lessons in the past, the remainder reported that they had conducted lessons on either the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The lessons teachers had conducted were taught across a range of subjects including the Stay Safe Programme (in relation to bullying for example), the core curriculum for religious education, and as a basis for drawing up a class contract. The staff reported that the lessons successfully raised the awareness of children in relation to their rights. Interestingly a number of comments highlighted the fact that children see rights as relevant only to children and people in other countries. Tellingly one teacher reported that:

Children were glad to see that they had rights but they feel that they are not listened to often enough.

Colleagues reported that lessons on famous human rights activists were highly successful and that they stimulated discussion and debate amongst the children. Three of the teachers reported that they had conducted such lessons and in one detailed response it was reported that:

The lessons appeared to encourage children to question rules and traditions, especially stereotypical views of gender issues.

The entire group reported that they had taught lessons on basic human rights principles such as non-discrimination or equality as part of the general classroom management system. These references were often informal and related to classroom events and happenings. More formally a number of teachers reported that lessons on issues such as fairness, sharing, understanding, gender, tolerance, and minorities, were carried out as part of their scheme of work.

Fewer teachers had facilitated lessons on human rights abuses. Topics such as the unfair distribution of wealth had been covered in development education. Lessons on strangers, bullies, and protection from abuse which form part of the Stay Safe Programme would also have been taught. One teacher who had taught senior classes recounted that the lessons on discrimination that she had facilitated went very well.

Interestingly, every teacher surveyed held strong views in favour of educating children about human rights, and felt that rather than undermining the authority and discipline structures in the school such programmes would in fact have a positive impact on the children and the school. Views in favour of human rights education ranged from the need to develop the children's own sense of discipline, the encouragement of

responsible behaviour, the fostering of respect, the empowerment of children, developing thoughtfulness and tolerance, and protecting the children against abuse.

A number of the respondents reflected on the need to prepare the lessons well, and to ensure that the subject matter is simplified as appropriate, and explained effectively to the children.

When asked if they felt that children could understand the concepts of rights and responsibilities there was unanimous agreement in favour:

Yes, more so than adults. Children have an acute awareness of justice and injustice.

Fairness is very important to young children.

This enthusiasm for teaching human rights was qualified by the need to ensure that the lessons are relevant and targeted appropriately to the relevant age groups.

Given that there is no official time allocation for human rights education in the curriculum the staff members integrated lessons into a number of different subject areas. Predictably both the Stay Safe Programme and particularly the core curriculum for religious education were suggested as likely programme areas which overlap with human rights education. Other subject areas mentioned were arts (drama and art), social environmental, and scientific education (geography, history, environmental education, development education), and language (oral work).

Part 2 Teaching in human rights

Discussion and consideration of the effectiveness of teaching in a participative environment yielded positive views. The entire teaching staff were broadly in favour of working in a participative and shared learning atmosphere. Respondents reported that:

The pupils will not only be learning about human rights principles, but they will be directly applying them in a classroom situation and thus lead to a better understanding of the principles.

The atmosphere is charged with tolerance and respect because children are more aware.

Two teachers cautioned that:

Some rules are necessary. Group work must be done in an orderly fashion.

Children should appreciate and respect the teacher's right to steer activities in an effective agreeable way.

Trafford (1997) registered similar concerns. These comments are important. Firstly, they indicate that the teachers are thinking about the implications of participative learning on classroom management. It is likely that other teachers harbour similar concerns. This sense that order and rules are essential for effective learning is a natural question to ask oneself if embarking on a more collaborative and open approach to teaching. Secondly, the concerns raised here, though valid, suggest an inaccurate understanding of participative learning. In my view the fact that they are raised at all indicates that some training is needed to help the teachers understand that participative learning is not anarchic learning. Rather the aim is to reinforce the rule and order within the group by helping the children to structure the learning experience.

When asked if it is a good idea to encourage democracy and participation in the classroom the respondents were generally enthusiastic and positive. “Of course”, “absolutely”, and “certainly” were the responses. A number of the comments were interesting and revealing:

Children like being involved, it's more interesting. It can improve their social skills and their confidence.

This can lead to a sense of responsibility in the children.

Making decisions together makes the children more responsible and develops in them understanding of other's opinions and acceptance of these.

Feelings of worth are fostered, enhances self-esteem.

As a result even very young children become very responsible for their own actions.

Most of the respondents have used the word “responsible” and indeed one further contribution reflected on the need for children to “realise the importance of rights AND responsibilities” [her emphasis]. Of course this is one of the essential elements of human rights education and it would certainly echo the importance of engendering responsibility in young people. But it is interesting to acknowledge that this element of responsibility is one of the “selling points” of human rights education when trying to bring teachers on board. When teaching human rights education courses to teachers I have observed that there is a sense of relief when they realise that it is all about responsibility and good citizenship. There is a widely held view that children who know their rights will become unmanageable. All of my experience in this area indicates otherwise (Osler and Starkey, 1998; Osler and Starkey, 2001b).

Teachers reported that they had used various techniques to encourage participation in their classes including involvement in consultations on a choice of activities and projects, developing class contracts, discussing misbehaviour with the children, conflict resolution strategies, and the class timetable. One teacher reported that she had used participative learning techniques with a class that had no such experience in the past, and a different class that were familiar with a participative approach. Interestingly, she reported that the enthusiasm children have for participation can tend to wane. However, she was referring to the use of specific methodologies, rather than participative learning per se, and in this regard it can be assumed that children may tire of any one technique (for example, brainstorming) if it is over played in the classroom.

All of the teachers agreed that a participative and shared learning approach improves discipline within the class. This is a highly significant observation given that I have met teachers at in-service courses who fear human rights education as it encourages critical thinking and self-confidence, and they perceive this as a detriment to authority. Based on the evidence of this survey any such fears are groundless. Contributions included:

They [the children] learn not only to respect me [the teacher] but to respect themselves and each other.

Discipline comes easier.

They [the children] see the necessity for some rules and they like the responsibility of drawing them up and enforcing them.

Equally colleagues reported that the parents of the children they teach would value a participative approach to learning:

From a parent's point of view it would improve the pupil's social skills and confidence. Once pupils enjoy school and learning the parents are pleased.

All parents would like to feel that their child has the opportunity and ability to contribute in the classroom, especially parents of children with learning difficulties or low self-esteem.

The parents are aware of the teacher's approach to discipline and learning and support it.

Part 3 Training

All of the teachers were asked if they had received pre-service or in-service training in human rights education. Three of the teachers, all of whom had graduated from the same teacher training college, reported that while there was no specific course on human rights education available, a module on development education was part of an optional programme in third year. Human rights issues were covered within the context of development education as part of this optional module which two of the three teachers selected.

The remaining teachers attended three other training colleges and reported that no pre-service training was available on human rights education or human rights issues. Thus none of the teachers were trained or exposed to human rights education during their training. This is significant when you consider that the teachers surveyed attended four different teacher-training colleges, and there are five colleges in total across the country.

The reports were equally discouraging in relation to in-service training. Only one of the teachers had attended a course on human rights education. This was a weeklong summer course run by an NGO. This is the only course run in Ireland specifically

related to human rights education, though a number of courses on development education also include human rights education.

Based on this feedback it is clear that the recommendation of a study in Northern Ireland is equally applicable in the Republic, namely:

While human rights education should become integral to all in-service training programmes for teachers, there is an urgent need to ensure its integration in the pre-service training curriculum (Bourne *et al.*, 1997: 46).

Learning from the consultations with teachers

Before continuing to the next stage of the project, the design of a policy and research plan, it was important to reflect on the learning from the consultation with teachers and to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the group. This information served to inform the further development of the project.

A. Enthusiasm

Firstly, and significantly, I was enthusiastic and energetic in leading the school and the action research project. I was positive in purposefully steering the development of a participative and democratic approach (Trafford, 1997). Also, it is clear that the teachers were enthusiastic and committed to the project. Their responses indicate that they were interested in human rights education and willing to work in a participative and shared learning environment. This enthusiasm was likely to have been linked to the fact that the school ethos encourages an open and collective whole-school approach to teaching and organising (Cunningham, 1991). But an enthusiastic approach will not necessarily change the way the children learn, or change the way the school operates unless it is implemented in a defined framework. Neither is it acceptable that teaching for citizenship be entirely dependent on the enthusiasm of teachers (Fogelman, 1991).

There was a strong sense of professionalism among staff members accompanied by recognition that ongoing training and research are necessary to consistently acquire new knowledge and skills:

One cannot be a teacher-professional without engaging in research in order to improve one's performance (McKernan, 1991: 47).

It is also possible that the teachers saw this project as important for them because they knew that I, as school principal, had attached importance to it. In the initial consultations with teachers I assured them that they did not have to be part of this project and that they should not become involved simply because I was co-ordinating activities. Colleagues reassured me that they were genuinely committed to teaching in and for human rights and that, to some extent at any rate, there was nothing very new in what was to be undertaken. Rather it was simply structuring, organising, and naming an area; that is to say making explicit much of what was already part of the hidden curriculum within the school.

B. Experience

It was clear that a majority of the teachers had some experience of teaching human rights education, and teaching in a style that recognises the rights of everybody in the classroom. Teachers had been involved in drawing up class charters, conducting lessons on famous human rights activists, and similar activities. In a broader sense the teachers had been working in a consultative environment where the children were seen as stakeholders in the classroom who had valid opinions and preferences.

It was equally clear however that the extent of the lessons which teachers reported that they had taught was quite limited. Respondents reported that they had not conducted elaborate programmes of activity but rather isolated lessons or project work on limited

themes. When asked to list the specific lesson topics they had taught most teachers offered a limited response. “Martin Luther King and Ghandi”, “The Convention on the Rights of the Child”, “class constitution”, and “gender”, were some of the responses. In most cases the lessons were taught as part of the core curriculum for religious education.

Thus, while the staff had some experience with human rights education, possibly as much experience as any teaching staff in Ireland, it was better to assume that this experience was limited.

C. Understanding

While staff members were enthusiastic, and relatively experienced in human rights education, they would face difficulties in understanding the scope and depth of the project. There was a tendency among colleagues to oversimplify human rights education by seeing it as a subject area, or indeed as a module of lessons within a subject. This was reasonable in a context where they each sought to feel confident about what their direct responsibility was in the overall project.

Developing an understanding among colleagues that an overemphasis on knowledge or information associated with human rights, might eschew the cardinal elements of attitudes and skills, would be part of the process. The objective was not just to provide the children with information but to help them use that information to develop attitudes and skills that would enable them to make a meaningful and positive contribution to society. In short, it was about changing the children’s experience of education. This is a particular challenge because it called upon the staff to change the way they taught:

If...curriculum change is to involve changes in how learning happens as well as in what is learnt, then it must be about changes in pupil and teacher behaviour as well as in the materials they are working with (D'arcy, 1980: 95).

To facilitate this broader concept of educating in human rights, it was necessary to devise techniques and methodologies that developed the children's skills, attitudes and knowledge in every lesson at all levels. Using interactive techniques such as debates, buzz sessions, and discussions, and using activities such as letter writing, art and projects would be essential. Creating thematic activities such as a school court would also be wise. By including these dimensions in the project the teachers would come to understand through practice that human rights education is not just about what is taught, but how it is taught, and why it is taught.

D. Training

Six of the staff members had not received training in human rights education. Clearly, this lacuna would pose challenges to the project and a mechanism needed to be put in place to provide the teachers with the necessary information and skills to empower them in any area in which they felt a lack of expertise or confidence. The levels of enthusiasm and experience outlined above would address this problem to some extent, but it is unfair and probably unwise to have expected the teachers to be part of the curriculum development process in this area without some training:

There can be no curriculum development without teacher development and the more teachers are to be given responsibility for curriculum development the more important it becomes that they be given all possible support (Kelly, 1989: 137).

Analysis of the results of the questionnaires from the children

The survey was conducted using a questionnaire that was thoroughly explained to all the children in advance, with the assurance that they could write what they genuinely felt, as the survey was anonymous. A total of fifty-seven children were surveyed.

The aims of this consultation were:

- to establish the degree to which the children actually felt that *Gaelscoil* was a human rights school where they were treated fairly and equally as human beings
- to establish the level of understanding and knowledge the children had of human rights
- to canvass the views of the children about possible future initiatives which could facilitate a participative approach to learning in our school

Reassuringly, the vast majority of respondents indicated that they felt that the school was fair:

The rules are fair and the teachers are too. [Aged 9]

The teachers from what I know have never been unfair. [Aged 9]

The teachers give the same amount of attention to everybody. [Aged 9]

Everybody looks after each other and if you're hurt inside everybody will help you. [Aged 9]

The teachers listen to us whenever we have something to say. [Aged 10]

Everyone is treated with respect. [Aged 10]

Even though there are a lot of rules they help us grow up and learn the difference between right and wrong. [Aged 11]

*The teachers work very hard to make everybody feel the same way.
[Aged 11]*

*We are never given too much homework or unnecessary punishment.
[Aged 12]*

Three children did not give a positive answer, with a twelve year old indicating that “ the teachers are too hard on us”. Overall these responses demonstrated a strong capacity among children to understand justice and rights (Osler, 2000).

The fact that so many children responded positively reflected a healthy and encouraging situation. It was clear that a climate existed in which the children felt that they were treated fairly. This echoed the feedback from teachers, which indicated that a certain amount of human rights education was already well underway in the school. These positive responses were certainly an indication that the school ethos, policies, programmes and structures were working to create a fair environment.

It is also important to note that the consultation process might have been somewhat flawed because the children may have felt compelled to give positive answers as if it were an exam or other classroom activity. Notwithstanding the fact that the children were assured and reassured that we wanted them to be open and honest, it is safe to assume that the degree to which the school was thought to be fair by pupils may have been exaggerated.

It is extremely interesting to note that none of the respondents spoke about experiences of unfair behaviour among the children. Bullying, fighting, arguments and such like are an intrinsic part of every school day. Each incident involves victims and offenders, the

bullied and the bullies. The children knew and understood that there were elements to these situations that were very unfair. So why didn't they write about it in their responses? The question they were asked was "do you think that this is a fair school?" so it might have steered the children away from the issue of fair behaviour among the children. But a more focussed question, "do you think that all people are treated with respect by everybody?" yielded a similarly positive response. Is it that the children felt that while peers can be unfair to one another, the mechanisms in place for addressing these situations were adequate? Or is it that the children saw the issue of fairness as something that pertained solely to their relationship with the teachers and vice versa?

When asked if they felt important and special in our school the majority responded affirmatively. They indicated that the friendships and support they had in the school made them feel valued and secure. Seven children made a point of stating that while they feel important they do not believe themselves to be more important than others:

There are loads of children in the school and I don't think I should be the important one out of all the other classes. [Aged 9]

I do not think I am better than anyone else. [Aged 10]

In our school I just feel normal and equal to everybody else. [Aged 10]

I do not feel important in our school because everyone is treated equally. [Aged 11]

Three of the children indicated that they did not feel important for various reasons:

...most of the time is spent giving out to other children and then we sometimes get punished because of other children. [Aged 12]

Again most of the children felt that the teachers listened to them when they had a problem. The children felt that they could approach the teachers and rely on them to sort out difficulties and problems:

If you were bullied they would sort it out. [Aged 8]

Yes because they are teachers and that's their job. [Aged 8]

They help out a lot and listen when you have a problem. [Aged 10]

When I have a problem they listen and really try to do something about it. [Aged 11]

Four of the children felt that the teachers were bad listeners:

They're always rushing around or talking. [Aged 9]

*I don't think the teachers listen to me because they just say go away.
[Aged 10]*

They probably think we're trying to get attention. [Aged 10]

These revealing and varied comments, though expressions of a minority view, did raise important points. School, by its very nature is a busy and charged environment. The pupil teacher ratio was between 27 and 33 pupils per teacher. Listening could often be difficult, if not impossible, and the children could be as guilty as the teachers when it came to ignoring a boy or girl who needed to speak. The teachers' ability to listen at any given time related to the time of the day, the activity in hand, and the perceived gravity of the issue.

Respect is central in a human rights environment (Thorne, 1996; Osler and Vincent, 2003), and when asked if everybody in the school treated all others with respect the answers were very revealing. Again the large majority of respondents were positive and indicated that they felt that all members of the school were respected. However a selection of responses gave food for thought:

Yes, because you're not allowed fight. [Aged 8]

..we will give them the respect they need. [Aged 8]

Everyone respects others the way they want to be respected except for some pupils who are always getting in trouble, showing off to other people. [Aged 9]

I do not think the cleaners are treated with respect because most children throw the rubbish on the ground and they expect somebody to clean it up. [Aged 11]

I don't think pupils are respected in this school because some get bullied. [Aged 11]

No, because some children would talk about them behind their back, and some don't listen to the teachers, and some are rude to parents. [Aged 12]

..sometimes the parents can be a bit rough on the children. [Aged 12]

It was clear from the responses that the children had a strong understanding of respect and held opinions about the level of respect that existed between members of the school. Even the younger children understood and recognised instances where a lack of respect was demonstrated. The majority of responses broadly agreed that an atmosphere of respect and understanding existed. Most of these responses ran to a few sentences and gave examples or qualifications to justify their assertions.

Yet again there was a dilemma hidden in these responses. We knew that there were fights in the schoolyard on a daily basis, and we knew that we would receive a call from a parent who was concerned about bullying once a month on average. In this regard our school was just like any other. So why didn't the majority of children tell it like it was? Did they really understand what respect means? Could they justify misbehaviour that hurts and upsets children (including themselves) because it was all part of a game? Were they painting a rosy picture for the teacher? Or was it really a just, and respectful environment for the majority of the children? These are the questions that would have to be explored throughout the process.

Gaelscoil had a code of conduct and a policy on bullying. While the documents were not explicitly framed in human rights terms they sought to define a safe and empowering environment for the children. There was certainly scope to develop and adapt these documents towards a more human rights based approach. This project would eventually highlight any inadequacies in current school policies and procedures and indicate how they should be addressed.

Policies, regardless of the development process and the extent of their coverage, are completely redundant unless they are implemented, and found to be beneficial when implemented. A second question that emerged when considering school policies was the extent to which the written policy actually defined the scope of activity that existed in practice.

The children were questioned about the effectiveness of the code of conduct and the policy on bullying. In an effort to explain the question and simplify the issue they were told that the teachers were trying to find out if the school rules about bullying and conduct were helping to make the school a happier place. The children were also asked to indicate how the code might be improved.

Some of the results were quite ambiguous, with general comments in support of the code and policy balanced by comments indicating shortcomings. This prompts me to report that the individual children's faith in the law of the school was clearly linked to their direct experience. In cases where the children felt injustices were not dealt with, they correctly saw this as a failure of the policy (or by extrapolation a failure to implement the policy). For example, the child [aged 10] who said: "I think the code of conduct is working well as there is never any serious bullying" is obviously experiencing a different educational environment to the child [aged 11] who said: "a lot could be done to improve it because there are a lot of bullies in the school that the teachers know, and they haven't done anything about it."

The majority of children reported that the school rules, policy on bullying and code of conduct were working well. A substantial minority of the children, eleven in all, indicated some level of dissatisfaction with the situation:

There are a lot of bullies. [Aged 8]

The teachers always seem to give in. [Aged 10]

It could be improved by making the people who you think did it go outside the door and talk about it on their own. [Aged 10]

There is still that 25 per cent or 30 per cent who are breaking it. [Aged 11]

Interesting responses like "it could really be improved by no running and other things", and "we can improve it by asking the children in the school to tell the teachers if they see someone bullying or if they are being bullied" would seem to indicate that the children might not have been aware of what was in the code of conduct. Running in the corridors was mentioned in the code. While the importance of telling was not covered in the policy it was emphasised again and again in the Stay Safe Programme.

There were a number of suggestions for improvements to the code, not least from the child who said “if two people say that they didn’t do something and one of them is lying I think there should be a trial.”

A number of teachers sought to define the school policies as they related to their classes, with the help of the children, by devising class contracts. The *ad hoc* use of class contracts had started in the school prior to the commencement of the study, and there was unanimous support for them among respondents. All of the children had been involved in developing a contract (though some of them couldn’t remember it) and in the main they gave a strong report in favour of the system:

It was fair. [Aged 8]

I think it is good because they are like the human rights. [Aged 8]

I thought it was good because we agreed on them and we obeyed them. [Aged 9]

We know what is right and wrong. [Aged 9]

Every year we have a class contract and I think it’s great. [Aged 9]

Because of it the teachers have respect for the pupils. I was happy to sign it. [Aged 10]

The children were asked a general question about how they could be involved more in the running of our school. A number of the responses were extremely exciting. Nine children suggested that they should be allowed to vote. Three indicated that a teacher/pupil meeting would improve our school. Other suggestions included:

By listening to children. [Aged 8]

Let children know more about what is going on with the school. [Aged 8]

Class questions and answers with teacher or principal. [Aged 9]

Let them [children] be involved in the things that the teachers and parents do, like let them help in the jumble sale. [Aged 11]

A children's board of management to meet every month. [Aged 11]

Three or four children [should go to] the parents' committee meetings. [Aged 11]

The kids should be allowed to have meetings. [Aged 12]

By having a class president. [Aged 12]

These very stimulating suggestions indicated that the children had a real contribution to make to the life of the school, and some very viable ideas on how this would be done. The proposed human rights education programme would explore a number of these proposals.

One heartening response came from a child (aged 8) who felt that our school "couldn't be improved more".

In an effort to establish whether the children had a factual understanding of some basic human rights instruments they were asked what they knew about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Human rights education has been taking place within the school in a sporadic and unplanned

way over the years, so a certain understanding of these basic instruments was to have been expected (see chapter 3). By assessing the level of knowledge about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child I was able to make certain assumptions about what the children would need to cover in the proposed programme.

The children certainly had heard of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child but the level of knowledge and understanding varied greatly. Different children were able to list the various rights enshrined in these documents, but no child was able to list more than three or four. Most respondents made very valid statements and assumptions about the documents:

Everybody has the same rights. Everybody is equal. [Aged 9]

Children should have an education. [Aged 10]

You can have affection, love and understanding. [Aged 10]

*We should all be treated the same and everyone should get a chance.
[Aged 11]*

Approximately half of the children had a basic understanding of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. For example:

I know that rights of the child are free education, full opportunity for play, and to be the first to receive relief in time of disaster.... [Aged 11]

Every human being is entitled to food, access to shelter..children are to have a basic level of education, and practise their religion.....[Aged 11]

However, there were also some misunderstandings and misconceptions. A minority of the children gave responses that indicated that they did not have a full understanding of the documents:

Lots of people are in jail because of it. [Aged 9]

They [children] have the right to do what they want. [Aged 9]

Everyone can have what they want. [Aged 9]

It [the Declaration] is a group of people fighting to make sure that everyone gets their rights. [Aged 10]

Fourteen children recorded that they knew little or nothing about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The fact that other children in the same classes indicated some knowledge about the instruments seemed to indicate that they had simply forgotten or never internalised whatever information they received.

While some work had certainly been done on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child it was obvious that detailed revision was necessary. The instruments would have to be a central and recurring focus throughout the human rights education programme, so that they might be constantly revised. In this way the children would be familiar with the texts and this familiarity would inform their opinions and actions in time.

Interpretation of the findings

The summaries of the information imparted by the pupils and the teachers outlined above were interrogated, initially by me as researcher, and then shared with teaching colleagues at a monthly meeting. The information was interpreted into a series of key messages which were used to inform the further stages in the process.

A. The key messages from teachers that informed the process

1. We needed to be cognisant of the fact that we were not starting human rights education for the first time in the school and that we should see this as an effort to build on what had been started, and institutionalise it as a core subject area.
2. An overall mission statement should be drafted which clearly located the human rights education programme within the school plan and school policies.
3. Clearly defined aims needed to be agreed by the teaching staff as part of the process.
4. A set number of lessons, possibly eight or ten, as with the Stay Safe Programme, would have to be devised for each class. Clear agreement was required regarding the number of lessons, the length of the lessons, and where the time was to be found within the school day. There was consensus around a proposal to include human rights education as part of the core curriculum for religious education and the Stay Safe Programme, as there were large areas of overlap.
5. The staff would have to be briefed on the resources that were available. The materials should be filed and stored where they could be easily accessed. Staff should receive an introduction to the resources before the programme starts.

6. The programme should be integrated into other subjects and activities insofar as possible. In particular, subjects such as art, drama, history, geography and languages, should be covered in at least some of the lessons.

7. Whole-school initiatives, such as a school court, school council or school declaration, should be led by one class and one teacher to facilitate co-ordination and ensure implementation. The teachers were enthusiastic about facilitating a participative learning environment and the school-based initiatives were central to involving the children in running their school. These initiatives would form a central plank of the programme.

8. Dynamic methodologies, such as circle time, project work, or buzz groups, should be used as much as possible.

9. Every class should be involved. There was strong agreement that all of the children in the school from junior infants [aged 4], to sixth class [aged 12], should be involved in the programme.

10. Each class should explore a suitable and relevant theme that is interwoven through all of the lessons the class will cover.

11. The programme should incorporate learning opportunities about relevant heroes and heroines, and relevant organisations.

12. Given the lack of training opportunities that the staff have had in this area, it would be important to have relatively detailed lesson plans which set out specific aims, methodologies, discussion topics, follow up activities, necessary materials, and so forth.

13. A pre-prepared diary form for each lesson should be available to help the teachers evaluate the lesson and provide constructive feedback when the programme is being refined.

14. The teaching staff should be consulted during the drafting and approval of the lesson plans. The teachers did not feel that they had the necessary experience to play a central role in drafting the lesson plans.

15. There should be a system of cross-referencing to ensure that the relevant resources (such as charts and articles) that were available would be highlighted in the relevant lesson plans. This would make it easier for everybody to access the information they need quickly.

16. The themes and lessons should draw on real life experiences and needs within the school, the family, and areas where the children have direct experience.

17. Ultimately the procedures employed during the programme, and the slowly changing environment which would develop in classes during and after the programme, would have a bearing on the school code of conduct and policy on bullying. Both documents would have to be revised to bring them into line with the evolving situation as necessary.

18. There was a sense that the programme needed to emphasise the human responsibilities dimension, in tandem with human rights.

B. The key messages from children that informed the process

1. There was clearly a need for revision of the work that had been done to date. Furthermore, the fundamental human rights instruments and principles would need to be revisited on an annual basis to consolidate understanding and strengthen attitudes.

2. Comparisons were drawn between the human rights situation in the wider world and the human rights situation in the school on a regular basis. The school is a microcosm of the world and by analysing the children's rights and responsibilities to others in their class, and in the schoolyard, the children would begin to conceptualise human rights and responsibilities on a global level. By corollary, some of the complex geo-political questions that result in human rights abuses could be explained to children in simple terms if linked to everyday occurrences in school. The relationships between the children, friends and foes, could be used to illustrate lessons in the programme in a concrete way.
3. The programme should expose bullying as a human rights abuse and highlight the behaviours that undermine the rights of children. Name-calling, fighting, victimisation, and other unkind actions were all too common in the school and the programme could help to raise awareness and curb such practices.
4. Lessons should focus on minorities, and the rights and needs of minorities. Children want to be part of the crowd and peer pressure is very significant for them. Children tend to isolate members of minority communities, or indeed anyone whom the group perceives to be different. The programme sought to challenge this and encourage openness and inclusivity.
5. The programme should involve children more in running the school through the establishment of a school council, a school court, or similar initiatives.
6. The activities in the programme should encourage respect and facilitate the development of a respectful environment. By encouraging respect for other children, their families, the teachers, and others, we could strive to develop the children's understanding of fairness and human rights.

7. The programme should have an activist dimension so that the children might participate in human rights activities and learn through praxis.

8. The programme should create opportunities that allow the children to make suggestions on how to improve the code of conduct, the policy on bullying, and the school rules. These should include the development of a school declaration that could be augmented by class contracts.

9. Mechanisms should be devised to improve the listening skills of the teachers and the children alike. Developing a listening and sharing school would be essential to the project.

Summary

The initial meeting with the teaching staff was followed by meetings with individual teachers and a questionnaire survey of all staff. The consultation process revealed significant support for, and positive interest in the project, and indicated that teachers had the enthusiasm and the interest to ensure that the project could be implemented as a collective responsibility. The need for training would be addressed through regular staff meetings, the provision of resources, and the development of a detailed programme of work for each teacher.

The children were consulted using a questionnaire and the responses yielded a positive analysis of the communications systems, and the policies within the school. The majority of the children clearly felt that they were attending a school in which they felt respected and happy. A minority of the children pointed to needs and weaknesses that should be addressed. It was clear that the initial human rights education activities that had taken place within the school over recent years set the seeds of understanding and openness. A number of important suggestions about ways to improve the school and the comments on the children's level of knowledge about human rights provide feed-back

which, together with the input from teachers, helped to inform the process of developing the programme of activity.

Chapter 6

Development of the human rights education policy

Introduction

In chapter three we examined the educational environment within which the action research project was to be based and assessed the current situation regarding human rights education within the school. This reality was articulated in a number of research questions. The chapter went on to identify the needs of the school if it was to become a human rights school.

The methodological approach that was implemented to address these needs was outlined in chapter four, where the need for a collectively generated and collaboratively owned human rights education policy was identified as part of the design phase of the action research process. Following shared identification of the key issues, a possible solution was identified, a school policy. This chapter explains how the solution was put into practice. The approach follows a defined pattern of “identification of the issue, imagination of solution, and modification of practice” (McNiff, Lomax, Whitehead, 1996: 107).

In chapter five we looked at the proposed action research process and examined the detailed input and guidance from the teachers and the pupils. In order to structure this input, and to provide a framework for the action research project within the school, it was necessary to develop a school policy on human rights education. As teachers seeking to develop a human rights school we saw it as our role to help the Board of Management to formulate the values we wanted to promote and the methods we would use to promote them in the form of a written agreed policy:

A focal role of the human rights educator is thus to help a school to define the values which it shares (Lyseight-Jones, 1991: 77).

Overview of the process

As a multi-denominational school with an ethos that encourages equality, multiculturalism, and participative learning, it was logical for the school to develop a policy in which human rights “provide the values for the content, structure, and process of all education” (Lynch, 1992: 79). Thus the suggestion that we develop a policy on human rights education was greeted with interest and enthusiasm by the teachers, and by members of the Board of Management.

The central policy questions were actively discussed with staff members over eight months, at staff meetings, and in one-to-one discussions. These included such issues as, the time that would be made available to teachers to organise human rights education lessons, the financial resources that would be made available to purchase books and other materials, the professional development mechanisms that might be put in place, the degree to which the lessons could be integrated with other subjects, and the establishment of whole-school initiatives such as a school declaration.

There was a large degree of concordance among the teaching staff about the best policy options for the school and a draft was prepared for the Board, which reflected the opinions of the staff, and the key messages received from the pupils and the teachers in the questionnaires. There was little debate with the board members about the substance of the policy. It is fair to observe that voluntary parent-led boards often do not discuss draft policies, and perhaps rely on the staff too much. That said, the Board members who were consulted informally during the drafting process were knowledgeable and welcoming, and the few comments made at the Board meeting were to the effect that the policy was entirely in keeping with and complimentary to the school vision and direction. Ultimately, the Board of Management duly adopted the policy unanimously.

Development of the policy

In chapter four I explained that the aspiration to involve colleagues centrally as designers and developers of the human rights education policy and programme proved to be unachievable. This is also discussed in chapter seven. Colleagues were involved in discussions on the content and methodologies at staff meetings and through informal exchanges.

I prepared the policy statement with the aim of setting out the school's official position in relation to human rights education. School policies tend to fall in to two broad categories. Firstly, there are certain statements that schools are required to develop and ratify as a matter of law or regulation, under the rules of the Department of Education and Science, the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) and other directives. These include the health and safety statement, the policy on bullying, and the policy on relationships and sexuality education. Secondly, there are policies on specific subjects where school innovation and practice augments or varies from the promulgated school curriculum.

Policies on subject areas vary from school to school, and in the case of *Gaelscoil* they included subjects such as French and the core curriculum for religious education, for example. As there is no formal recognition for human rights education within the Irish primary school curriculum, it was preferable for the Board to have a written policy on the subject to ensure collective ownership of the pedagogical approach and priority, and that an agreed curriculum would be followed. All school policies become part of the school plan, so when ratified the policy becomes a recognized part of the school curriculum.

The human rights education policy includes a mission statement, aims for the programme, a list of resources, methodologies, and curricular themes. The full text of the policy can be seen in Appendix F.

The entire process of developing the policy served a dual role in raising the consciousness and understanding of human rights education within the school community. Firstly, by formulating the commitment to human rights education as a policy statement we succeeded in involving the Board of Management, and some other parents in the process. Secondly, the inter-staff discussions during the policy preparation stage served as an induction programme during which the teachers became more familiar with human rights education.

A. Mission

The first task was to draft a school mission statement (see table 6.1) for the programme that could be agreed with the staff and the Board of Management before proceeding with the detail of the project. All new school policies must be compatible with the ethos of the school and the school plan. In reality the most important part of the policy is the mission statement because it can be used to capture, and explain the programme to parents and others in a simple, yet comprehensive manner. The staff, and to a lesser extent the Board members, contributed to the revision of the statement and the final document was accepted by all school partners.

<p>Table 6.1 School mission statement</p> <p>MISSION</p> <p>To create a shared learning environment, positive interpersonal relationships, a curriculum for human rights education, and a democratic organisational system, all of which combine to develop a human rights school.</p>
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The mission statement shown in table 6.1 reflected all aspects of the programme in one sentence. In the words of a colleague:

It's about sharing more on how we teach and ensuring the children share experiences.

Human rights education is not simply a subject; it is a way of teaching, and a way of organising a school. The mission gave space to the range of areas which the human rights education programme would embrace and set out the ultimate objective of the programme which was to develop a democratic human rights school:

If the central concern of education is not only to be learning about human rights and democratic political institutions but also learning democratic values then classroom ethos or atmosphere will have to change not only in those lessons devoted to civic or political education but also right across the curriculum and in the everyday life of the schools (Harber, 1994: 160).

B. Aims

The aims of the programme were developed on the basis of the key messages received during the consultation, and following discussions with the teachers at a staff meeting. It was agreed that the project should aim to help the children develop their experience, their knowledge, and their skills in human rights education:

For young people to learn about human rights they must experience them and believe in them, as well as know about them (Osler and Starkey, 1996: 85).

During the planning discussions we set out three aims (see table 6.2). Firstly, experiential learning and living in an environment where the children feel that their rights are protected is central to the process. In this environment the children see human rights in action, are empowered by having access to information about their rights, and are encouraged to develop the skills and attitudes needed to understand and uphold

human rights. To create this educational experience, the school environment, and management procedures must be seen as part of the programme. The manner in which staff interact with the children, and the various school policies on conduct, home-work, and perhaps every aspect of school life must be set within a democratic, experiential framework underpinned by respect, fairness, and human rights:

When education is based upon experience and educative experience is seen to be a social process, the situation changes radically. The teacher loses the position of external boss or dictator but takes on that of leader of group activities (Dewey 1938: 59).

With this in mind colleagues and I had established that the programme should be a holistic attempt to develop a school in which the children could experience a learning environment based on partnership, openness, and democracy. In short I “believe that classrooms should be places where students’ views are respected, valued and given some recognition” (Sowden and Walker, 1991: 73). By experiencing human rights in action the logical expectation was that the children would come to know and understand their responsibilities to each other, and to society in general. There was a justified feeling within the staff that the school had already made progress in this regard, but the teachers welcomed the suggestion that this approach should become institutionalised through the adoption of a human rights education policy.

The second aim related to knowledge, the factual information that should be imparted to the children if they are to learn about human rights, justice and democracy. This information would include significant people, dates and events regarding the protection and violation of human rights in Ireland and internationally.

Thirdly, there was the expectation that the knowledge and experience that the children would get in the school would encourage the praxis of human rights. The expectation was that the children would use the skills and attitudes they have developed to become

good citizens of the school community, and by extension good citizens when they leave school. The further aspiration would be to encourage the children in the pursuit of justice, fairness, and equality in the world.

Table 6.2 School aims for human rights education

AIMS

To ensure that all children in the school come to know and understand their human rights and their consequent responsibilities in a participative and democratic learning environment.

To help the children learn about important dates, people, events and organisations which have contributed to the development and observance of human rights throughout the world.

To equip the children with the basic skills and attitudes needed to practise respect, tolerance, understanding, justice, non-discrimination, good citizenship, and equality, in school, at home, and as they grow through life.

This is not dissimilar to the approach outlined by Richardson (1982) in which he presents the objectives of a human rights education curriculum in three groupings, knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

C. Timetable

Time is a significant issue that involves a policy decision by the Board. Teachers face competing demands for class contact time in the revised curriculum (see chapter one) and they need to know that the management of the school has sanctioned the time they

are committing to a new initiative. By stating the time commitment to human rights education in the school policies (see table 6.3) and the school plan the Board legitimises the activity in the eyes of the Department of Education and Science. Naming human rights education as a formal part of the school plan and timetable would be welcomed by the school inspectorate and indeed the parents, who might seek to query teaching activities that are outside the more commonly agreed curriculum. The teachers also endorsed this approach:

Time is the critical challenge. We just don't have it. All this work takes a lot of time, and as much as we know how important it is, we can't do it unless we know that other essential work won't suffer.

The time available for every subject is set out in the curriculum. The time-slot for social, personal and health education set out in the primary school curriculum is thirty minutes per week (Government of Ireland, 1999a), and this can legitimately be used for human rights education:

SPHE is concerned with everyday life and living. It is about the physical environment in which we work and our relationships and how we behave towards one another. It is equally about the way in which teaching and learning take place in the school and the provision that is made for children to work and learn together (Kavanagh and Sheils, 1997: 71).

In addition, in the case of *Gaelscoil* the staff and the Board agreed that the lessons could be organised during the time allotted to the core curriculum for religious education, which is two hours per week. Many of the themes in the human rights education programme overlap with the religious education programme in any event. For example, it was agreed that human rights lessons for first class would focus on the human rights principles such as respect, dignity, and equality. The same principles informed much of the religious education content as it had developed in our school.

Table 6.3 School timetable for human rights education

TIMETABLE

It is envisaged that every class will have ten human rights education lessons (eight for infants' classes) during the school year. These lessons may be organised as a module and covered during one school term.

Human rights education can be integrated with other subjects such as religious education, social, environmental and scientific education, social, personal and health education, and languages. It is accepted that the lessons at the junior cycle level are broadly similar to lessons already in the school plan under religious education, the Stay Safe Programme, and relationships and sexuality education. Resultantly the themes can be covered under these other subject areas, or these lessons can be used for revision.

Specific time for human rights education lessons can be taken from the two hours per week set aside for religious education.

Assemblies will take place every Tuesday morning from 10.30 to 10.45.

In addition there is a period of discretionary curriculum time (Government of Ireland, 1999a), which provides the flexibility within the school timetable to allow teachers to allocate time to particular subjects, or projects that require additional attention. This period of two hours per week can be used at the teachers' and the school's discretion.

..the inclusion of a period of discretionary curriculum time...affords the teacher and the school the flexibility to accommodate different school needs and circumstances (Government of Ireland, 1999a: 68).

I also recognised that some of the themes covered in the human rights education syllabus could easily be integrated with other subjects on the curriculum. For example poetry was used in some of the lessons and this could be integrated with language classes. Resultantly I encouraged teachers to have an integrated approach to the subject matter.

D. Resources

The need for resources, including texts, posters, videos, and CD ROMs, is always a burning issue in education. Indeed it becomes particularly important when the school is implementing a new area of work for which there has been no formal in-service training and which is not supported financially by the Department of Education and Science. The need for resources and background information was one of the issues raised by the teachers during the planning phase of the project.

Accordingly we built up a library of materials over the course of a year. This was a suggestion that came from colleagues. A significant number of resources were acquired from local NGOs such as Comhlámh and Trócaire, from international organisations such as UNICEF and ICRC, and by purchasing materials with the financial support of the Board of Management.

The teachers also indicated that use of the materials would be maximised if the staff were given a full list of what was available, and a system was put in place to ensure that the list would be kept up to date, and always accessible to colleagues. In addition colleagues asked that they be shown new materials during the monthly staff meetings. I established a dedicated and user-friendly system for filing and storing the materials.

A wide range of resources (see appendix I) was made available, and a commitment was given to continue purchasing new material as necessary. Having taken time to become familiar with the books and manuals, I devised a system of cross-referencing, to link the

lesson plans with the relevant resources. Particular case studies, or materials which teachers found valuable in the resources were installed as part of the programme we designed, and so the cross-references became a useful tool in planning and implementation. This system was a response to a concern that teachers would not have the time to access the required information before teaching the lessons.

E. Methodologies

The introduction of the human rights education programme provided an opportunity for me to discuss the methodologies and teaching techniques which are used in the school with colleagues. I sought to use this opportunity to promote a more co-operative and shared learning environment. There was a general acceptance that it is “not possible to separate the what to teach from the how of teaching” (Brock-Utne, 1994: 68). If we want to create a human rights school we have to teach in human rights. Accordingly the initial discussions at staff meetings placed a strong emphasis on methodology with a view to including a range of participative learning techniques in the school policy (see table 6.4). *Gaelscoil* has a number of open and positive educational policies, and teachers practised a child centred approach to the extent that this was possible in a system with a high pupil-teacher ratio.

New initiatives included agreement that assemblies would be introduced with the aim of celebrating the children’s achievements and highlighting important world events and festivals. There was also a proposal to hold a human rights day in the school on the 10th December (International Human Rights Day). The staff agreed that organising project work in preparation for the day would be a good way to stimulate interest in the event across the school. I also suggested that the circle time methodology (Mosley, 1993) would be introduced to discuss the various themes and issues raised during the human rights education lessons. While one or two teachers had used circle time before this was the first concerted effort to introduce it as a matter of policy across all classes. It was also envisaged that circle time discussion would be organised during the lessons for the

Walk Tall programme (anti-drugs programme) and relationships and sexuality education.

Teachers also discussed the importance of using techniques such as icebreakers, brainstorming, debating, buzz groups, and other active learning methodologies. It was agreed that the lesson plans should include these various techniques insofar as possible:

The use of more active methodologies requires thinking and planning, so it is good to have the preparation done.

These are all things we like doing with the children, and it is important if we want things to change.

Table 6.4 Examples of methodologies and teaching techniques
Icebreakers
Assemblies
School human rights day
Project work
Circle time
Class meetings
Brainstorming
Buzz groups

The discussions with the staff on methodology were generally very interesting and revealing, and it was consistently clear that these discussions would have an impact on subjects beyond human rights education. Teachers were engaged in these discussions, and openly contributed suggestions on how to open up the lessons to yield maximum participation. Colleagues accepted and established from the outset that participative

learning strategies would be the most beneficial methodologies to develop the children’s knowledge, attitudes, and skills:

The emphasis on skills, values, and attitudes leads to more general questions about the nature of a young person’s experience in school. A concept which is frequently mentioned in this context is that of participation (Fogelman, 1997: 90).

To stimulate the children’s participation in the running and organisation of the school it was agreed that a number of the key components of the programme would have to be whole-school initiatives, cross-curricular, and inter-class. Teachers agreed that in practice these initiatives would have to be led by one class grouping if they were to be realised (see table 6.5):

These ideas like assemblies should involve the children at all levels.

Elaborate plans will only work if we know who is in charge of each bit.

Table 6.5 School based initiatives that could involve all classes
Class charters - led by second class
School declaration - led by third class
School council - led by fourth class
School court – led by fifth class
Model United Nations General Assembly - led by sixth class

The programme was structured to ensure that the older children, from second class [aged 8] upwards, would have responsibility for whole-school initiatives. The objective was that each class would spearhead an initiative that would have an impact on the

organisation of the school and would involve children from a number of classes in a practical way.

F. Curriculum content

The initial plan to involve the entire teaching staff in drafting the human rights education programme proved to be impractical for a number of reasons. While the teachers were supportive of the initiative they didn't have the time to commit to the drafting work, and didn't feel that they had the necessary expertise. I developed a list of proposed themes for lessons, on the basis of the draft mission statement, aims, timetable, resources, and methodologies. This list was discussed with the teachers and it was adjusted to reflect the input received.

A series of progressive themes were identified and allocated to the appropriate levels within the school. Each theme was to include up to ten specific lessons, and project work based on heroines, heroes, and organisations that are linked to human rights work. I was anxious to have a well-defined programme that presented the lessons in a manner which teachers would find user friendly.

Generally speaking curriculum subjects in Ireland are structured in four stages or groupings: infants (junior and senior), first and second classes, third and fourth classes, fifth and sixth classes. Four key stages were prepared as part of the curriculum based on this model. Infant classes were to focus on caring, sharing, and fairness to create an understanding of the issues upon which human rights are built. First and second classes would work on the principles of human rights and developing an understanding of human rights. Third and fourth classes were to cover the two most relevant human rights documents in detail, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Fifth and sixth classes would explore the more complex moral and social challenges embedded in the human rights discourse. Based on this process the themes set out in table 6.6 below were agreed.

Table 6.6 Curriculum initiatives for all classes

<u>Class</u>	<u>Theme</u>
Junior infants	Kind and caring
Senior infants	Fair and not fair
First class	Principles of human rights
Second class	Build understanding of human rights
Third class	The Convention on the Rights of the Child
Fourth class	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
Fifth class	Equality
Sixth class	Conflict and conflict resolution

Once the themes were agreed work commenced on the elaboration of the human rights programme at large, including lesson plans. This process is analysed in chapter seven.

Summary

The assessment of the current situation regarding human rights education in the school, and the identification of the needs within the school took place during the processes of consultation and discussion with the teachers, the Board and the pupils. Needs were identified in the areas of curriculum, staffing, and organisation, and a series of solutions were identified.

One of the central tasks we prioritised was the development of a policy statement that set out the values which should be promoted in the school and the methodologies that should be used to cultivate these values within and around the children. During the policy development process the overall pedagogical strategies that would address the identified needs were put in place. Following the agreement of this overall policy framework for the programme with the staff, the Board formally approved it. Work then

proceeded on the development of the first draft of lesson plans, and this is discussed in chapter seven.

Chapter 7

Development of the human rights education programme

Introduction

This chapter builds on the school's human rights education policy, the agreement on which is dealt with in chapter six. It records the process followed to develop the human rights education programme as part of the design phase, which was in effect a continuation of the dialogue that resulted in the agreement on the policy. It also reflects how three interdependent programmatic strands emerged in the planning process: the curriculum, professional development and organisational leadership. The process used to develop these strands into a structured programme is outlined.

By this point in the process there was general recognition and acceptance within the school community of the importance of teaching the children about human rights. As one educator has argued:

For the sake of both individual and global development, children around the world need to understand the concept of rights, to know what they are entitled to, to empathize with those whose rights have been denied, and to be empowered to take action on behalf of their own rights and those of others (Fountain, 1993: 1).

Accepting and echoing the importance of this statement the next step in the process was to set about developing a programme of activities, lessons and workshops for every class. The aim was to develop a programme of lesson plans to facilitate the implementation of the human rights education policy, and to do this in collaboration with teaching colleagues.

The programme development process

An overview of the action research planning process is set out in table 7.1, mapping the partner inputs to the needs assessment, the reflection and analysis, and the strategy development stage before implementation could commence.

Partnership and participation

Human rights education is process oriented, and participative. Any human rights education programme that is meaningful must be developed using human rights methodologies. From the outset it was essential that the mechanisms put in place to generate the programme needed to be collaborative and inclusive. I sought to engage the entire school community in the planning process – the pupils, the staff, the parents, and the Board of Management. While I was the catalyst, and had an understanding of my role as the central cog in the process, I knew that if the project were seen solely as my initiative that it would risk undermining the very process I sought to put in place. As with the foregoing experience of developing the school policy, I sought to construct the programme development process as it would go on, through a participative approach:

..the evidence of the value of participation is overwhelming. Teachers talk of their sense of being valued (Trafford, 1997: 93).

Pupils

The pupils were involved in the development process through the input received in response to the first questionnaire. This input is elaborated on in chapter five and resulted in a clear set of messages that were used to inform the process.

Parents

The involvement of parents in projects such as this was not a new idea in the school. There was already a culture of involving parents at classroom level which was a helpful factor. There were two previous examples of parental involvement in lesson content design and delivery. In a number of cases where the parent was an expert in the area and willing to help in the classroom, with music for example, and also where a group of parents was formed to help in the design of the core curriculum for religious education, which is unique to *Gaelscoil*.

A number of parents who were interested in the human rights education project were called upon to provide advice on the content and the methodologies, and how the whole-school dimension to the programme might operate. The Parents' Committee were informed about the process and their input invited during the planning process.

Board of Management

The Board of Management has the role of formally approving adjustments to the school plan, so they would have the decision-making authority on the programme in the final analysis. As with the policy development process Board members were consulted and involved throughout. It should be noted that while the parents involved in both the Committee and the Board were always supportive and enthusiastic, they rarely gave any concrete feedback. This was due to a number of factors:

- the fact that I had prioritised the participative involvement of the teachers and the pupils in the process, and accordingly did not devise dedicated inclusive methodologies to involve the parents in the process
- there was some evidence, in the case of at least one parent involved, that his understanding in the area of human rights education was very limited, presumably from his own experience, and there was an associated reluctance to engage

- the overwhelming response was open, positive, and reflected a feeling that human rights education would be so central to the school ethos that it didn't warrant significant discussion

Despite this lack of in-depth engagement, the overall process of informing the Board did contribute to the level of understanding of the human rights education process in the school community.

Teachers

The teachers in *Gaelscoil* contributed to a questionnaire survey at the beginning of the process, which produced a range of information that was used when designing the programme. As indicated in chapters four and six the intention to involve the teaching staff centrally in the programme design process proved unsuccessful, largely due to time constraints. The intention had been to generate ownership and engagement by ensuring that colleagues designed and shaped the process in a way that reflected their needs, and the needs of their pupils, within the context of the overall research project. During the first staff meetings it was clear that while colleagues were enthusiastic and committed, they felt that they had neither the expertise nor the time to dedicate to more detailed planning, and much of this was left to me.

Colleagues contributed to brainstorming sessions on the key elements that needed to be put in place to ensure the effective design and delivery of the programme, the themes to be used with each class grouping, and the whole-school initiatives that were to be implemented. I then developed these ideas into a draft programme, which was discussed with colleagues at staff meetings. Their input was incorporated into the final programme. Individual class teachers took a more focussed responsibility in helping to guide the finalisation of the programme for their individual classes. Colleagues were also central to the ongoing process of programme evaluation and redirection, which ran throughout the year.

There was an increasing level of interaction and dialogue on the programme content and design during the implementation phase, as we reworked approaches, and handled emerging challenges together. This reflected a growing level of ownership of the process by colleagues as the study developed. However, it is clear that for the future, if the human rights education processes in *Gaelscoil* are to be sustained, it will require more collective engagement by all staff.

School ethos and culture

In addition to the input from the school partners, it was also necessary to locate the programme within the framework of principles that govern the school. The school as a society and as an institution has an ethos, a culture and a history that define a series of informal and sometimes formal boundaries, understandings, and relationships (Cunningham, 1991; Inman and Burke, 2002; Devine, 2003). These environmental and organisational dimensions played a critical part in everything that happened in the school. As a project aimed to challenge and change it was essential to decipher the opportunities and obstacles that the school organisation provided before designing the programme.

I worked my way through every aspect of the school plan, every policy, curriculum area, and guideline, searching for links, levers, and barriers. This was an extremely rewarding process as it yielded significant information that helped to support the integration processes, and more importantly it failed to identify any significant concerns relating to the school ethos and organisation.

Needs analysis

The information received through these channels, eclectic as it was, provided a framework of data that was used to develop the project from the conceptual stage into a tangible programme of work. I used the information to analyse and quantify the

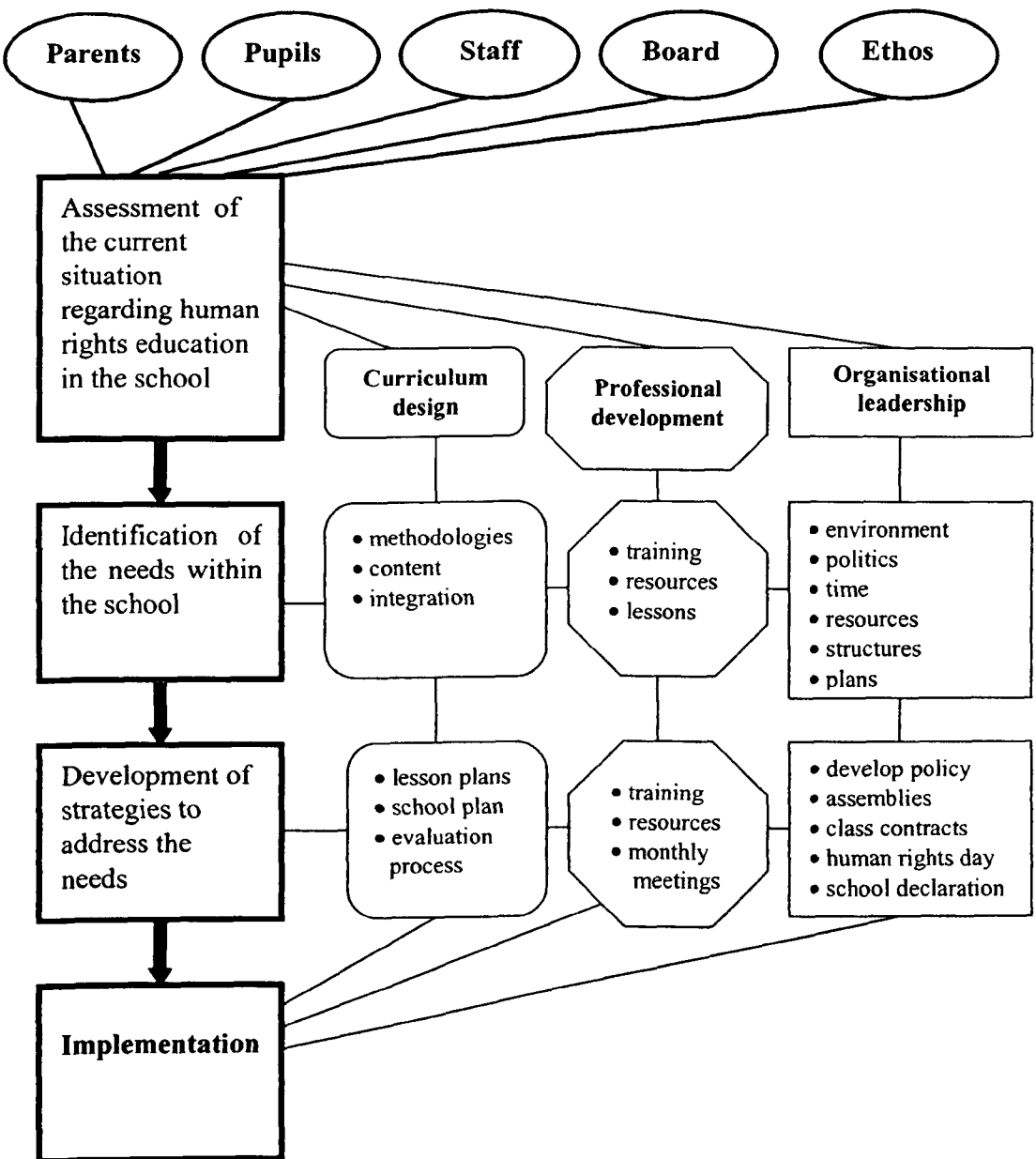
situation that pertained in the school regarding human rights education. The needs analysis provided the direction for a process of transformation driven through action research (Thorne, 1995; Trafford, 1997).

I identified the gaps that would have to be addressed across three dimensions. Firstly, in the area of curriculum design we surmised that information and direction would be needed on the methodologies to be used, the content to be taught, and the integration opportunities and strategies that could be exploited.

Secondly, the professional development needs of staff in the areas of in-service training, the requirement for adequate resources, and the need to have structured lesson plans in place, were noted.

Thirdly, I identified needs when thinking of the school organisation and leadership as a whole. The school building and environment limited the scope for interaction and dynamic communications, something which would obviously be beyond our control, but necessary to consider. Another aspect identified which presented obstacles, was the issue of school politics. The power dynamics and the inter-relations that play out within any community impact on how people think, feel and act. The children fully understand, and internalise, these power relations (Devine, 2003). Interpersonal difficulties, and conflicts within the staff, and between the parents and staff were of particular concern. Again this is an area over which we had little control, but a consciousness of its relevance and reach for the paradigm involved was important. Organisational needs identified which were more manageable within the scope of the project were timetabling processes, and structural procedures in the school which may

Table 7.1 Overview of the action research planning process used to generate the human rights education programme



have needed to change, for example the systems for dealing with misconduct had to be manageable and deliverable. In discussions with colleagues we felt that in essence we were trying to strike an effective balance along a number of axes:

- rigidity versus flexibility – structure without stifling creativity
- complexity versus simplicity – multifaceted while remaining straightforward
- comprehensive versus focused – over-arching but also user-friendly

The human rights education programme

Format and structure

The programme was divided into eight sections, one for each of the classes in the primary school system. Each section was based on a graded theme and subdivided into four areas: (i) lessons, (ii) heroes and heroines, (iii) organisations, and (iv) school based human rights promotion mechanisms. The programme for each class contained eight lessons (for infants' classes) or ten lessons (for first class to sixth class). The teachers indicated that they would favour a programme that had a limited number of lessons and that could be covered in a fixed period of time. Notwithstanding this, colleagues realised that some integral aspects of the programme would influence their work in a more comprehensive way throughout the year.

The lessons were cross-referenced to related material in the resource texts and manuals available in the school. This made it easier for teachers to access additional information about the topics covered in the lessons. A small number of lessons were taken directly from these resources, while others were adapted somewhat or were similar in outline. There were a significant number of cross-references and support resources available for the senior classes. For example, eight of the ten lessons developed for both fifth and sixth classes are linked, to some extent, with at least one available support text. The large majority of available workbooks and teachers' manuals on human rights education are geared towards older children. By contrast, there were virtually no suitable

resources to draw upon when developing the lessons for the junior classes, all of which had to be developed without recourse to other materials.

The idea that each class should learn about a number of local, national and international heroes and heroines, and organisations that are important in the field of human rights activism was appealing to the parents and the teachers. It was felt that the children would benefit from studying the lives and stories of people such as local man Criostóir de Baróid, who established Between, an organisation that provides holiday breaks for children from Northern Ireland, or national personality Mary Robinson, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and internationally renowned people such as Rigoberta Menchu, winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace. Similarly, by learning about the work of relevant organisations the children would come to understand that they too could make a difference by joining or supporting like-minded people in some of these groups such as UNICEF, the ICRC, or Amnesty International.

The programme included a series of whole-school initiatives developed with the intention of involving a wide range of children in the activities. For practical purposes the staff agreed that the whole-school initiatives should be co-ordinated by one named class so that there would be clear lines of responsibility for the activities. The aim of these approaches was to change the way the school was run, so that the school would operate in a more inclusive and democratic way:

The basis of democratising classroom management is, of course, the democratisation of school life in general. Herein lies a very important issue. School life is a very complex reality, beginning with what we may term the bureaucratic dimension (the administrative aspects of running the school) and culminating in a wide range of psycho-social and affective aspects. The school is a living entity in which numerous relational networks develop between the

different actors: teachers, pupils, administrative and auxiliary staff, parents, etc. The democratisation process must start with this, the internal life of the school (Paun, 1994: 19).

In addition these initiatives strove to change the way the children learnt and the way the teachers taught by introducing a human rights based approach. This concept of merging human rights education with teaching methods and practices underpinned the action research project and suggested that rather than teaching about human rights in a formal way, human rights must be experienced by the pupils (Henaire, 1995).

The motivation for using whole-school initiatives to create an educational environment informed by, and based upon human rights, lay in the fact that the school is a microcosm of society. If the rules and structures governing the everyday lives of adults can be emulated, experienced and understood within the school it would give the children a tremendous head-start in the development of the attitudes, values, and skills needed as they grow into adulthood:

Schools have much in common with state communities both in the way they function and in the way they require young people of very diverse backgrounds to live and work together on the basis of mutual respect. Schools have value systems linked to their purpose and role, power structures and rules enforced by a justice system (Rowe, 1992b: 180).

It was these very value systems, power structures, and rules that would hopefully change with the introduction of this programme, and it was probable that the whole-school initiatives would be important in this process of change. By analysing and adapting these internal school practices in the framework of human rights, justice and responsibility “the classroom and the school are jointly and dialogically reconstructed into the democratic reality of the wider community” (Lynch, 1992: 58).

Overall the feedback received from the teaching staff regarding the first draft of the programme was quite positive. There were a range of comments and contributions relating to the relevance of various themes, or techniques to different age groups. Other comments related to integration of human rights education lessons with subjects in the school plan, proposed timings for lessons, practicalities relating to comprehensive whole-school initiatives that would involve a lot of classes, such as the Model United Nations General Assembly, and procedures for keeping diaries during the project.

The lessons were refined and redrafted on the basis of these comments. The comments received during the initial questionnaire consultation process with the children were also taken into account. There was a broad welcome for the revised text of the programme and it was accepted by the staff. Thereafter the programme was formally included in the school plan by the Board of Management.

Methodologies

Throughout the programme there was an emphasis on non-traditional methodologies as required by the school policy on human rights education (see chapter six). Many of the lessons involved discussion groups, circle time activities, buzz groups, brainstorming activities, project work, and so forth. By using these methodologies the teachers facilitated more open and shared learning processes, which were more in keeping with the overall aims of human rights education.

A major deterrent to teachers seeking to use non-traditional methodologies was the time and level of organisation required to prepare the lessons. It is a lot easier to walk in to a class and talk to the children about a subject, than to plan and organise a workshop-based lesson. This was one of the reasons why colleagues were anxious that the programme lessons would be prepared in some detail, and that all relevant resources would be referenced in the lessons. These inclusive methodologies had the added

benefit of allowing the children to take charge of the lessons and the learning process. They become part of the teaching as well as part of the learning.

Pipho (1995) presented the relevance of teaching styles and methodologies as a set of three continuums in the context of developing citizenship education. He looked at the traditional/non-traditional, in-school/outside-school and teacher-controlled/student-controlled dimensions of education and urged teachers to move towards the latter end of these continuums. Following this approach the programme that was developed in *Gaelscoil* set out to involve the home, and community based organisations in the activities, to use innovative methodologies, and to empower the children to take a central role in the lessons.

A summary overview of the programme is available in Appendix G.

Curriculum for junior infants

When devising the curriculum for human rights education it was agreed that all classes should be involved, including infants. The need to develop an understanding of right from wrong and justice from injustice is no less great for people aged four. In their world they see fairness and unfairness just as clearly as adults do, if not more so. The seeds of understanding that will equip young people to grow into caring, responsible citizens must be nurtured from the day they are born.

By its very nature the language, message, and content of human rights education is quite complex. But the same is true of every subject we seek to impart to students. In fact, when you start to think about human rights for the purposes of developing lessons for children it quickly becomes apparent that far from being complicated, it is actually very relevant and adaptable to any age. The key professional challenge is to pitch the aim, content, methodology, and length of the lesson to suit the children at their own level.

The lessons for junior infants were based on the theme “kind and caring”. The objective of the programme was to help the children to become aware of the good feelings that are associated with relations and experiences that are positive and happy. The lessons focused on helping the children to talk about situations, friendships, and caring relationships in which they experienced kindness. By discussing the importance of kindness the children began to develop an association between happiness and situations where others are caring for them, and kind to them.

There were eight lessons in the programme and they related exclusively to the immediate environment of the child, including the home, the school, and friends. The lessons were quite short and activity based, to ensure that the young children enjoyed them. Some were purposely designed to involve the home environment, for example, by asking the children to bring a picture home, or to bring in a particular item from the home. The objective of this technique was to encourage other family members to reinforce the messages that were being imparted in school. The methodologies were varied to stimulate interest and included discussions, art, storytelling, group work, games and circle time.

Curriculum for senior infants

The theme chosen for senior infants was “fair and not fair”. Children have a strong sense of fair play and will be the first to complain if they think they have been treated unfairly. “That’s not fair” is a common complaint echoed in the schoolyard. The children easily understand the concept of fairness, and as such it is an appropriate theme for human rights education lessons with senior infants. By discussing fair and unfair relations in the school and home environment with the children a number of important messages about treating people equally, and giving as you get, could be imparted to the children.

Lessons about unfair behaviour will necessarily deal with the issue of bullying. As a matter of policy the school took bullying very seriously and had a number of measures in place to monitor bullying and to deal with cases where bullying was identified. Unfair behaviour was linked to bullying in this series of lessons, which were easily integrated with other class work on the theme. For example the teachers covered the modules on bullying from the Stay Safe Programme in every class.

Links with the home were built into the work for senior infants also. The home environment was discussed in one lesson. Various techniques were also used to ensure that the family at home were aware of what the children were learning in school. For example, the programme was outlined to parents at the parent/teacher meetings at the start of the school year in September.

The content of the lessons was targeted towards the age group, as with the lessons for junior infants, and it was not envisaged that each would take more than twenty minutes.

The logical extension of this series of lessons was to use the concept of fairness as a framework for conduct and relations in the class. By referring to fair and unfair behaviour when discussing disagreements, arguments, and misbehaviour with the children, the teacher would consolidate the importance of treating others fairly over the course of the school year.

Curriculum for first class

We agreed to have ten lessons instead of eight for the children from first class to sixth class. In addition it was envisaged that the lessons would take longer and in some cases may be covered over two or more days. In classes where discursive and inclusive methods were used teachers were aware that considerable time was needed to bring the lesson to a helpful conclusion. The teachers were reassured in the school policy on human rights education (see chapter six) that this time was legitimately available to

them and this undoubtedly encouraged them to allow more time for debate, and reflection during the lessons.

The theme for the first class programme was respect for others and the lessons covered many of the basic principles of human rights; respect, justice, equality, and so forth. The emphasis was on the broad concepts involved, much as with the infant classes. The language and message behind these concepts was simplified considerably. For example, the concept of equality was linked to the notion of treating everybody fairly as discussed with senior infants. The concept of respect was linked to caring and loving, words that children know and understand.

Some of the lessons dealt with quite adult concepts such as freedom and dignity so they were handled in a simple, child-focussed manner. For example, the lesson on freedom was based on a children's version of the story of the life of Rigoberta Menchu. Having read the story the children were encouraged to think about the differences between her life and life for the children in their community. Similarly the lesson on dignity was about feeling important and confident. The lesson was based on a simple story in which a child is mocked in school on the one hand, yet praised on the other by family. By discussing how he felt on both occasions the children began to engage with the concept of dignity.

The language of rights was introduced by discussing the things that we need to live happy and healthy lives and explaining that these things are ours by right. It is right that we should have them because we need them. The idea of "responsibility" was also raised in discussions about the things we had to do to make sure that friends and family were happy. We found it helpful to link the fact that we have human rights with the associated responsibilities. In this way the children saw that they had a role to play to help others have what they need to be happy.

Curriculum for second class

The theme for second class was building an understanding of human rights. During the course of the programme the children's understanding of rights and responsibilities was broadened from the child's individual domain, to develop an awareness that rights and responsibilities belong to every child and every person, everywhere. During the programme there was a progression as the children moved from the consideration of rights within the classroom to look at a range of global case studies relating to human rights. These included the story of Sadako, a Japanese schoolgirl who died as a result of the Hiroshima bomb.

As part of the overall programme there were five whole-school initiatives for the promotion of a participative human rights approach across the school. These initiatives were co-ordinated by the five more senior classes in the school. Second class took the lead on the development of class charters, or class contracts, throughout the school. Class charters had already been used sporadically throughout the school for approximately two years and were generally thought to be worthwhile as an inclusive technique. Teachers and pupils alike spoke favourably of the charters as a method to promote shared classroom management. The focus of authority within the class was moved away from the teacher to some degree, and a set of objective rules was duly agreed with the children and became a tool of governance. This cultivation of autonomy is a pre-requisite in a just school:

Authority as such cannot be the source of justice, because the development of justice presupposes autonomy (Piaget, 1932: 318).

The object of the exercise was to ensure that every class developed and used a set of mutually agreed norms and rules, which would be set out on a poster as a class charter. Initially, as part of the series of lessons to be covered by second class the pupils developed their own class charter. By involving the children in the process of

developing and agreeing the class rules they were more likely to accept and promote them. The second class children were then organised into groups to visit the other classes and tell them what they had achieved and how it was working in practice. In this way, and with the help of the entire teaching staff, it was hoped that other classes would also develop charters or contracts.

Curriculum for third class

The theme chosen for the human rights education programme for third class was the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As the most relevant and most important human rights instrument for children the teachers felt it was important to dedicate a significant amount of time within the programme to explaining the significance of the Convention and promoting the rights codified therein. As outlined in chapter one all states that have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child undertake in Article 42 to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike (UN: 1989b).

The introductory lessons to be covered included workshops on the needs, and the rights of children, followed by a series of more specific lessons dealing with such issues as inequality, child labour and street children.

The school based human rights promotion mechanism co-ordinated by third class children was the School Declaration project in which the children had to organise the consultation mechanisms with other children in the school to develop a Declaration of the Rights of the Children in *Gaelscoil*. The children of third class visited the other classrooms in small groups and explained to the children that they should list the human rights they have as pupils in our school on a chart. The children then collated the suggestions and displayed them as the "Declaration of the Rights of the Children in our School" (see appendix J). The third class programme finished with a session on the importance of children in the world and their role as future leaders of society.

Curriculum for fourth class

The broad topic covered by fourth class was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The initial activity with the children covered the history and development of the UDHR after the Second World War. This was followed by a range of workshops and exercises on the rights it enumerated. The children used photographs, games, and other activities to become familiar with the content of the Declaration. The programme also highlighted the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the UDHR and examined this in one lesson. A number of the rights in the Declaration, such as the right to food, were then explored in some detail, and examples of the impact that the abuse of these human rights has on the lives of real people were explored.

The school based promotion mechanism spearheaded by fourth class was the school council (see chapter two). The objective was to establish a forum whereby the children would have a formal democratic mechanism in which they could voice opinions about the organisation of the school.

Harber (1992: 25-27) outlines the experiences in two primary schools and concludes that “pupils can be given a valuable introduction to democratic practice which is relevant to their age and they seem to take this on in a mature and responsible manner”.

Curriculum for fifth class

Equality is a core principle upon which *Gaelscoil* is founded, and a policy on equality was developed soon after the foundation of the school and is now included in the school plan. The school has been proactively involved in programmes and activities to promote equality over the years. For example, children from fifth and sixth classes were national prizewinners in the anti-racism campaign organised for European Year Against Racism in 1997 (Government of Ireland, 1998c). As a core principle of the school, and

one of the concepts underlying human rights, equality was chosen as the theme for fifth class.

The children participated in a number of exercises on equality including issues such as gender equity, anti-racism, and disabilities. Issues and aspects of identity, including similarities and differences between individuals, sexes, nations, and ethnicities were explored in a series of introductory lessons and workshops. The programme then moved on to explore gender equality through a project based workshop on newspapers and the coverage given to stories about women and men. Activities on disability involved co-operative activities with the children from a local special school. In addition the class covered a series of lessons on racism including activities on the Traveller community, xenophobia, apartheid, caste systems, and the civil rights movement in the USA.

It was agreed that a school court should be one of the mechanisms used to promote the participation of the children in the workings of the school and that fifth class should take the lead. Experience in other schools indicates that a school court has had a very positive impact on the conduct of children in general:

The children were sure that the presence of the court in the school has had a positive effect, and some claimed they had been able to use the threat of taking bullies to the court to curb bullying activities (Brier and Ahmad, 1991: 33).

It was hoped that the court would achieve a number of positive outcomes, including an increased awareness and understanding of the impact of misbehaviour on victims arising from the debate and consideration of their plight; an increased sense of responsibility associated with being part of the justice system; and a sense of ownership, which would ensure that the children had a vested interest in upholding the rules that the court monitored.

Curriculum for sixth class

The themes that were covered with sixth class, conflict and conflict resolution, involved coverage of a range of difficult topics which the children were already beginning to understand and discuss informally in class. There is a balancing act that involves endeavouring to provide enough of the facts about the horrific realities associated with some human rights abuses, landmines for example, without disturbing and upsetting the children unduly. An argument that could be levelled against teaching some aspects of human rights education in primary schools is this very question of the appropriateness of the material. Therefore it was important that we would strike the right balance in the programme. While it was true to say that many of the pupils would have had wide-ranging knowledge about world issues, others remained purposely protected from some of the sadder realities of the world, and that is a matter which needed to be managed with care.

A second challenge which faced the sixth class children, and indeed the children of the other senior classes, was the fact that they would be covering parts of this planned and graded developmental human rights education programme without the benefit of having covered the foundation or introductory lessons in junior classes. The process of human rights education, which involves the development of attitudes, knowledge and skills, requires that children cover the entire programme and experience all of the activities over time. This could not happen in this one-year action research project. This difficulty was overcome in part by ensuring that the children understood any new concepts or terminology in advance rather than assuming that they had covered it previously. Additionally, and more constructively, although the programme had been designed as a tool that could be used long-term within the school, we acknowledged the fact that the senior classes were effectively starting from the beginning. This had been taken into account when designing the content of the lessons.

The lessons on conflict covered political killings, genocide, human rights abuses, refugees, and landmines. These were followed by a series of lessons on conflict resolution at school level, community level and international level. The programme ended with two general lessons that served as revision based on a video, "Stand Up For Human Rights", and a poem, "The Unknown Citizen".

The school based human rights promotion mechanism chosen as part of the sixth class programme was the Model United Nations General Assembly (MUNGA) project:

The Model United Nations is a most interesting exercise for stimulating the young person's aptitude for listening as well as his/her ability to understand his/her own values by way of coming to terms with those of others (Surian, 1996: 53).

The objective was to involve as many of the senior pupils as possible in the project during the preparation phases and in the MUNGA itself.

Summary

The analytical project preparedness process which took place across the school community resulted in a comprehensive needs analysis for the school. These opportunities and obstacles were defined along three lines, the curriculum, professional development, and organisational leadership, and were fashioned into a draft human rights education programme. It was agreed that the programme of activity would involve all classes, and follow a standard format. Dynamic and discursive educational methodologies were to be used throughout. The programme was elaborated with some help from the teaching staff, and agreed with them at staff meetings. The lessons for each class were based on chosen themes as follows:

Junior infants	Kind and caring
Senior infants	Fair, and not fair
First class	Respect for others
Second class	Building an understanding of human rights
Third class	The Convention on the Rights of the Child
Fourth class	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
Fifth class	Equality
Sixth class	Conflict

The work of various organisations, heroines and heroes was also included in the programme. Additionally, the senior classes spearheaded a number of whole-school initiatives to promote human rights.

The one significant outstanding task before proceeding to implement the programme was the need for a comprehensive review and evaluation mechanism. This issue is expanded in chapter eight.

Chapter 8

Measuring impact and effectiveness

Introduction

The need for a comprehensive evaluation process to support the action research paradigm was identified in consultation with colleagues while developing the programme of activities for implementation throughout the school, as outlined in chapter six. During the programme development process the issue of measuring impact and effectiveness was a central focus of attention. As a subjective process involving the reflections, reactions and interpretations of individuals that were themselves key actors in the process, it was clear that any evaluation framework would have to rely largely on the understandings and meanings attributed to outcomes from the particular point of view of each teacher. All researchers have a personal perspective which necessarily affects their data at all stages (Osler, 1997b). Subjectivity, as an ingredient in any practice involving personal change, would be a feature of the process.

While acknowledging subjectivity and bias, I thought it important to define criteria, benchmarks, or outcomes, which might bring some objectivity to the assessment of progress, the identification of barriers, and the refinement of plans on the basis of experience. The notions of learning from experience, critical reflection, and analytical reassessment, are fundamental to human rights education. So to develop and implement a programme without a reflective core would be antipathetic to the mission in hand. Any new or innovative approach being introduced on a pilot basis must be presented in an evaluative framework that will verify the impact. This is particularly so when the subject matter is controversial, and expressly seeking to drive change in an environment characterized by inertia in areas such as curriculum innovation and pedagogical approaches.

This chapter will outline the approach to evaluation that was used, and the quantitative and qualitative process tools that were designed as monitoring action research.

The approach

A central element to the action research project was change; initiating, effecting, monitoring, and recording change. The programme set out to change the learning environment in the school; to change the way the teachers taught, to change the way the pupils learn, and ultimately to change society:

Action research is the systematic collection of information that is designed to bring about social change (Bogdan and Biklea, 1982: 215).

Given the breath of activities under scrutiny it was necessary to consider ways to quantify, and to qualify the aims of the project in terms of the realistic end results expected. A programme as broad as that proposed herein cannot but bring about change. The issue therefore was whether it would bring about the desired change to an expected degree. By seeking to measure, or at least to monitor, the transformation that the programme would bring about, the overall approach could be validated:

Validation enables action researchers to test their claims to have improved and understood better their own professional practice (McNiff, Lomax, Whitehead, 1996: 25).

The difficulty of course was how to validate change when start points and end points are mere punctuation marks in a lifelong process. There were multiple variables at play, many of them entirely subjective. Attempts to establish a starting point from which to benchmark any developments would invariably rely on subjective judgements by the researcher. The difficulties of seeking to measure such a baseline are complex (Trafford, 1997), and no comprehensive data relating to the children's knowledge,

attitudes or skills in relation to human rights was scientifically accrued at the starting point of this action research process. The initial questionnaire cohort study with students provided helpful information, but it was not broad enough to use as baseline data.

The need to establish criteria with which to evaluate the project was dictated by the need to confirm and reconfirm the overall direction of the work periodically, and most importantly, upon completion. The impact of this project, I have believed since the outset, would be dependent on knowing what was to be achieved and then confirming the degree to which the process had moved *Gaelscoil* in that direction.

You are looking for confirmation that you have done what you say you have done (McNiff, Lomax, Whitehead, 1996: 111).

With this in mind it is worth referring again to the aims I was trying to achieve, which are set out in detail in chapter four.

The primary aim to monitor, and evaluate the successes and failures during the implementation of the human rights education programme is the focus of this chapter. By extension this aim then makes it possible to validate the degree to which I achieved the other aims. It was clear that two different lenses would be required to ensure that these aims are contextualized within a monitory framework. Firstly, a qualitative analysis of the programme content, delivery and impact would be essential to establish if the aims of the programme had been realised. Recording improvements in educational practice, for example, would require a qualitative review. Secondly, a quantitative survey was needed to record the structural or operational aspects of the delivery of the programme and to measure whether the programme was implemented in the manner and with the scope that was envisaged at the outset. Factual concerns such as training and resources could be tracked in this way.

Qualitative analysis

The qualitative challenge was to identify appropriate learning outcomes, and expressed experiential criteria that could adequately capture and record change towards the action research aims of the human rights education programme. The inadequacy of indicators to measure effectiveness was cited by Kenny (2002) as a gap in the provision of development education in Ireland, and the same difficulty presented itself for this study. The essential subjectivity of any values based content approach makes qualitative judgement processes difficult to construct. Like Carter (2000) my study was not simply logical but ideological. This is particularly onerous given the breath of the action research project in hand, involving as it did all the teachers and pupils in the school, and indirect linkages to the Board of Management and the parents.

It is pivotal to accept that knowledge, and the traditional assessment tools such as examinations which are used to measure knowledge retention, have no place in a human rights approach to learning and the school system, something recognized by a deputy chief inspector at the Department of Education and Science:

We must abandon the notion of knowledge being the sole aim of education. The acquisition of skills and attitudes to allow all of us to participate fully in the democratic process is a basic human right (Ó Dálaigh, 2002: 36).

Human rights education spans a continuum of influence from knowledge, to skills, to attitudes, moving from the entirely objective to the entirely subjective as it goes. It is about critical engagement with the children on all aspects of their experience (Devine, 2003). While it may be possible to assess the knowledge component it becomes difficult to measure skill achievements, and more complicated still to pinpoint attitudinal change. The equation becomes ever more complex when you consider that the knowledge, skill and attitudinal elements to human rights education are indivisible, not just from each other, but from the entire learning experience of the children.

The various teaching and learning approaches which are part and parcel of human rights education, including for example experiential learning, active learning, participative approaches, and critical reflection, are abstract in nature, and present obstacles to educators seeking to record impact. There is an additional difficulty in schools where teachers are faced with the prospect of having to assess the children's performance. While this is more of an issue at second level, there are many primary schools where assessment is a central dimension to the school plan, and this philosophy makes a human rights approach less possible. While the issue of objective assessment has been more prevalent in debates about second level approaches to human rights education (CDU, 2000), it is important to appreciate the import of these constraints as they apply to my attempt to demonstrate impact objectively at primary level.

Notwithstanding these difficulties I believe that it is possible to adopt a set of qualitative self-reflective questions that can be used by as a checklist for human rights. Osler and Starkey (1998: 329) identified a set of self-evaluation statements, which can be used as a quick checklist in schools to reflect on the degree to which human rights are encouraged. Similarly in Osler and Morrison (2000) the role of self-evaluation as a process of reflection on issues of race equality is demonstrated. An overall approach to developing this questioning approach to school self-evaluation can be based on the observations of Ruane *et al.*, (1999: 15):

While knowledge can be assessed through objective tests, it is far more difficult to assess the acquisition of skills and attitudes. Firstly, it is necessary for the teachers together to identify what skills and attitudes they wish to see in the children in their school. Once the desired outcomes have been identified the following questions could be addressed. Do the atmosphere, teaching approaches and methodologies, and the general school environment promote or hinder the acquisition of these concepts, skills, attitudes and values? Do the

methodologies employed develop children who, for example, can work with others, communicate effectively, and who are critically aware?

My view was that the development of a set of self-reflective searching questions presented the most effective method to develop an action research monitoring framework. The logical order in which these questions were prepared was as a set of thought provoking questions on progress in the areas of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

1) Knowledge

The problem with any knowledge-based questions in this scenario is that the learning outcomes are not linked to empirical facts. While there is of course a knowledge component to human rights education, an expanded knowledge bank is not the primary aim. The traditional methods of assessing knowledge retention are incongruous to a human rights learning environment, and could serve to undermine the importance of critical dialogue. That said, looking to the human rights education programme set out in chapter seven, the development of knowledge on heroes and heroines of human rights, on key human rights organisations, or on facts such as rights listed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to cite some examples, presented a range of concrete information, the knowledge of which could give some insight into the effectiveness of the programme.

2) Skills

Here the challenge was to establish the range of skills we were seeking to cultivate and then translate these into learning outcomes (Ward, 2002). Human rights education is a formative moulding of the active learner. It seeks to develop the skills which will equip the learner with the tools for active citizenship:

- Intellectual skills - expression, communication, judgement, critical analysis

- Social skills - acceptance, relationships, conflict resolution, participation, taking responsibility

It was possible to take each of these skills and develop a learning objective appropriate to the age and experience of the learner, and then to monitor their progress longitudinally from the start of the human rights education programme to the end.

3) Attitudes

Attitudinal change is, by its nature, slow and evolutionary. It can be progressive, regressive or both, and identifying the point from where you measure progression or regression is entirely subjective. Attitudes are framed by vague, emotive, and biased parameters. These might include notions such as understanding, empathy, and kindness, which in turn dictate an individual's attitude to equality, dignity, and justice. Different attitudes pertain in different situations depending on factors such as location, age, gender, identity, gravity, consequence or scale. For example, a person's reaction to problems in accessing the right to health care experienced by a white man in Dublin who is waiting for a cataract operation for over a year due to hospital waiting lists, will be different to that same person's views on the access to the right to health care for poor children in Colombia that have no access to cataract treatment resulting in a situation where they will live their lives in darkness unnecessarily. A person's priorities and passions will influence their thinking in ways that can seem irrational to others. This maelstrom of emotion is the heartland of human rights education, and its vagaries and variety are both the opportunity and the challenge to humanity. All this indicates that any attempt to develop criteria to measure attitudinal impact would have been unworkable.

Identified reflective questions

Based on this analysis the aim was to generate a series of meaningful questions, which could be used to stimulate reflection, and record observations on the effectiveness of the learning experience. The questions had to be concise enough to engage the teachers, and concrete so as to bring focus to an exercise which had the potential to be quite abstract. Accordingly I identified three or four questions in the realms under consideration, knowledge, skills and attitudes:

Knowledge

- 1) What new information did the children learn in relation to human rights?
- 2) What is the children's assessment of the worth of this knowledge, as part of their broader learning needs?
- 3) Has this knowledge caused the children to change anything in the way they behave or think?

Skills

- 4) How have the learners' intellectual skills developed throughout the programme - expression, communication, judgement, and critical analysis?
- 5) How have their social skills - acceptance, relationships, conflict resolution, participation, capacity to take responsibility, improved?
- 6) How might these skills be useful to the children in everyday situations?
- 7) How might the acquisition of these skills be having an impact on the learners' understandings of and attitudes to others?

Attitudes

- 8) What has changed about the way the children think about others?

- 9) What has changed about the children's attitudes to participation and cooperation?
- 10) How might these changes be of benefit to the children for the future?

Limitations

It must be acknowledged that these questions had limitations. The reliability of the analysis generated from the teachers in response to these queries depended on the age of the children, the degree of engagement of the teacher, and many other variables. But such will always be the case when qualitatively measuring the cause and effect of any educational experience.

Furthermore, the learning outcomes of a specific human rights education module could not be captured divisibly from the impact of other concurrent pedagogical experiences. The concept of interdependence is innate to human rights. So it is that human rights educators seek to highlight the coherent and integrated links between human rights and all aspects of the school and schooling:

The procedural values of human rights overlap with the procedural values of human rights education – freedom, tolerance, fairness, and respect for reasoning (Lister, 1991b: 141).

By corollary the values that underpin human rights education run inherently through all curricular areas, and all aspects of the school community. In this way it becomes difficult to attribute learning progress in human rights education to any one subject, any one programme, any one teacher, or any one policy. Human rights education is by its nature an experiential matrix of multiple cross-curricular and whole-school influences. There are many subjective variables that are at work in any values driven learning environment, which make qualitative measurement complex:

We are mindful of the range of other philosophical, pedagogical and epistemological problems identified in setting values as learning outcomes in the educational process (Ward, 2002: 18).

Notwithstanding these limitations the questions outlined provided a framework to record the outcomes of the programme and as we will see in chapter nine the teaching staff found this methodology useful.

Quantitative analysis

In addition to evaluating the qualitative impact of the programme on the young lives for which it was tailored; it was thought wise to evaluate the delivery of the programme quantitatively. The advantage of quantitative indicators is their measurability and solidity. They can also serve to validate the qualitative indicators. In seeking to identify indicators my focus was on three areas, the degree of participation and involvement, the rate of delivery of the programme, and the record of quantifiable outputs. I framed a series of nine questions across these areas, which would inform my analysis and shape my findings.

Quantitative Indicators

Participation

We set out to involve all pupils, and all teachers in the programme, to provide a whole-school action research sample. The obvious advantage here was the adoption of a whole-school approach as a research end in itself. Human rights by definition encompass the entire realm of life, and can only be meaningfully used as the framework, context, and content of education through a whole-school approach (see chapters two and four) (Cunningham, 1991; Trócaire, 1995; Carter and Osler, 2000). While the intention was to involve the entire school community it was an ambitious undertaking

and it was important to record the percentages of teachers and pupils that actually took part fully:

- 1) How many teachers took part in the programme?
- 2) How many pupils were involved in the programme?
- 3) If teachers dropped out, why?

Delivery

The programme provided between eight and ten lessons for each class, with a number of linked project based activities on heroes and heroines, organisations, and school based initiatives, such as the school court with fifth class. This was a formidable plan, and so it would be worthwhile to enumerate the degree to which teachers actually managed to fulfil the expectations of the programme in this regard:

- 4) To what extent did teachers manage to complete the entire plan?
- 5) In cases where they did not, why?
- 6) Did teachers go beyond the plan in any area, and why?

Outputs

Lastly, there were a number of defined and concrete outcomes expected from the children. Whether it was artwork with infants or the Model United Nations General Assembly with sixth class, these were quantifiable outputs, which gave an indication of the level of success achieved in implementing the programme:

- 7) Were all planned outputs delivered?
- 8) If they were not, why?
- 9) Were any additional unplanned outputs generated?

Summary

The critical importance of an overall monitory framework for the action research project was established in the context of the research aims. The challenges to a qualitative research methodology were outlined and a series of reflective questions on the programme impact in the areas of knowledge, skills and attitudes, was developed to guide the teaching staff when preparing a qualitative analysis after implementing the programme. A range of questions, which the teachers could use to record the quantitative outputs, was also elaborated. These evaluation mechanisms became part of the observation and recording methodologies, which were used throughout the implementation process. The evaluation report can be seen in chapters nine and ten.

Chapter 9

Implementation of the programme

Introduction

Chapter five records the input from teachers and pupils as part of the planning phase, and before the development of the policy and the programme. This record provided information which was used to effectively monitor progress in the teachers' understanding and approach to human rights education, and to record the process of change in the school. These initial consultations gave an insight into the levels of enthusiasm, experience, understanding and training of the teachers in human rights education.

This chapter reports on phase three of the project, the implementation of the human rights education policy and programme in *Gaelscoil*. It records the feedback received from the teachers and the pupils as part of the action research monitoring processes, and captures the messages and meanings which the participants experienced and understood during the course of the study.

The comparative analysis, and the reports from the ongoing monitoring mechanisms set out in this chapter serve to:

- record the experience, attitudes and expectations regarding human rights education of the teaching staff, and the children
- accurately report on the refinements to the teaching and schooling process required during the project to facilitate learning in, for and about human rights
- provide evidence, albeit from a very small sample, of the levels of exposure and training that Irish teachers have in the area of human rights education

Feedback from teachers

The action research project was implemented over the course of a year. The monthly group discussions with the teaching staff throughout the implementation phase illuminated the experiences the staff had with the programme, the successes as well as the challenges. The feedback gave an insight into the evolving pedagogical environment in which the action research was implemented. The consultations with colleagues at the end of the school year included interviews and a questionnaire, which yielded a range of results in relation to the project.

Seven of the eight teachers implemented the plan, though with varying degrees of success and breath. The exception was fourth class which was taught by a number of substitute teachers during the year and the inconsistent contributions from these different class teachers made it difficult to track progress and implementation. Thus input from the seven teachers was used to compile the following analysis arising from the action research project. This analysis comes in two parts:

- information recorded from the monthly updates which formed part of the regular staff meetings, interviews, and a questionnaire
- the analysis of the diaries and lesson notes kept by the teachers.

Interviews, meetings and questionnaires

There was a unanimous and sustained view that teaching the human rights education programme was a positive, and rewarding endeavour, for pupils and staff alike. The main message in all consultations was that the themes, methodologies and experiences were enjoyed by the children, and contributed to a more positive classroom environment. The experience was clearly a new one for most teachers, and the sense of challenge and anticipation associated with anything new was in evidence:

I found it helpful that we were all doing some of these things for the first time because we could talk about problems in a way that we mightn't normally.

The process of developing a policy and a plan as a group gave me a sense of responsibility, a stake in it all, and that made the positive moments more rewarding. By adopting the same approach with the children I could see the same sense of ownership in them.

It has been an enjoyable experience; what teaching should be all the time I suppose.

As the months went by, and confidence grew, the openness made everything from classroom management to the children's work more positive, but there was a vulnerability there that had to be watched. We were trying something new, and being more open than usual, and when something went wrong it was too easy to slip into old ways and things unravelled then.

The worth of the experience was reflected for colleagues in improved relationships with pupils, and amongst the children. With some exceptions, a more open and communicative dynamic was contributing to a stronger sense of responsibility from members of the school community. This contributed to a calmer and more enjoyable working environment, and a greater sense of fulfilment and achievement.

More specifically colleagues noted:

The process made the children more aware.

It taught the children a real understanding of justice, and fairness, and showed the children's understanding of these values.

Human rights education provided the children with a range of social skills and the opportunity to practice them.

The holistic approach got the children thinking in more depth about how they relate to one another, and to the community.

Teachers reported that the methodologies employed in the programme such as group work, debates and art work, were appealing to the children and contributed to the level of enthusiasm the children had for the programme. The participative approach ensured that the children were more involved in the lessons, and teachers drew links between the methodologies, the level of interest of the children, and ultimately the impact of the programme:

The group work and discussions were very interesting and helped the children to reason out their opinions.

I realise now that participative and interactive methodologies are not used nearly enough. They worked really well in class and created a great atmosphere. Contributed to communications and relationships.

On the negative side the programme clearly placed additional demands on the teachers and there was a sense that the level of effort and energy required might not be sustainable over a longer period of time. While there was an acceptance by all of the value of the programme, it was not accompanied by an open-ended willingness to continue with the same level of commitment to the programme as it stood. The primary reason given for this was the amount of time required to organise the learning approach effectively. While teachers regularly level this criticism at iterative learning processes (O'Leary, 1995), it was a surprising message to receive from the teachers in *Gaelscoil* given their demonstrated enthusiasm for the approach. Views included:

The main problem was the amount of time needed.

Some of the activities were physically difficult to arrange in the classroom, for example simply making the space in the room to organise a circle.

In some cases a number of the more time intensive initiatives, such as the school court for example proved to be unrealistic and were abandoned by the teacher, notwithstanding the fact that the value of the initiative was undisputed. In fact the main reason given for the decision of any teacher not to implement an element of the agreed programme was time.

When activities reached beyond the class to embrace a broader school constituency, such as the school committee, the teachers reported that the added logistical difficulties impacted on the effectiveness of the lessons, or on their ability to deliver as planned. The lack of a true whole-school culture where lessons were shared across a range of classes proved to be a barrier. A range of other whole-school processes did work very well; the school declarations, class contracts, the school assemblies, the policy making process, and the Model UN General Assembly are examples. Some of the teachers would be disinclined to commit to such an ambitious range of cross-school approaches again without significant additional planning and preparations. Staff recorded that:

The day we convened the Model General Assembly was great, and the interest generated before and after created a real buzz. The children enjoyed working together and developed language and understanding that was energising. But it was a complex project and we didn't get the support we might have liked from other classes – they were just too busy doing their own stuff.

We didn't think through the whole-school dimension enough. It has implications that we weren't ready for. The school court is a wonderful concept, but it is an

entire project in itself to get it up and running, accepted and understood, by teachers and by the children.

One teacher lamented the fact that her use of inclusive techniques did little to manage the dominant personalities so as to include quieter children in the discourse. She felt that the looser nature of the approach might even have made it harder for introverted students to contribute in favour of an environment where the extrovert class members could prevail. Other teachers referred to a tendency among some children to use both the more informal lesson structure, and human rights based arguments, as catalysts for disruptive behaviour. While this was not a major issue of concern it did create stresses for the staff. Concerns included:

The dominant children and personalities.....dominated! It was difficult to allow all children to contribute.

A number of the children seemed to opt out, which was nothing new, but their remoteness and disinterest has a more negative impact than usual because the exercises were participative in nature.

In discussions with these colleagues it was clear that the difficulties owed much to the teachers' lack of experience and training with participative methodologies. Despite these concerns a majority of the staff felt that the use of methodologies such as groups, work in pairs, and brainstorming, created a space for children who could often have been excluded, to contribute to discussions. So, while there was disagreement among staff regarding the benefit of iterative approaches, particularly for less voluble class members, there was agreement on the importance of good classroom management techniques for participative learning exercises, and the associated need for training of staff.

In hindsight a weakness in the process that I should have better anticipated and planned for was the simple reality that none of the children, at any age, had learned in or of

human rights previously, at least not in a coordinated and planned way. The programme was structured cumulatively to meet the needs, capacity and interests of the children at their various stages of development. In other words the programme assumed that children in third class, for example, would not use the same starting point as children in first class, even though they might have had equal experience of human rights education previously. The fact that they had not previously had the experiences and learning opportunities that would allow them to accrue the knowledge, amass the skills, and develop the attitudes appropriate to the content did prove to be a difficulty, particularly with the middle age groups from first to third class. As one teacher reported:

Some areas were beyond the children's comprehension. They didn't have the language and understanding. We had to alter the language and ideas to bring the content in to line with the children's experience.

The programme for the infants was simplistic and suitable to the point where no difficulty arose with senior infants for not having been through the junior infants programme. Indeed the appropriateness of the content to the younger children was remarked upon, contradicting a view often held by adults that the content of human rights education might be too difficult for younger children (Brown, 1996) (see chapter three).

On the other hand the older children in fourth, fifth and sixth classes had developed the capacity to quickly grasp the new concepts they were dealing with in the programme. This apparently left a situation where some children in between had problems initially. In particular, teachers reported that these children struggled somewhat to grasp the vocabulary, not having progressed through the programme from an early age. However the needs of each class were reviewed from month to month and on balance the problems were addressed through simplifying the lessons.

Teachers' views on the experiences of the children

The staff reported positive feedback from the children, with all teachers reporting that the pupils enjoyed the lessons and reacted very well to the new process. They reported that the students looked forward to the lessons and were eager to pick up discussions on the themes covered.

The primary areas cited were relationships, communications, and interactions between the pupils, with all teachers reporting that cooperation, and understanding had appeared to improve. Teachers' comments included:

The lessons were thought provoking for the children and encouraged cooperation and the development of group work skills.

The children were more aware of difference, and more respectful of difference.

They developed a clearer understanding of the values underpinning the programme.

The children were very interested in all aspects of the listening and sharing process.

Colleagues reported an increased level of awareness and understanding among pupils of concepts such as justice and injustice, tolerance, responsibility, and fairness, and an agreement that these concepts were best taught in a comprehensible way by reference to their own life experiences (Heater, 1991). A number of teachers emphasized the improved social skills evident among their pupils. The predominant view was that the programme had a positive impact on the inter-relationships between the children, with increased interest in cooperative work.

Methodologies

When questioned about the techniques and methodologies involved colleagues made a direct link between the use of iterative practices, the level of enjoyment and involvement that the children reflected, and the degree of success which they noted; the awareness, understanding, action spectrum (Shiman, 1991). The use of techniques such as discussions, brainstorming, and debates, was found to be very rewarding. The teachers reported a sense of satisfaction at having tried new techniques that worked well:

Prior to these lessons I wouldn't have done a lot of debating or group work. These were new ideas, and they worked very well.

All of the teachers reported that they had at least some previous experience with use of the methodologies involved, but only one recorded that she had tried all of the approaches in the programme previously with classes she had taught. An issue that arises here is the clear indication from all but one of the staff that much, though not all, of the methodological approach that underpinned the programme was new to them. Individual colleagues reported using techniques such as circle time (Mosley, 1993), or brainstorming for the first time in a classroom environment during the implementation phase. Given the youthful profile of the staff members involved this does raise questions in relation to the pre-service training of primary school teachers.

When asked specifically about training in human rights education the staff felt that it should be a compulsory aspect of the Bachelor of Education course, and highlighted the primary need for far more training in the use of facilitation techniques such as group work within the constraints of normal classrooms (for example; space, pupil/teacher ratio, poor resources, and limited time). With participation as the core principle that gives meaning to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it should be a prerequisite for teachers to receive training in appropriate methodologies (Osler, 1994, Osler and Starkey, 1996). As two colleagues recorded:

Human rights education should be a compulsory subject in training college.

Teachers should have access to in-service training on techniques such as group work, including how to make it work in confined spaces.

There was a realisation among teachers over the course of the project that their lack of training may have put them in situations where they had treated pupils unequally in the past, and that it would take a significant institutional reform in the teacher education system to turn this around (Klein, 1994).

When asked if the programme had led to structural changes at classroom level three teachers reported positively, all in the context of very specific elements of the programme. For example, the class charter was seen as a good tool, contributing to shift the perceived responsibility for discipline and control away from the teacher, and encouraging the children to take on greater responsibility for their own actions. This was evidenced by the manner in which the children referred to the charter rather than the teacher when one of them was misbehaving. The increased use of participative methodologies led one teacher to comment on the increased willingness to listen among the children, and her own increased investment in listening and responding (Thorne, 1994).

Two staff members reported no significant change in the classroom or school structure, expressing the view that the human rights education processes developed and implemented were largely in line with the teaching approaches they had always used, and the ethos the school had already been nurturing. In essence they were saying that the methodologies and approaches that we consolidated throughout the study were seamlessly coherent with ongoing initiatives through the core curriculum for religious education, and other processes.

A number of teachers reported that they formally sought to integrate the themes and issues that formed part of their human rights education programme with other subject areas including religious education, relationships and sexuality education, and the Stay Safe Programme. This had been one of the original requests of the staff in the planning phase. The integration of human rights with other subjects was thought to be beneficial in terms of reinforcing the concepts, and ensuring that the same value system permeated across the curriculum. In one instance a teacher reported that the children themselves sought to draw on the learning from a human rights education lesson in another subject area, and that the subsequent lesson went extremely well. One teacher reported that she made no attempt to integrate the lessons, and in her view this did not detract in any way from the process:

The themes were useful to reinforce other programmes including the core curriculum for religious education and the Stay Safe Programme. Combining lessons was one way to make up time.

Conduct among the children

The most common talking point among staff when reviewing the implementation of the programme was in the area of pupil conduct. The use of a human rights based approach to classroom and school management appeared to result in positive trends regarding behaviour, interaction, and relations. Teachers spoke of the increased level of responsibility among pupils for their own actions and increased consciousness of the impact of actions on other people. Children themselves understood and discussed the links between good conduct, participation and the enjoyment of their work. The democratic learning framework underpinned by human rights approaches, where equality, openness and inclusivity became a more conscious and central element of school life, was seen by colleagues as the propellant for this shift. The lessons provided a reference point to which teachers could return when problems arose in relation to

discipline. These findings echo studies carried out elsewhere, including Alderson (1997), Osler (1998), and Carter (2000).

Colleagues reported that the increased awareness and understanding among pupils of issues relating to justice, fairness and respect for others had an impact on the classroom environment. They felt that communications with the pupils improved, and that the children had a greater sense of responsibility (Harber, 1992). Teachers of the younger children were more positive in their analysis of the impact of the programme on conduct, reporting that participative approaches added greatly to the process of socialisation for the very young pupils (Abdallah-Pretceille, 1991).

However, in all cases teachers explained that the need to revise and reaffirm the concepts from the programme when problems with pupils arose was time consuming, and often resulted in lapses into more autocratic classroom management styles for the sake of expediency. This in turn served to undermine the overall human rights approach, thus creating additional frustrations for the teachers, and presumably for the pupils.

During a number of the lessons a minority of the pupils opted out and in some cases became disruptive, using the language of rights and democracy to legitimise their protest. Without having had the opportunity to analyse the gender perspective to this trend in detail it should be recorded that they were all boys, and they used rights as tools of disruption (Carter and Osler, 2000) in a manner which undermined the lessons considerably. Protest and conflict are part and parcel of democracy, critical society, and citizenship, and finding methods to accommodate this, without jeopardising the effectiveness of the lessons became a challenge. Staff members noted that:

The project has had a positive impact on the classroom environment. The class contract had an impact.

We felt that we had better tools to handle behaviour issues. There was more accountability involved – to classmates, to oneself, to the school declaration....and not just to the teacher.

It was easier to discuss issues of conduct in a context where the language and understanding of fairness and justice has been introduced.

Equating rights and responsibilities gave another angle on taking responsibility for one's actions. It made children more conscious of impinging on other people's rights.

There was some frustration when children got boisterous and misbehaved – sometimes when trying to avoid facing up to the difficult issues we were discussing. Perhaps if the use of methodologies like small group discussions were more familiar to the children they might better appreciate the approach.

Teachers' experiences with the parents

No formal attempt was made to involve parents in the process beyond discussing the policy with members of the Parents' Committee and the Board of Management and getting their approval for it at the outset. Like Carolan (2000), the parents who did discuss the project informally with staff had a good understanding of human rights and considered the school to be an ideal learning place for human rights education. However, teachers recorded surprisingly little feedback from parents. Bearing in mind the higher level of interaction between teachers and parents in primary schools, particularly at junior level, this was seen as unusual.

In considering why the parents were not coming to teachers to discuss the programme, one supposes that the parents assumed the lessons were part of other more longstanding areas of work such as religious education, and that the content was not unusual in the

context of a work programme in a multi-denominational school. Secondly, there is the adage that no news is good news, and that parents tend only to contact the teachers when they perceive things are not working! As if to validate this one teacher did report a complaint from a parent because her child was learning about the work of UNICEF, arising for her concerns in relation to UNICEF's policy on family planning. As no coordinated attempt was made to canvass parents for their views on the programme, there is a limit to what should be recorded on this matter. The entire area of parental involvement in the school community as part of a human rights approach is one that is worthy of further research.

Diaries

Seven teachers kept diaries to record their progress throughout the implementation phase of the programme, though with varying degrees of depth. They provide an informative, and valuable record of the actual programme of work delivered with the children as against that which was planned. The notes drawn up after each lesson were recorded on standard, simple and useable diary sheets by the teachers (see appendix H).

Teacher A – Junior infants [aged 4-5]

Process: The teacher's assessment of the programme was extremely positive recording that she felt the aims of the programme proved to be appropriate and that they were achieved in all lessons. She observed that the lessons allowed the children to talk about concerns such as bullying or fighting, and it also opened up a space where the children spoke about their feelings openly. She pointed out that these valuable opportunities might not otherwise have found time in curriculum. The humour which surfaced throughout added to the enjoyment for the class. For example, the lesson on sharing became both instructive and humorous when a number of the young children refused to share!

Methodologies: The class teacher recorded a number of frustrations with the use of participative approaches, mainly group work, and argued that such methodologies were too difficult for use with four and five year old children. The main reasons for this argument related to the high pupil/teacher ratio, linked to the fact that the children had only just started school for the first time. The use of artwork and concrete lesson materials went well, but reportedly took too much time to prepare, with a view that teachers would not normally be willing to spend that much time preparing lessons. My colleague recorded:

I found the group work very difficult. It ended with one child dominating each group or with a fight! I stopped using groups, and found that the children enjoyed it more.

Teacher B – Senior infants [aged 5-6]

Process: The teacher's diary records that the programme was found to be suitable to the age level, and that the level of understanding of the issues being discussed, such as treating people the same way, or bullying, was very impressive. There were links to other subject areas such as the Stay Safe Programme which the teacher felt she exploited effectively. The teacher amended the lesson plans as she worked through the programme on the basis of ongoing evaluation, an approach used by some other colleagues also. She reported a very positive outcome from the lessons where emotions were discussed, for example in the lesson "When people are not fair" the children focused almost exclusively on physical hurt initially, but with direction the dialogue shifted to a sympathetic understanding and sensitivity to other children's needs and emotions.

Methodologies: The use of stories, art work and related methodologies added greatly to the quality of the listening and the dialogue. The class teacher reported a high level of engagement, and enjoyment as a result. Unlike Teacher A, this colleague welcomed the

use of group work as a technique and reported that the discussions went better when convened in small groups. The contrasting views reflected the fact that these children had spent a full year in school, making it easier to manage groups. The teacher recorded that she had to introduce additional background stories, and poems at the start of a number of lessons in order to more effectively stimulate the children's engagement with the issues. This arose from her assessment that the level of discussion and dialogue was limited in some cases, which she attributed to a difficulty the children might have had grasping more complex concepts such as protecting others. Some of the activities were too ambitious for the age group. One overall comment was:

The children reacted very positively to the experience – boosting some pupils' confidence and making them more sensitive to other children's needs and emotions.

Teacher C – First class [aged 6-7]

Process: The teacher was very pleased overall with the outcomes of the programme. Initially there were challenges, for example with the first lesson on respect, where the children seemed to have real difficulty understanding certain concepts, resulting in a decision by the teacher to revise the lessons. Overall the revised programme went well and proved to be very interesting, with the teacher's diary recording the pupils' full engagement throughout. The degree to which the children undertook the collective activities positively surprised the teacher. For example she reported that in a lesson on leadership, where each group had to decide who would represent them, that without prompting, the children agreed to have a vote, and that they really enjoyed the process and participated in full.

Methodologies: The integration of the series of lessons was clearly beneficial to the overall impact, while use of case studies on individuals was found to be helpful. A number of the activities based on more abstract thematic approaches did not achieve the

agreed aims according to the teacher, as the children found the concepts difficult to grasp and there was a recommendation that the lessons should be rooted even more in the children's own experience for the issues to become more meaningful and understandable. She noted:

There was very positive feedback from the homework activities, (for example, the request to children to think of stories at home about how to strengthen the dignity of others and to tell them next day in school). The children were very eager.

I was pleasantly surprised by how much the children knew about their rights by the end of the process.

Teacher D – Second class [aged 7-8]

Process: A pattern emerged through the records from a number of class teachers indicating initial difficulty with the level of expectation. For example there was a clear difficulty with the vocabulary, with words like “equality”, and “opinion”. The lessons were amended to take these challenges into account. During the redrafting process we sought to adjust the programme to take into account the fact that the children in more senior classes would not have had the benefit of having previous experience of human rights education. This resulted in interesting discussions with staff as we reworked the lessons, and highlighted the essential need for a greater emphasis on revision. The teacher recorded her sense that the level of participation was unusually high among children that might not normally be willing to get involved.

Methodologies: Experiences with the use of techniques such as debating, participative voting, and photographs, were all positive. A concern emerged about a number of the active methodologies and the manner in which more outgoing children tended to dominate when these techniques were used, ironically this made sharing and cooperation

less likely according to the teacher. Attempts to use moments like this flexibly to discuss dominance and bullying when classroom relations ran in to difficulty were somewhat positive, but time consuming and distracting. The diary records that:

Dominant children took over when using participative methodologies.

One of the more questionable school rules was questioned – leaving me a little lost for words at first!

Teacher E – Third class [aged 8-9]

Process: The teacher remarked on the high level of engagement, and interaction between the pupils during the discussions, and reported that the aims were achieved in all but one of the lessons. It was clear that many, if not all of the children were considering these human rights issues for the first time. There was a marked progression in their level of understanding and their consequent analysis of the issues being presented to them, according to the teacher. The comprehensive work done on a school declaration reflected a clear understanding of rights and the ability to distinguish between needs and wants. The teacher had been initially cautious about some of the more complicated content areas, but ultimately she was very pleased, if not surprised, by the degree to which the children were able to comprehend and grasp the difficult concepts underpinning human rights. The use of concrete examples of people and organisations that are working in the area of human rights was found to be very beneficial.

Methodologies: The class teacher felt that the programme went extremely well, and apart from some time consuming techniques, she felt that the methodologies were flawless. The work in pairs for a number of lessons went very well, and the level of listening during the lessons, stimulated by participative methodologies such as group

work, and discussions was reported to be good. The applicability and usefulness of the resources was commented upon. The staff member records that:

The children got very involved in the discussions, and liked being challenged. The stimulation to think and react got them generating understanding, for example when considering how they might hurt other children by their actions. And they were clearly learning a lot from one another when talking about the problems children face. The medium of story was very effective here, as was role-play.

Teacher F – Fifth class [aged 10-11]

Process: In her diary the teacher recorded that students grasped the content, engaged with the themes, and explored the experiences in a positive and successful manner. A number of the more strenuous lessons, from the teacher's perspective, such as those on complex human rights issues, resulted in somewhat lively exchanges and an observation that a number of the children were discriminatory, something which was educational, but also very challenging. On analysis this was felt to be a reflection on the success of the lesson, in that the open discussion brought the raw responses to the fore, and gave pupils an opportunity to engage with human reality. One lesson resulted in a situation where the children started to complain about a number of weaknesses in the provision of facilities and policies in the school, which was intuitive, and another example of a successful lesson in the eyes of the teacher.

Methodologies: The use of more ambitious methodologies such as mini projects, and homework all went satisfactorily. The teacher was very pleased with the degree of engagement and commitment from the children during the discussions and debates. In a small number of instances time became a concern where the teacher felt that the methodologies were resulting in the lessons taking too long, and perhaps losing the

interest of some children, but also putting the teacher under time pressure for the rest of the day. In the teacher's own account:

The children seemed to be very aware of the issues. They were quite articulate in their discussions of discrimination, and inequality, but it became challenging for some individuals when the concerns were brought close to home. I'd have concerns still about attitudes, and there is more to do.

Teacher G – Sixth class [aged 11-12]

Process: The notes reflect that some of the issues being dealt with gave rise to discussions in class on human rights abuses (for example in relation to discussions on the genocide in Rwanda). These exchanges were handled through focussing on positive messages and imagery, and in a manner that worked very effectively according to the teacher. The process gave voice to a level of insight and understanding on human rights issues that was more informed than expected. The records indicate that children regularly referenced situations they had seen on television or read about on the internet. While some of the content was quite harrowing, the children were matter-of-fact in their analysis, and at no point did it become necessary to shy away from the planned content. It's clear from accounts that some children were certainly predisposed to the issues and well informed, most likely from the home environment. These students led many of the discussions and were instrumental in bringing the broader class group along in some of the lessons. On the other hand there were other children who knew little or nothing of human rights.

Methodologies: The use of simulation games, and scenarios went extremely well. The diary records that these methodologies generated deep discussions, and quality interactions. Similarly the use of poetry and video as techniques in some of the other lessons went down very well with the children. All of the lessons achieved their aims, and the diversity and range of methodologies contributed to this success, ensuring that

the children were captivated, and engaged. The whole-school initiatives proved to be very time consuming, but worthwhile. One interesting quote from the diary is:

The commitment of the children to the process of involvement and shared learning was great. They got a kick out of working together on the projects. They seemed happier and more involved. Something to do with control I feel, and of course the issues were interesting too.

Impact on the children

The teachers were asked to evaluate the process by answering ten reflective questions upon completion of the lesson modules (see chapter eight). The questions relate to the areas of knowledge, attitudes and skills (Richardson, 1982). The responses to the quantitative indicators listed in chapter eight are also reflected herein.

Knowledge

1) What new information did the children learn in relation to human rights?

The staff reported that the children had covered all pre-planned content areas regarding human rights instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the related concepts that underpin human rights. In these areas the teachers believed the children absorbed the information and became more articulate and competent in their knowledge base. Teachers of the older classes in particular reported an enthusiastic level of engagement with the information, with the children happily taking on project and research work at home, on the internet, and as part of the classroom work (Cremin, 2002). With some of the case studies, such as genocide in Rwanda, the children developed a comprehensive knowledge of the history and happenings there.

On the negative side teachers were not as confident that the children had learned enough about some of the organisations or individuals that the programme covered. Each class had a number of heroes/heroines and organisations, which formed part of the content. Some teachers reported that they did not cover these with the children, as they hadn't the time to research the information. While the lessons, for the most part, were self-contained, some background reading was required of the teachers to prepare information on people such as Henry Dunant, or on organisations such as the Simon Community, and teachers were unable to complete this. Consequently the new information imparted in these areas was limited.

2) What is the children's assessment of the worth of this knowledge, as part of their broader learning needs?

The teachers were unanimously of the view that the content of the programme, and the knowledge accrued by the children during the process would be necessary and valuable to them as citizens. The information was already beginning to prove its worth during the academic year, so it was clear to the staff that over time this knowledge would be of importance in forming the children's social character, personality, and attitudes.

There were a number of specific lessons after which the teachers found it hard to say that the children learned anything at all of long-term worth, and they presented structural or classroom management reasons for this, rather than any flaw in the content, or the knowledge that was to have been imparted. In some cases, entirely arising from the fact that new material and approaches were in effect being piloted, there were problems with a particular approach or technique that didn't work. For example, one of the integrated artwork activities with junior infants proved to be too complex, leading to a situation where the teacher had to change the approach, and resulting in a less effective lesson, in her view. In another instance the difficulty was the lack of engagement, or even a disruptive element that emerged when the methodology used to underpin the conflict resolution work with sixth class involved simulation games which were designed

specifically for the programme. The first attempts to use the activity resulted in a number of children becoming boisterous when in role, which undermined the lesson somewhat.

3) Has this knowledge caused the children to change anything in the way they behave or think?

Despite the positive reflections of teaching colleagues, at a deeper level the epistemological analysis was problematic for the teachers. Establishing or mapping the knowledge base which was part of the human rights education programme, and assessing when this knowledge was imparted to a point where it influenced the children's behaviour was complex. The vagueness or fluidity of knowledge in this area on the one hand, linked to the multiple curricular learning opportunities covering some of the same knowledge content, made it very difficult if not impossible to objectively measure the degree to which knowledge imparted during the programme had changed these young people in any way.

At a more subjective or even simplistic level, all of the teachers believed that they had presided over an initiative that had brought about changes in the children. At a basic level the teachers observed that the children had a vocabulary, information, and associated confidence to address daily problems they experienced in a different way. This was not widespread, but anecdotally teachers reported how references to the class charters, the conflict resolution experience, and the language of fairness, came out on occasions as the children interacted. The staff reported that the programme, perhaps because it was rooted in a knowledge base that was appropriate to the children, stimulating in content, and taught in an inclusive manner, was informing the children, and appeared to be impacting on the children too.

Skills

4) How have the learners' intellectual skills developed throughout the programme – expression, communication, judgment, and critical analysis?

The same skill set was the focus of other subject areas, making this question difficult for colleagues to answer, thus they found it easier to approach this question at the macro-level. To address the question colleagues were encouraged to take an overview, and set aside the difficulty in legitimately establishing whether the development of a child's skill set, (in the area of critical thinking, for example), is a product of one programme or another.

From this perspective, the teachers were quite proud of the fact that the children in the school were overt, communicative, challenging, questioning and discerning. The staff believed that the open learning style informed by a spirit of equality, and accountability had influenced the children, and developed their skills considerably. The use of school assemblies that were convened by the children themselves, or the involvement of children in decision making, are just two examples given of how the school nurtured skills that are necessary in the active citizen.

5) How have their social skills - acceptance, relationships, conflict resolution, participation, capacity to take responsibility improved?

Again colleagues faced the same dilemma as with question four, above, even more so perhaps. One of the hallmarks of the revised primary curriculum is the increased emphasis on the importance of social skills:

Social skills, such as co-operating, collaborating, participating, trusting and respecting, accepting, relating, etc. are a critical dimension to a number of areas within the revised primary curriculum including social, personal and health education, music, visual arts, science, geography and physical education (Murphy, 1998: 9).

The staff were quite confident that they were doing a good job in general of nurturing social skills within the school, and pointed out that the school code of conduct, the policy on bullying, and other over-arching governance tools were developed with a view to promoting a process of social dialogue, social interaction, and social responsibility. They were of the view that the human rights education programme was a perfect fit with this ethos, and saw human rights education as a very successful vehicle for the process. While a small number of teachers went so far as to say that the human rights education programme had brought little new to this element of the school curriculum, it was accepted by the majority that the framework, structure, and content of human rights education provided a strong curricular focus which lifted the visibility of the social skills programme in the school.

As with question three above, the teachers reported a small number of anecdotal tales of children using a human rights based approach to deal with concerns and to organise relationships in the classroom. The children, particularly the older ones, were reported to be using their skills and understanding in areas such as equality and cooperation to manage conflict, and classroom relations. A number of teachers reported that they referred back to the skills they had been taught at times when they were needed to manage real situations. For example the importance of accepting difference while not discriminating was recalled to manage problems in relation to gender equality and the inclusion of girls in class activities at break time in the yard. On the one hand this technique proved useful because the children's prior exposure to the relevant social

skills helped defuse classroom tension, while on the other hand it further consolidated the children's social skill base through a form of revision.

6) How might these skills be useful to the children in everyday situations?

The staff indicated that the overt, communicative and questioning nature that the process encouraged, together with the inclusive, responsible social outlook that it nurtured, provided the children with essential life-skills. Of this there appeared to be little doubt in people's responses.

In responding two dilemmas emerged. Firstly whether this skill set was being imparted anyway through other subjects was a recurring question. The staff often commented on this, not so much as a concern, but as a demonstration of how central participation and openness are to the school work plan. In noting that the skill set being imparted was essential, it was not clear that all the teachers felt that human rights education in itself is essential, but that the multiple skills nurtured through the process must be passed on to all young people in one way or another, regardless of the learning process, subject, or the curriculum area in which such learning takes place.

Secondly, there were queries as to whether the skills were imparted to a satisfactory degree using the programme. The problems experienced are discussed throughout this chapter, together with the successes. The staff were mindful that the process could have been better, but in general felt happy that it had impacted positively on the children's skill levels.

7) How might the acquisition of these skills be having an impact on the learners' understandings of and attitudes to others?

The responses to this question can be taken at two levels. The abstract or theoretical others, and the real others, with the contrast between both proving insightful. The

programme addressed the skills required to include, enter dialogue with, and cooperate with others at all age levels. When dealing with issues of non-discrimination in respect of minorities there were very few “others” among the pupil cohort, and so at an abstract level the children demonstrated an exaggerated level of acceptance and openness to others. The fact that they were not dealing with the emotion and challenge of meeting with Traveller children (for example) on a daily basis, made it superficially easy for them to willingly embrace Travellers in their contributions. On the other hand, according to the responses from colleagues to this question, when the “other” became real, when considering differences such as gender or physical attributes, it became much more interesting. The children were more challenged, more honest, and more discriminatory.

The teachers noted that it was when the children were developing and using their intellectual and social skills in real-life situations that their attitudes were truly challenged and meaningful change started. Empathy at a level that can change attitudes is, based on the feedback from teachers, difficult for children of primary school age. As one colleague responded:

A general question like “why should everybody be allowed to play games?” yielded very different answers to “why do you have a system for choosing teams at break which always results in the same children being picked last?”

Attitudes

8) What has changed about the way the children think about others?

Teachers were quick to point out that primary school children are living through an age-range during which their psychological and sociological awareness and understanding of others is developing naturally. The expectations of teachers working with younger primary school children in respect of their attitudes to others were limited accordingly.

That said the emphasis on the need to be kind, caring, fair and respectful with others in the lessons with the junior classes, was thought to have helped the children relate to others. When the children were challenged, having acted harshly to peers, for example, they were able to say that they had not been fair, or kind. Their understanding of others had developed to the point where they knew others should be treated fairly.

With the older children the expectations were naturally greater. Teachers assumed that children from age eight or nine would understand how to behave with others in the school, so the aims were based on helping the child to think of relationships in the context of rights, and to think of others beyond the school community and their own immediate lives. Responding to the question staff were happy that the children were more informed, more knowledgeable, and more thoughtful about their own rights, and as such assumed that they should be thoughtful about the rights of others. The teachers were struck by the depth of interest and capacity for understanding demonstrated in respect of global issues, and they felt that attitudes were changed accordingly. For example, one teacher was surprised at the general level of awareness the children had about world issues that would not normally have been discussed in class, for example in relation to landmines. By having these discussions in the context of a participative and shared learning approach the teacher felt that the knowledge the children were generating from the internet and television was being built upon in a way that generated understanding and attitudinal engagement.

The teachers were confident that the process would progressively develop more informed attitudes to others over time. Respondents observed that the reflective skills the children were acquiring throughout the process (for example, critical thinking) would continue to stimulate the children's attitudes for life.

9) What has changed about the children's attitudes to participation and cooperation?

Teachers found it impossible to say whether the children were more committed to the concepts of participation and shared learning, or whether their attitudes had changed to any measurable extent. They reported anecdotal and isolated evidence of the children's willingness to embrace cooperative approaches, and their openness to working together on projects, and problem-solving exercises. For example, there were reports of children seeking to sort out difficulties with peers using dialogue and discussion in which the vocabulary imparted during the lessons and projects came into use. This acceptance of the language and concepts of human rights among some of the children, when contributing in class, and when dealing with one another, was taken as an indication by a number of teachers that at least some of the children had been changed by the process.

Colleagues stressed the fact that the pupils genuinely enjoyed learning through participation. As staff we took this level of enthusiasm as a further indicator of change, for stimulation that generates interest and enjoyment also generates lasting impressions. This was evidenced by some staff in their reports of how the children were able to easily remember what had been covered in the previous lessons.

10) How might these changes be of benefit to the children for the future?

Teachers felt that the attitudes the process cultivated, and will cultivate through continuous reflective interaction with others, equip the children to live better in a changing, more intercultural, more diverse, and more challenging society in Ireland. These changes will help the children develop the life-skills necessary to become independent, interactive citizens, and will benefit the children across the entire range of social activities from personal to professional. Lastly, some teachers noted that the children will be better equipped to embrace a global understanding, which was thought to be extremely important given trends in global trade, globalisation, and geo-politics.

Feedback from pupils

Before designing and implementing the programme a survey was conducted with the pupils in the senior half of the school (see chapter five). The aim was to establish how the children felt about the school, the level of understanding and knowledge the children had of human rights, and to canvass their views in advance of the design and planning of the programme. As with the questionnaire survey with teachers, this benchmark analysis with pupils defined a point of departure against which progress could be compared.

A second survey with the same cohort was organised after the implementation. Thirty-six pupils were involved in this follow-up survey, which again was explained in detail to the children and discussed with them in advance.

The aims of the process were:

- to identify areas of progress and improvement in the provision of human rights education in the school arising from the implementation of the programme
- to establish the level of knowledge, skill and attitudinal change that the children had accrued since their involvement in the initial survey
- to canvass the views of the children on their experiences of the human rights education project

The survey sought some basic information on key human rights instruments or organisations to assess whether the children knew more about human rights than demonstrated in the previous questionnaire. Results showed that the children's basic knowledge in relation to human rights had improved from the situation that pertained a year previously when about 50 per cent of the children had at least some knowledge, to a situation where all but one respondent had some understanding of the Convention on the Rights of the Child or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Responses from the children reflected that they were aware that they have human rights and that these are

listed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Responses to questions on what is the Convention on the Rights of the Child or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from children of various ages included:

It is very important to children because it tells you your rights. [Aged 8]

It's a piece of paper with rights on it. [Aged 8]

A list of rights that is important because it lets us all know our rights. [Aged 9]

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a list of rights telling us that we have the rights to many things and no one can take that away from us. [Aged 10]

Rights for everyone even if they are different in some way. [Aged 10]

There was, of course, a direct correlation between the programme the children followed and the knowledge they demonstrated. The children verified that they had retained a lot of the information they had been taught.

When asked to list the rights they had almost everybody was able to make some attempt at the question. Responses ranged from detailed lists, to short one-line responses. Examples included:

I have the right to live and play and be happy. [Aged 9]

I have the right to a home, medication, a family, friends, a school. [Aged 10]

My rights are the right to privacy, right to life, right to food, water, and a home, right to have clean air and the right to a family. [Aged 11]

Unsurprisingly there were responses that held more gaps than substance, and they highlighted that a lot more should be done. The analysis remains quite simplistic, but it is clear that the programme would need to be running across the school annually to expand and consolidate the knowledge base.

When asked what they learned during the programme the answers demonstrated a level of understanding that was quite impressive. Respondents of all ages had good recollection of issues covered in the lessons:

I learned that everyone has rights. [Aged 8]

I learned that you should not bully in school. [Aged 8]

I learned that you should be aware that other people have rights and not just you, and that you should help people to know their rights. [Aged 11]

I learned that I have a right to many things and that no one has the right to take that away from me. It is important not to take away anyone's rights. [Aged 11]

I learned how important rights are, and that there are many people whose rights are being violated right in front of our noses, and we don't care. [Aged 11]

The children recounted the methodologies linked to some of the lessons, speaking for example of the police officer who visited and showed a video, and reporting that:

We did plays and we really enjoyed ourselves. [Aged 8]

We made a book about the Travellers. [Aged 10]

The children spoke of activities such as the Model UN General Assembly, poetry, art and the activities at the school assembly. There were no negative accounts of the activities, while a small number of children were unable to identify any of the classroom methodologies used.

All of the children thought that learning about human rights was important and were glad to have had the opportunity. Most felt that human rights would help them later in life, with only a few children mentioning specifically the importance of human rights in the school. Many indicated that knowing how they can hurt people and how others can hurt people was important. In their own words they expressed their views as follows:

Human rights are needed, like rules are needed. [Aged 9]

*It's a good idea to learn about human rights so that we will have a better school.
[Aged 10]*

Fifty percent of the children said they had discussed the programme with their parents, and those that did reported unanimous support and interest in the programme from their parents.

While almost half the group could not think of any long-term benefits to having learned about their rights, one respondent was pretty sure that they wouldn't help him or her get a job! A small majority were confident that knowing their rights and understanding when they were being violated would be helpful in life, although exactly how they weren't certain.

Interestingly nearly all respondents felt that the human rights education programme had contributed to stemming bullying and unfair treatment in the school:

It made bullies feel ashamed. It worked on me. [Aged 11]

Only slightly less than half the children reported that the information they had gathered about human rights during the year was of direct benefit to themselves. When asked if they felt their rights had been abused in anyway during the year fifteen respondents, or 42 per cent, responded positively, mainly reporting on bullying or exclusion. Most pupils agreed that the teachers effectively protected their rights during the year, with most of them making a link between the fact that they felt safe and happy in school and the role being played by the teacher, for example, with many referring to efforts by the teachers to stop bullying.

There was a mixed response when the children were asked what they had learned about responsibilities to their friends, family and others. There were a few eloquent responses:

I learned that they have the right to everything that I have the right to, and not to do anything to them that I would not like done to me. [Aged 10]

I learned to respect their rights, not to abuse them, and to stick up for them when their rights are being abused. [Aged 11]

I learned it was our responsibility to help anyone whose human rights are being violated. [Aged 12]

I learned not to take rights for granted. [Aged 12]

Summary

During the year the children engaged in a process of participative learning about human rights, in human rights and for human rights. The collective effort of the teaching staff

ensured that the process was implemented much as had been envisaged. In reflecting on the process the staff were largely positive and firmly of the view that the values and principles imparted were essential, and expressed a sense of confidence that they had stewarded a positive and rewarding progression with the children. The children themselves clearly enjoyed the experience and reported that their knowledge and skill base had expanded as a result. Both teachers' and pupils' responses indicated that the process was part of an evolution towards active citizenship, with the children more equipped to continue their critical path to adulthood as a result.

Not all the pupils benefited in this way, nor were all the teachers convinced that human rights education in itself is a necessary curriculum opportunity to stimulate participative democratic learning processes. However the methods, procedures, and experiences were enjoyed and all respondents indicated at least some degree of positivity about the process.

Chapter 10

Conclusions

Introduction

This final chapter presents the outcomes of the action research project. The information gathered throughout the implementation process, using the cyclical action and reflection approaches set out in chapter four, is analysed and consolidated into core areas of learning.

The issues that came to the fore in chapter nine were largely systemic, institutional, and normative. The concomitant challenges, relating to training, curriculum, school structure, and behaviour are mainly organisational, and clearly endemic. They are presented in this chapter from an organisational change perspective focussing on school leadership, professional development, and curriculum. Undertaking a school restructuring process aimed at improving effectiveness demands an approach to change from an organisational perspective (Hageman Chrispeels, 1992).

The process of reflection and action in search of improvement is ongoing, and these findings are a snapshot at a particular point in the progression after an intensive year of implementation in *Gaelscoil*. The conclusions are presented in such a way as to provide impetus to further action-oriented analysis by the school community, and to contribute to similar processes at national level.

Findings

The needs analysis to which this study was responding was set out in chapter seven. This process of collective analysis, planning and design, focussed on the three areas of leadership, curriculum, and professional development, where strategic responses were developed and implemented.

School leadership

The comprehensive, all encompassing nature of the human rights education process, as experienced in our school, required the central involvement of school leadership. This confirms the importance of school leadership for effective learning (Trafford, 1997). As we sought to change the organisation we found that the involvement of the Board of Management, and my role as principal were critical.

Whole-school approach

The action research plan was structured around a whole-school approach (Cunningham, 1991; Starkey, 1991). Chapter nine records the degree to which this was achieved during the year. The message from all colleagues was that such a whole-school initiative required concerted and detailed planning, shared ownership by staff, and a cooperative approach to teaching. These pre-requisites can only be met when the school leadership plays a driving and a facilitative role. The views of colleagues reflect a sense that insofar as we were successful in changing learning processes across the entire school, the vision presented by the school leadership, and the sustained support available to staff were essential.

The entire process placed significant demands on staff, and while they were engaged and supportive, they made it clear in their commentaries that such a comprehensive project could only be led from the top.

Concretely colleagues found that when they were seeking to coordinate activities across a range of classes – such as the election process for the school council, or the process of involving all classes in the development of the school declaration – they could not have done it at all but for the mutual approach that had been facilitated by me as principal. In fact, despite the preparatory work in the staff room most colleagues were unhappy with

the level of success achieved with the whole-school initiatives and felt that we underestimated the amount of time and planning required.

A good example cited by many was the role played by the school leadership in facilitating the development of the school policy on human rights education using iterative processes. This was felt to be empowering and resulted in ownership by all staff. It would be much more difficult had an individual teacher tried to embark on such a significant process.

Progression

A weakness found in the pedagogical process we used arose from the reality that none of the children, at any age, had learned in or of human rights previously, at least not in a formal structured way. As noted in chapter nine this posed problems when some children had difficulties with the language and understanding required to engage with age appropriate issues. In discussions with colleagues, as we revised the programme to address these concerns, it became clear that a mechanism to monitor the exposure of children to human rights education would be valuable.

Naturally teachers have different strengths and weaknesses, and colleagues implemented the processes to different degrees, and only the school leadership had a sense of these discrepancies. It was clear from the feedback that some fully incorporated the methodologies into their ongoing classroom style, while others had less success for different reasons. Thus children became immersed in the democratic approach to varying degrees, depending on the unique approach of their different teachers over time.

As part of the whole-school approach it was necessary for the school leadership to play a monitoring role to ensure that children were progressing and that their exposure to human rights language, knowledge, approaches and experiences was progressing.

Integration

The integration of human rights education with other subjects was thought to be beneficial in terms of reinforcing the concepts, and ensuring that the same learning approaches permeated across the curriculum. Staff members often commented on the similarity between elements of the human rights education process, and the overlap of lesson content in other areas. Indeed a number of examples of children themselves building links were recorded.

Again however, colleagues pointed out that integration doesn't just happen organically, it must be planned, coordinated and facilitated, with the direction and support of the school leadership. Based on our experience integrated learning approaches need to be formulated in the context of the school plan. For example, while there was a lot of discussion about integration with the religious education curriculum and the relationships and sexuality education programme, less connectivity was identified in practice than expected. The reasons given for this were the lack of planning and preparation, as a group.

Curriculum

The approach taken in the study was curriculum based. From the outset we saw the curriculum as the change vehicle (Fallon-Byrne, 1997), and we built the programme to fit within the primary school curriculum and the school plan. The majority of the teachers felt that the curriculum framework, structure, and content of human rights education that we implemented provided a strong focus on inclusive learning. They felt that it lifted the visibility of the social skills programme in the school, and that it brought coherence to the processes involved.

Participation

Curriculum is much more than content. The concept of participation (Fogelman, 1997) as an essential dimension to the curriculum, was reconfirmed in this study. Like most teachers we had probably become rather institutionalised into the idea that the educational dynamic was around what you taught, rather than how you taught. Methodologies had become set and unquestioned.

Through the planning process it became clearer to the staff that the central curricular focus for this action research was methodological. The knowledge, while important, was secondary. The focus was on the children's attitudes and values, and the response had to be experiential and empirical.

Participative learning approaches, based on sharing, questioning, listening, and understanding were adopted. Techniques such as group work, debates, committees, meetings, children doing the rounds from class to class to canvass input, assemblies, projects, and buzz groups, all became a greater part of the school dynamic.

The interpretation of our experiences is that while colleagues found the process challenging, their analysis was upbeat. They enjoyed it and found it rewarding. The pupils liked learning through participation, and eagerly anticipated the next human rights education sessions. They were engaged and constructive, with only a few exceptions.

Time

The methodological approach clearly placed additional demands on the teachers regarding time-management and the allocation of time. Indeed there was a view that it could be too time consuming to engage in participative learning across the curriculum in the long term given the pressure on teachers to complete courses.

The issue of preparation time was also raised. Colleagues found it demanding, and a number of aspects of the programme were not implemented because colleagues couldn't invest the time in preparation. Doubtless this problem was more acute because of teachers' unfamiliarity with the material, and they agreed that this would become less of an issue over time.

The allocation of significant curriculum time to allow democratic learning systems such as school councils and school courts to thrive is essential. The start-up phase was particularly onerous in our experience, and we would anticipate an ongoing significant investment of contact time. For teachers to feel able and willing to invest this sort of time in classroom activities that are not content oriented will require curriculum change.

Evaluation

The emphasis on process throughout the action research was essential. We planned and implemented the study through cyclical stages of action and reflection. The evaluation, and reflection on outcomes became increasingly important to us as a team, (Osler and Starkey, 1998 and 2000). The staff meetings focused to a greater and greater degree on analysis as we progressed. This gave rise to two observations, the fact that evaluation as a tool is undervalued, and even non-existent; and the extent of the added value in terms of effectiveness that comes from the process of reflection. To change you have to think, and to think brings change. We sought to build a thinking school, and the reports from colleagues give cause for reassurance that this was achieved.

The evidence from the study suggests that a greater role for evaluation of how we teach, as well as what we teach, exists within the curriculum and that it needs to be seen as a core element of school planning.

Professional development

Pre-service training

The lack of pre-service training in human rights education available to teachers in Ireland was a significant impediment identified throughout the process (Osler and Starkey, 1996; Bourne *et al.*, 1997). When asked about training in human rights education the staff felt that it should be a compulsory aspect of the Bachelor of Education degree course. The more colleagues learned and understood of a human rights based approach to learning, the more disappointed they were in the level of pre-service provision they had received. Colleagues recounted that they had been given much of the philosophical basis when studying Kohlberg, Dewey and others, but that this was not matched by practical training in human rights approaches.

It was our experience that some members of staff sought to teach much as they had been taught themselves, and that pre-service training did little to disavow them of the traditions and norms of the Irish primary school classroom approach.

One teacher expressed the view that the particular needs of teachers trying to use facilitation techniques, such as group work within the constraints of normal Irish classrooms, should be met as part of the pre-service training programme.

The quality of the relationships and communications between teachers and pupils, and amongst pupils, where the participative approach is working well can allow people to open up. In a number of cases this open discussion brought raw responses to the fore, and gave pupils an opportunity to engage with human reality to a point where it gave rise to certain stresses, ambiguities and challenges according to some teachers. A number of colleagues felt they lacked the capacity to deal with such interpersonal situations and that it is an area requiring additional attention at pre-service level.

As the curriculum reform processes outlined in chapter two are now informing the teacher-training programme, there is an opportunity available which the third-level college authorities should use to integrate human rights approaches into the formative training of teachers. On the basis of my research this is a critical requirement.

In-service training

Teachers pointed out that the approaches and techniques required demand a degree of ongoing motivation, and energy. Some were of the view that more didactic, content-based teaching, to which they had been traditionally accustomed, came more easily to them. Accordingly they suggested in-service support as one tool that would be necessary to ensure that teachers remained engaged in participative learning approaches.

The ongoing roles of school leadership, school planning, and curriculum reform in the process of human rights education were also linked to the need for in-service training. On the basis of our experience whole-school approaches will only succeed if institutional inertia can be unblocked by new ideas and innovation. Ongoing professional development opportunities are a primary source of such energy.

In-school training

The evidence from our experience would support professional development approaches that are organised on a whole-school basis. During the planning phase of the project colleagues received an in-school training programme on human rights education that was effectively tailor made for them, and the school. This initiative facilitated the emergence of a collective learning approach amongst the staff. On reflection colleagues found this very worthwhile, particularly as the process was a whole-school venture.

Resources

In our experience the availability of resources on human rights education was very important. The level of knowledge required of teachers to support the learning process demanded that resources including teaching manuals, information materials, posters, and information technology resources including websites, and CD ROMs be available to the teachers and the pupils.

Behaviour

The objective of the action research was to develop and implement a holistic human rights education approach across the school with a view to improving learning practice. Three interdependent elements of the study – leadership, professional development and curriculum – were planned and implemented with the intention of changing the learning environment to bring about a human rights based approach. The purpose of this was to influence behaviour; the ways in which we communicated, and interacted as individuals within the school community and within society, and so the way we learned from one another. We sought to facilitate relationships informed by the human rights concepts of equality, fairness, justice, and interdependence. All of this relates centrally to behaviour.

The findings of this study indicate that the use of a human rights based approach to classroom and school management appeared to result in positive trends regarding behaviour, interaction, and relations. Nearly all the children consulted after the implementation phase felt that the human rights education programme had contributed to stemming bullying and unfair treatment in the school, resulting in a better school atmosphere. All teachers reflected positive experiences relating to behaviour. The pupils' communications skills and their capacity to relate to one another affirmatively were enhanced (Alderson, 1997; Osler, 1998; Carter, 2000). Cooperation, and understanding appeared to improve between the children in their classes.

When analysing these experiences with colleagues a number of interrelated elements to the process that drove behavioural change were identified.

Accountability

The use of collective regulation techniques that were developed and monitored by the children themselves created a stronger climate of accountability. The “them and us” divisions where staff provided the main accountability mechanism were replaced with a framework of understanding that misbehaviour would result in accountability to peers. In our experience this attitudinal shift generated an increased sense of responsibility in the children.

Decision making

The shift in decision-making responsibility, limited as it was, to the children, was perhaps the single most important aspect underpinning the change. Pupil generated processes to develop and approve class charters and the school declaration, the school council and the school court were examples of the delegation of decision making to the children. These mechanisms achieved varying degrees of success, as outlined in chapter nine, but they were all part of an environmental change that was thought to have encouraged better behaviour.

Our analysis focussed on the direct link between behaviour and power, and we found that the children’s expectations of one another in shared decision making processes resulted in improved conduct.

Transparency

The openness of the process we put in place created a more transparent environment. Pupils were clear on where they stood and knew the rules. They spoke of a sense of

fairness in the systems, and a sense that people were being treated equally. Again there were exceptions, but overall we found that the clarity and transparency of the system helped to improve relationships and communications. One teacher in particular observed that the processes created a more open environment where the children could talk about concerns such as bullying or fighting, and it also opened up a space where the children spoke about their feelings more.

Responsibility

The net effect of the framework of decision-making, accountability and transparency that was put in place was an increased sense of responsibility. Children appeared to demonstrate greater ownership of their actions in a climate where they understood that the rights of others were dependent on their willingness to be responsible. Teachers felt that the attitudes the process cultivated in relation to responsibility, and will cultivate through continuous reflective interaction with others, equip the children to live better in a changing, more intercultural, more diverse, and more challenging society.

Difficulties

There were difficulties throughout the process, all of which have been set out in chapter nine. A number of the active methodologies proved to be too time consuming. The proper implementation of some of the whole-school dimensions proved too complex. The limits of physical space were constraining. The deficiencies in training resulted in some teachers having difficulties with the participative approach. The lack of time for preparation resulted in some disappointing outcomes. Some planned lessons and approaches just didn't work and had to be redrafted. At a practical level much was learned from these less successful aspects of the study.

The behavioural trends were not all positive. Teachers reported a tendency among some pupils to dominate the dialogue and to become boisterous during the more informal

participative sessions. Some children used the language of rights in an effort to validate the disruption of classes and to disengage from the process. These examples of misconduct ranged from mischievousness to misbehaviour, and while they were very much the exception, this was an issue for some teachers.

Our understanding of these problems led us to the conclusion that a combination of process, change and substantive factors needed to be addressed. The process issues included the need to revise some of the methodologies, create more flexible time allocations, and refinement of the programme to take greater account of progression and integration. These changes will take time, and undoubtedly some of these difficulties will diminish as the innovative dimensions become more familiar to all. The substantive challenges will require a comprehensive response which reaches beyond the school in some instances. These include enhanced training and professional development opportunities for teachers, and the need for increased understanding and implementation of whole-school responses to the needs.

Recommendations

School level

1. The action research pilot project has shown that the human rights education process has had a positive impact on the school, and more particularly on the pupils, including on the way children think, and behave, and accordingly it should be fully incorporated as part of the formal school plan for the future. The democratic dialogue with pupils instigated as part of the process is taking hold within the school, but will need to be nurtured and promoted by all if it is to have long-term impact on the way pupils learn, and the attitudes they form.

2. The whole-school democratic approach to integrated participative learning, involving the entire management, and teaching staff, and based on agreed school policies and

plans, will need continued and ongoing investment of time and energy at staff meetings, school planning days, board meetings, and in the classroom if it is to become embedded as part of the school culture.

3. School provision of basic support mechanisms including training, peer-to-peer support, availability of resources, and information technology should be progressively developed for, with and by the teaching staff.

4. More elaborate monitory and reflective approaches will need to be developed to evaluate and record experience, and build on past practice to ensure that a progressive learning environment exists.

National level

5. The evidence presented on the challenges facing Ireland at a societal level highlights the responsibility on the school system to provide a learning environment which stimulates active and positive citizenship. The pilot project provides evidence that a human rights school can thrive in the context of current Irish national curricula, and government policy. The Department of Education and Science, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, and schools should seek to promote and encourage decision-making at school level to embark on a participative approach to learning.

6. The Department of Education and Science, the teacher training colleges, and education centres, have an obligation to bridge the identified gap in the provision of training and support (in-service and pre-service) for teachers seeking to promote participative learning, including in the areas of methodologies, classroom management techniques, planning and evaluation.

7. A dedicated human rights education unit to provide leadership, support and backing for schools and teachers, including policy guidance, resources and practical direction,

should be provided by the Department of Education and Science, regarding such issues as school management, integrated implementation of the revised curriculum, whole-school approaches, and time allocation, if teachers are to feel empowered to fully embrace participative and holistic learning approaches.

8. There is little academic research capacity in the area of human rights education in Ireland, and the Department of Education and Science together with academic institutions should seek to develop and resource research programmes in this area as a matter of importance.

Summary

This final chapter sets out the findings of my study in four areas:

- The core role and function of the school leadership in nurturing, facilitating, and implementing a whole-school approach to human rights education, including essential dimensions such as integration, and progression.
- Aspects of the curriculum, and the hidden curriculum, including participation, time, and evaluation.
- Professional development, including pre-service, in-service, and in-school training.
- Behaviour, and the framework for accountability, decision-making, transparency, and responsibility in the school.

The recommendations underscore the positive results of the study by proposing strategies to refine and consolidate the participative learning approaches in *Gaelscoil*. Further recommendations outline ways in which the research can serve to encourage the use of whole-school human rights education processes in other schools.

APPENDIX A

Notes for the initial meeting with teachers

The aims of this first meeting were to inform the teachers formally about the proposed action research project, to enlist their help with the action research phase of the whole-school project, and to provide some initial training on human rights education. The meeting was arranged after school, and the fact that the entire teaching staff stayed for the meeting reflected a basic level of interest and commitment.

We started by acknowledging the fact that the term human rights education meant little to most of the teachers, given the fact that there was no training in human rights education provided in the colleges of education. Other than hearing mention of it in relation to the core curriculum for religious education, or work done by myself in this field to date, they would probably not have heard of it elsewhere.

We went on to consider the following basic presentation about human rights education to contextualise the project at this launch meeting:

Presentation to staff at launch meeting

International context

It is important to consider that the Irish Government has given a commitment at an international level to ensure that Irish citizens are taught human rights education, and whether it is honouring it. Without going into too much detail about this I would just like to highlight three such international commitments:

1) United Nations

“Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”

This statement is quoted and adopted repeatedly in major United Nations instruments, notably, Article 26, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948), Article 13, Article 5, UN Convention against Discrimination in Education (UN, 1962), International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (UN, 1966), and Part II, D. 79, Vienna Declaration (UN, 1993). The Irish Government is party to these instruments. However, my experience as a teacher indicates that the Department of Education, the teacher training colleges and schools pay scant, if any, attention to human rights education.

2) UNESCO

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has been very active in the field of education for human rights. The 1974 “Recommendation concerning education for international understanding, co-operation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms” was the first significant attempt to embellish the principles relating to the promotion of human rights aspired to in the UDHR.

The recommendation states “that each Member State should formulate and apply national policies aimed at increasing the efficacy of education in all its forms and strengthening its contribution....to respect for and application of human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

3) Council of Europe

Resolution (78) 41 on the Teaching of Human Rights of the Committee of Ministers recommends that governments take whatever measures are appropriate to ensure that the teaching of human rights and fundamental freedoms is given an appropriate place in curricula of teaching and training, initial and in-service, at all levels. This was reinforced by the landmark Resolution (85)7 on Teaching and Learning about Human Rights which recommends that the governments of member states, having regard to their national education systems and to the legislative basis for them encourage teaching and learning about human rights in schools.

So you can see from these three examples that human rights education is obviously thought to be very important but little or nothing is being done to ensure that it is actually taught in our schools.

What is human rights education?

The range of activities specifically designed to transmit understanding and knowledge of human rights, to foster values and attitudes that uphold the same rights for all, and to encourage action in defence of these rights (Amnesty International).

Human Rights Education has three significant dimensions (see appendix to Resolution (85)7). Human rights education reaches across all programme areas and is not just another subject but a framework in which learning can take place; an organisational system which has implications for every aspect of school organisation and curriculum.

Teaching about human rights - knowledge:

- forms of injustice
- concepts associated with human rights
- international instruments
- people, movements

(For example; core-curriculum, geography, history, language)

Teaching for human rights - skills:

- intellectual skills - expression, communication, judgement, critical analysis
- social skills - acceptance, relationships, conflict resolution, participation, taking responsibility

(All subjects, school atmosphere and organisation, hidden curriculum.)

Teaching in human rights:

- democratic learning - the listening school
- participative learning - the sharing school
- positive learning - the self-esteem building school

(All subjects, school atmosphere and organisation, hidden curriculum.)

What have we managed to achieve to date in our school?

A number of human rights education initiatives are already in place in the school in an effort to establish the enabling environment from which a human rights school can emerge and succeed. While these will be analysed, refined and improved, during the course of the study it is worthwhile looking at them in brief just so that we all take heart from what we have already started.

1) We have included lessons about human rights in the school plan. Lessons on the UDHR, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, human rights organisations, human rights activists, responsibilities and so forth are included in the core curriculum for

religious education for senior classes. For example, third and fourth class children will learn about the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the United Nations. Children in fifth and sixth classes cover human rights, the UDHR, and conflict resolution skills. The school booklet summarises as follows; “The school religious education programme develops critical thinking, human values, responsibilities, and an understanding of the beliefs of all peoples.”

However, teaching for human rights is possibly even more important and here the school already has a number of fledgling mechanisms in place. The policies of our school are based on the concept of teaching for human rights. Reference is made to international standards and the concept of rights and responsibilities as they relate to social interaction. The opening clause of the school policy on bullying is “Under Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, schools have a duty to protect the children in their charge from physical and mental violence”.

Similarly the school code of conduct says, “Every person, and every child, has rights. With these rights come certain obligations and it is important that every member of the school understands this.”

We can be pleased with the attempts they are being made in the school to create a learning environment based on equality, justice, and participation. Some of the more obvious, or stated, expressions of this would be:

- everybody, including teachers, is on first name terms
- there is a positive approach to behavioural management
- praise and rewards are used to reinforce good behaviour
- class contracts, developed by the children, are used in senior classrooms
- there is an emphasis on respect, responsibility and the development of self-esteem

What I am trying to achieve with this research project

The proposed school-based aims are:

- to provide an insight into the knowledge and attitudes about human rights education which prevail within the school community
- to establish what opportunities and obstacles could serve to help or hinder the development of human rights education in the school
- to provide a framework of methodologies and practical approaches which could facilitate the development of *Gaelscoil* as a human rights school
- to equip and empower the teaching staff to implement this framework by providing them with the necessary support, training and resources
- to monitor, and evaluate the successes and failures during the implementation of the agreed approaches
- ultimately to improve educational practice in the school through the implementation of human rights education

The national aims are:

- to provide the first example of scientific educational research on the subject of human rights education in an Irish primary school for the benefit of research and practice
- to provide an analysis of the Irish primary school curriculum from the viewpoint of the human rights educator
- to provide qualified data that may be of relevance to interested parties seeking to promote human rights education in Irish primary schools

How the teachers can help

I would like to invite you all to be part of this study so that we can analyse the opportunities, obstacles, advantages and disadvantages of a human rights approach to education. More specifically I am hoping that we will work together in the following ways:

RESEARCH PLAN

1) Interview

I would like to have an interview with each of you over the next few weeks:

- to agree a time-frame for the project
- to hear what you have to say about some of the things I discussed today
- to establish which opportunities and obstacles you think could serve to help or hinder the development of human rights education in the school
- to provide an insight into the knowledge and attitudes about human rights education which you think prevail within the school community
- to provide resources, manuals, texts
- to encourage and support as necessary
- to start planning the lessons and approaches that will be used,
- to agree a system for recording and evaluating

2) Plan lessons and approaches

We will work together to plan human rights education lessons and approaches that you could teach with your class during the research project. Together we will come up with a work scheme for each class. This will be agreed at the next staff meeting.

The work scheme will include agreed goals for each class for the research period.

The goals I would have in mind might be:

- Teach an agreed number of human rights education lessons (possibly one per month) during the period
- Integrate human rights education into various subjects
- More consciously try to create a participative/democratic learning environment
- More consciously try to develop human rights education skills in the class. Such as understanding, conflict resolution, equality, and responsibility
- Involve parents in the project, for example by inviting them to help in the classroom during human rights education lessons, to give talks, or by involving parents in research at home

All goals/objectives will have to be clarified at the interviews so that they are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timetabled.

3) Keep a diary

Keep a diary of the progress, changes, problems, comments from children and parents, and other key issues that unfold during the research period.

4) Regular updates

We will take time at monthly staff meetings to review progress and redirect efforts during the research period. We will use these opportunities to share ideas and problems, and to help with planning and evaluation.

4) Evaluate

At the end we will look back over the plan period and see what changes have occurred, if any, in the organisation and in the attitudes of the school partners with a view to building on what we have learned for the future.

APPENDIX B

First questionnaire for teachers

Part 1 Teaching about human rights

1. Have you ever introduced the Universal Declaration, or the Convention on the Rights of the Child into your classroom? If so give details and a critical analysis of the impact of the lesson on the children.
2. Have you ever taught a class about famous human rights activists, and/or organisations (for example; Martin Luther King, Mary Robinson, Trócaire, UN)? If so give details and a critical analysis of the impact of the lesson on the children.
3. Have you ever taught a class about basic human rights principles (for example; equality, non-discrimination)? If so give details and a critical analysis of the impact of the lesson on the children.
4. Have you ever taught a class about human rights abuses (for example; unfair trial, famine)? If so give details and a critical analysis of the impact of the lesson on the children.
5. Do you think that primary school children should be taught about the Universal Declaration, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, human rights defenders, and human rights organisations, or would such lessons empower the children to the extent that they could undermine the authority/discipline structures in the school?
6. Do you think that primary school children can understand the concepts of rights and responsibilities?

7. Where can teachers find the time to teach about human rights since this is not a formal subject on the curriculum, and just one of a myriad of “new” subjects such as information technology, relationships and sexuality education, and so forth coming on stream? What subjects have you integrated human rights education with in the past to make time for it?

Part 2 Teaching in human rights

Teaching in human rights is simply the application of human rights principles (such as justice, equality, respect) in the classroom. By educating children in a participative way, based on human rights principles, they can grow up with the skills and knowledge necessary to act as responsible human beings. Words that might describe a human rights classroom include sharing, listening, telling, and democratic.

8. Do you think that it is possible to teach effectively in a participative environment based on human rights principles?

9. Is it a good idea to encourage democracy and participation in the classroom?

10. Have you tried any techniques or ideas to encourage participation (for example; consulting the children, or allowing them to have input when preparing class rules, punishment, and time-tabling)?

11. Do you think class discipline is improved when a participative approach to classroom management is used?

12. Do you think that the parents or the children you teach would value a participative approach to learning?

Part 3 Training

13. Did you receive any training in college on human rights education?
14. Did you receive any in-service training on human rights education?

APPENDIX C

Second questionnaire for teachers

1. Did you teach the human rights education programme with your class? If not, why?
2. Do you think it was a worthwhile exercise? Give reasons for your answer?
3. What elements of the programme went well? What should remain unchanged for next year?
4. What elements of the programme did not go well? What should change and how? What problems did you encounter?
5. How did the children react to the lessons?
6. Do you think that the programme has had an impact on the children and if so what might that be?
7. Did you try any new techniques or ideas for the first time to encourage participation, and how did the lessons work out?
8. Do you think the human rights education programme has had an impact on class structure and organisation in any way?
9. Do you think the human rights education programme has had an impact on class discipline in any way?
10. How did you handle any areas of overlap between the human rights education programme and other programmes such as Stay Safe or RSE?

11. Did you get any feedback from the parents of the children you teach regarding the programme?

12. Now that you have taught human rights education what pre-service training do you think teachers should get in this area?

APPENDIX D

Initial questionnaire for pupils in third, fourth, fifth, and sixth classes

1. Do you think that this is a fair school? Give the reasons for your answer.
2. Do you feel important and special in our school? Give reasons for your answer?
3. Do you think the teachers listen to you when you have a problem and really try to do something about it? Give the reasons for your answer.
4. Do you think that all people (pupils, teachers, cleaners, other staff, parents) are treated with respect here by everybody in the school? Give reasons for your answer.
5. Do you think our code of conduct and our school policy on bullying is working well or how do you think it could it be improved?
6. Did you ever have a class contract and what did you think of it?
7. How could we involve children more in the running of our school?
8. What do you know about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?
9. What do you know about the Convention on the Rights of the Child?

APPENDIX E

Second questionnaire for pupils in third, fourth, fifth, and sixth classes

1. What is the Convention on the Rights of the Child?
2. What is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?
3. What is the United Nations?
4. What human rights do you have?
5. What did you learn during the human rights education lessons this year?
6. What interesting things happened in the school to teach us about human rights issues?
7. Do you think that the teachers and other pupils protected your rights and the rights of others this year?
8. Do you think it was a good idea to learn about human rights?
9. What did your parents think when you discussed the human rights lessons with them?
10. Did you learn any lessons about human rights that you think will help you when you grow up?
11. Do you think that the lessons about human rights helped in any way to stop bullying, and unfair treatment of people in our school?

12. Can you remember any time when the information you have about human rights helped you this year?
13. Can you remember any time when you felt that your human rights were abused in school this year?
14. What did you learn about responsibilities to your friends, your family, and your school?

APPENDIX F

School policy on human rights education

MISSION

To create a shared learning environment, positive interpersonal relationships, a curriculum for human rights education, and a democratic organisational system, all of which combine to develop a human rights school.

AIMS

To ensure that all children in the school come to know and understand their human rights and their consequent responsibilities in a participative and democratic learning environment.

To help the children learn about important dates, people, events and organisations which have contributed to the development and observance of human rights throughout the world.

To equip the children with the basic skills and attitudes needed to practise respect, tolerance, understanding, justice, non-discrimination, good citizenship, and equity, in school, at home, and as they grow through life.

TIMETABLE

It is envisaged that every class will have ten human rights education lessons (eight for infants' classes) during the school year. These lessons may be organised as a module and covered during one school term.

Human rights education can be integrated with other subjects such as religious education, social, personal and health education, and languages. It is accepted that the lessons at the junior cycle level are broadly similar to lessons already in the school plan under religious education, the Stay Safe Programme, and relationships and sexuality education. Resultantly the themes can be covered under these other subject areas, or these lessons can be used for revision.

Specific time for human rights education lessons can be taken from the two hours per week set aside for Religious Education.

Assemblies will take place every Tuesday morning from 10.30 a.m. to 10.45 p.m.

CONTENT

School based initiatives that could involve all classes

Class Charters - led by second class

School Declaration - led by third class

School Council - led by fourth class

School Court - led by fifth class

Model United Nations General Assembly MUNGA - led by sixth class

Methodologies and teaching techniques

Icebreakers

Assemblies

School Human Rights Day

Project Work

Circle Time

Class Meetings

Brainstorming

Buzz groups

Curriculum initiatives for all classes

Junior Infants	Theme: Kind and caring
Senior Infants	Theme: Fair and not fair
First Class	Theme: Principles of human rights
Second Class	Theme: Build understanding of human rights
Third Class	Theme: The Convention on the Rights of the Child
Fourth Class	Theme: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
Fifth Class	Theme: Equality
Sixth Class	Theme: Conflict and conflict resolution

APPENDIX G

School programme for human rights education

Junior infants

Theme: **Kind and caring**

1. Kind and caring at home
2. Kind and caring with friends
2. Kind and caring in school
3. People who are kind and caring
5. Gifts and giving
6. Showing love
7. Sharing
8. Saying sorry

Heroes and heroines: Parents

Organisations: Our school
 Caring and Sharing Association

Senior infants

Theme: **Fair and not fair**

1. Being fair with friends
2. Being fair at home

3. Being fair in school
4. Treating people equally
5. When people are not fair
6. Bullying
7. Protecting others
8. Do what is right

Heroes and heroines: Father Matthew

Organisations: Simon Community

First class

Theme: Respect for others

1. Respect
2. Understanding
3. Tolerance
4. Justice
5. Equality
6. Freedom
7. Caring
8. Dignity
9. Rights
10. Responsibility

Heroes and heroines: Rigoberta Menchu, winner of the Nobel Peace Price

Organisations: Greenpeace

Second class

Theme: **Build understanding of human rights**

1. What is a right?
2. Rights in the classroom
3. What is a responsibility?
4. Rights and responsibilities
5. Children from around the world
6. Games from around the world
7. Stories from around the world
8. Children in Northern Ireland - children in conflict
9. Children in Japan - Sadako's story
10. Children in Kenya - Papu's story

School based human rights promotion mechanisms: Class charter

Heroes and heroines: Sadako, Japanese schoolgirl.
 Chriostóir de Baróid, founder of Between

Organisations: Between
 The Paper Crane Club
 Trócaire

Third class

Theme: **The Convention on the Rights of the Child**

1. Needs and wants
2. What does a child need?

3. The Convention on the Rights of the Child
4. Children have rights too!
5. Jitka's story
6. Neela's day
7. Street children, Paulo's story
8. Child labour
9. Children from around the world
10. Children are the future

School based human rights promotion mechanisms: School declaration

Heroes and heroines: Eglantyne Jebb, founder of Save the Children

Organisations: UNICEF

Fourth class

Theme: **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

1. History of the UDHR
2. What are rights?
3. Introducing the UDHR
4. Photograph activity
5. Matching cards
6. Human rights passport
7. Fifty years of the UDHR
8. Mapping human rights
9. Discrimination
10. Food

School based human rights promotion mechanisms: School council

Heroes and heroines: Eleanor Roosevelt - Co-author UDHR
Chico Mendes - Rubber tapper from Brazil

Organisations: Amnesty International

Fifth class

Theme: Equality

1. Identity
2. Them and us
3. All different all the same
4. Choosing characteristics
5. Gender equity
6. Special children
7. Physically challenged
8. Travellers
9. Racism, xenophobia
10. Apartheid, caste systems, civil rights movement in USA

School based human rights promotion mechanisms: School court

Heroes and Heroines: Dunnes Stores strikers, Nelson Mandela
Martin Luther King

Organisations: COPE

Sixth class

Theme: **Conflict, war and conflict resolution**

1. Political killings
2. Genocide
3. Human rights abuses
4. Refugees
5. Landmines
6. Conflict resolution
7. Conflict resolution between communities
8. The UN and its Charter
9. Stand up now for human rights
10. The unknown citizen

School based human rights promotion mechanisms: Model United Nations
General Assembly

Heroes and heroines: Mary Robinson, United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights
Henry Dunant, Founder of the International Red
Cross/Red Crescent

Organisations: International Committee of the Red Cross/Red Crescent
Trócaire
UN

APPENDIX H

Teachers' diaries

Were the aims of the lesson appropriate to the class?

Were the aims of the lesson achieved?

Did the lesson go well?

What should be done differently next time?

How did the children react to the lesson?

What single comment from a child sticks in your mind after the lesson?

Are there any other observations you wish to record?

APPENDIX I

Sample of resources

- 1) Back issues of The Fourth R, Human Rights Education Newsletter, Cearta Daonna, SAOL.
- 2) 75:25, Ireland in an Increasingly Unequal World, Dóchas
- 3) Education for Peace, P. Cremin
- 4) Yes, You Do Count, Church's Peace Education Project
- 5) Stand Up Now for Human Rights (Video), Council of Europe
- 6) Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations
- 7) UN 50, Primary School Kit on the United Nations
- 8) The Right to Develop, Stories, Poems and Plays for Young People, Mabel Segum
- 9) 50 Years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Amnesty International
- 10) Nuncamas, Trócaire/Amnesty International
- 11) Comhlámh Human Rights Education Pack
- 12) It's Only Right, Susan Fountain
- 13) Our World, Our Rights, Amnesty International
- 14) First Steps, Amnesty International
- 15) Roma, Gypsies, Travellers, Council of Europe
- 16) Learning to Participate, Development Education Centre
- 17) The State of the World's Children, UNICEF
- 18) A Global Curriculum, Trócaire
- 19) Development Education and Human Rights, Development Education Journal, Volume 4.2, 1998
- 20) The Universal Declaration of Human Rights - Forty Years On, Development Education Centre
- 21) The Rights Stuff, Development Education For Youth/Amnesty/Trócaire
- 22) Amnesty Interactive (CD ROM), Amnesty International
- 23) Trócaire and CDU catalogues

- 24) FOCUS Refugees, Comhlámh
- 25) Day of Solidarity with Indigenous People, Trócaire
- 26) I'm no racist...and what is it anyway?, Development Education for Youth
- 27) Rwanda Information Sheet for Schools, Trócaire
- 28) Rights of the Child, Irish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children
- 29) A Memory of Solferino, Henry Dunant
- 30) United Nations Human Rights Fact Sheets 1-24
- 31) Team Planet, Trócaire
- 32) The International Committee of the Red Cross, What it is? What it does?
- 33) ICRC. Answers to your questions, The International Committee of the Red Cross
- 34) It's Only Right, Susan Fountain
- 35) EIP in action around the world, *École Instrument de Paix*
- 36) Education for Global Citizenship
- 37) ABC Teaching Human Rights, United Nations
- 38) Trócaire poster on the Convention on the Rights of the Child
- 39) Children Everywhere, the World Book
- 40) UDHR poster, Amnesty International
- 41) Primary School Teacher's Resource Pack, Trócaire
- 42) People of Peace, Irish Commission for Justice and Peace
- 43) My Rights, Irish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children
- 44) The Right, poster on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Trócaire
- 45) The European Convention on Human Rights, Council of Europe
- 46) Windows on the World and Team Planet photo packs
- 47) The Human Rights Album, Council of Europe
- 48) Stop Child Labour, International Labour Organisation
- 49) So Everybody Fights, Irish Commission for Justice and Peace
- 50) Cairde Rwanda News, Comhlámh
- 51) 50 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Amnesty International
- 52) Our book...of child rights

School declaration for human rights

Developed and adopted by the pupils of our school

All children in this school are equal.

All members of the school have the same rights.

Everybody is free.

Everybody has the right to be happy at school.

Everybody has the right to know the reasons if they are reprimanded.

Everybody has the right to be safe and secure from bullying, and the right to be protected from bullying.

Everybody has the right to be heard when they have a problem, and to have their side of the story heard in the event of a dispute.

Everybody has the right to befriend others, and to friendship from others.

Everybody has the right to privacy.

Everybody has the right to his or her ideas, beliefs, and religion.

Every body is entitled to have opinions, and to express their views when they see fit.

When somebody is hurt or sick they have a right to be helped and be looked after.

Everybody has a right to education.

Everybody has a right to participate in sporting, music and leisure activities.

Everybody has a right to assistance from others when they are in need.

Nobody can take these rights away.

Human Rights Education in an Irish Primary School

Paper presented to the European Conference on Educational Research, Hamburg, September 2003

Introduction

The evolution of a national educational response in Ireland to the social and political changes of recent times provides an interesting case study on citizenship education. This paper reflects the outcomes and findings of an action research project in one Irish primary school (children aged four to twelve approximately) where a human rights education programme was developed and implemented within the context of Irish government policy, national curriculum processes, and school structures. The research provides interesting pointers that are relevant and valuable not just in the specific school, but also nationally, and internationally as well.

Context

There are three over-riding national considerations that frame the context for human rights education in the Irish school system.

1) Irish society is no stranger to the abuse of human rights and the erosion of human dignity. During the years of violence in our society bias and apathy sadly, and progressively, raised our threshold of acceptance to a level where bloodshed and suffering were almost viewed as part of normal everyday life in Ireland. The 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement has brought a thankful end to the most horrific abuses of human rights, but the underlying lack of respect and tolerance continues.

2) The traditional, rural and introspective fabric of Irish society is changing apace. The creeping urbanisation of the population, the growing crime-rate, and the escalating drug-

problem are among the many symptoms of a rapidly changing Ireland. These strains on society are having an affect on the youth and schools are struggling to manage growing learning and discipline challenges, as the problems associated with emerging social issues spill over into the education system.

3) The rapid increase in the numbers of non-Irish people resident in the country has resulted in a significant demographic shift, as migrant workers arrive to meet the growing demand for employees, and as asylum seekers follow the opportunities presented for a safer and better life. The response of Irish people has been unsettling at best. For example Amnesty International reported in 2001 that 78 per cent of people from ethnic minorities in Ireland had experienced racism (FAQ, 2001). The Market Research Bureau of Ireland has reported that 62 per cent of young Irish people believe racism is a growing problem here (Irish Times/MRBI, 20 September 2003).

Accordingly the locus of responsibility has, quite rightly, shifted to government to provide the educational framework that will ensure that children develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required to contribute to a culture of human rights and citizenship.

Irish government policy

Charting our Educational Future - The White Paper on Education (Government of Ireland, 1995) opens with a list of “principles of approach”. Second of these is;

- the State is obliged to protect and promote fundamental human and civil rights, in accordance with the Constitution, national law and relevant International Conventions, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Government of Ireland, 1995: 4)

The Government of Ireland followed this with the introduction of the Education Act in 1998, which has placed Irish educational systems and structures on a statutory footing

for the first time. Despite the principles set out in the White Paper there is no reference to the promotion of human rights or citizenship in the Act, though it does list the promotion of “moral, spiritual, social and personal development” (Government of Ireland, 1998a: 13) as one of the functions of a school.

The Education Act is just one part of the most significant overhaul of the Irish education system in 150 years. Other parts include new and revised curricula across the system.

The Department of Education and Science introduced a new course to the junior cycle of secondary schools (age approximately 12 to 15 years) in September 1997. This course, entitled Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), covers four units; the individual and citizenship, the community, the State - Ireland, Ireland and the World.

There is no doubt that the introduction of Civic, Social and Political Education at the junior cycle has created the curriculum space for the encouragement of active citizenship (CDU, 2000a: 4).

It is envisaged that teachers will use a thematic approach to the subject and explore given themes, including human rights across all of the units. This is the first time that human rights education has been formally included on the official curriculum at any level.

Civic, Social and Political Education aims to enable and empower students to become participative, aware and responsible citizens (CDU, 2002a: 5).

A review of the senior cycle for secondary schools (age approximately 15 to 18 years) is currently under way. Hammond (2002: 12) and Ward (2002) outline the strong case for introducing a continuation programme for human rights and citizenship education into the senior cycle of secondary schools.

At primary level (age approximately 4 to age 12) the Department of Education introduced a revised primary school curriculum in 1999. A new subject, called Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) was instigated, although implementation in schools did not formally start until 1st September 2003. One hour per week is allotted for SPHE, while two hours per week are allocated flexibly by the teacher based on the school plan and his/her work programme with the class. It includes among its aims and objectives:

- to foster in the child a sense of care and respect for himself/herself and others and an appreciation of the dignity of every human being
- to begin to identify, review and evaluate the values and attitudes that are held by individuals and society and to recognise that these affect thoughts and actions
- to become aware of some of the individual and community rights and responsibilities that come from living in a democracy (Government of Ireland, 1999b: 9-10)

The content of the curriculum includes elements on conflict resolution, media education, developing citizenship, and communications, all of which create ample space and opportunity to teach human rights education.

Social skills, such as co-operating, collaborating, participating, trusting and respecting, accepting, relating, etc. are a critical dimension to a number of areas within the revised primary curriculum including social, personal and health education, music, visual arts, science, geography and physical education (Murphy, 1998: 9)

More interestingly perhaps, the overall schooling context within which the revised curriculum is situated is founded on a child-centred participative learning approach, and teachers are given significant autonomy to allow for innovation and project based

explorative learning. This provides for a whole-school or integrated approach at primary level (Ruane *et al.*, 1999; Osler and Vincent, 2002).

Notwithstanding these positive openings and opportunities for human rights education in Ireland, the reality is that teachers need more than printed curricula to change. The evidence suggests that the Department of Education must be more proactive and energetic in the provision of policy, training, resources, direction and support if classroom innovation is to flourish. The challenge facing teachers seeking to promote citizenship in schools was clarified when, speaking in 2000, the Chief Executive of the (governmental) National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Anne Looney, said:

Curriculum, as currently configured, may not be good for human rights education – but schools themselves may also be similarly unsuitable. Schools may value the actively engaged, critically aware, independent learner as the ideal student, but faced with the reality of such a student may have no choice but to expel him/her (CDU, 2000b: 22).

The Research Project

Against this backdrop I conducted an action research project on human rights education in one Irish primary school, *Gaelscoil*. The project was carried out after the new SPHE curriculum had been issued to teachers, but before implementation started formally. It involved developing and implementing a whole-school human rights education policy and programme across all levels in the school for an academic year. The project sought to enable a learning environment in which children would experience human rights first hand.

For young people to learn about human rights they must experience them and believe in them, as well as know about them (Osler and Starkey, 1996: 85).

The overall approach was based on the framework outlined by Richardson (1982) in which he presented the objectives of the curriculum in the area of human rights in three groupings, knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

The aims of the research project can be presented in two, quite different categories; the primary, or school based aims which provided the focus for the overall structure of the action research project; and the secondary aims which the project can serve to achieve by contributing to the national discourse on human rights education in Ireland.

The school-based aims were:

- to provide an insight into the knowledge and attitudes about human rights education that prevail within the school community
- to establish what opportunities and obstacles could serve to help or hinder the development of human rights education in the school
- to provide a framework of methodologies and practical approaches which could facilitate the development of *Gaelscoil* as a human rights school
- to equip and empower the teaching staff to implement this framework by providing them with the necessary support, training and resources
- to monitor, and evaluate the successes and failures during the implementation of the agreed approaches
- ultimately to improve educational process and practice in the school through the implementation of human rights education

In the process of realising these primary aims at school level the project has, it is hoped, achieved a number of secondary aims that could be said to have national significance. While noting that “it is not possible or desirable, to aim for replication or generalisation, since the aim is to understand rather than to predict” (McNiff, Lomax, Whitehead, 1996: 106), nevertheless, it is hoped that a body of knowledge has been developed which may achieve other external aims.

The national aims were:

- to provide the first example of scientific educational research on the subject of human rights education in an Irish primary school for the benefit of research and practice
- to provide an analysis of the Irish primary school curriculum from the viewpoint of the human rights educator
- to provide qualified data that may be of relevance to interested parties seeking to promote human rights education in Irish primary schools

What is human rights education?

The range of activities specifically designed to transmit understanding and knowledge of human rights, to foster values and attitudes that uphold the same rights for all, and to encourage action in defence of these rights (Amnesty International, 1996).

Human rights education has three significant dimensions (Council of Europe, 1985). Human rights education reaches across all programme areas and is not just another subject but a framework in which learning can take place; an organisational system which has implications for every aspect of school organisation and curriculum.

Teaching about human rights - knowledge

- forms of injustice
- concepts associated with human rights
- international instruments
- people, movements

Teaching for human rights - skills

- intellectual skills - expression, communication, judgement, critical analysis
- social skills - acceptance, relationships, conflict resolution, participation, taking responsibility

Teaching in human rights

- democratic learning - the listening school
- participative learning - the sharing school
- positive learning - the self-esteem building school

Methodology

The emphasis from the outset was on process. Human rights education is more about the epistemological and cognitive progression, than about programmes and outputs. The process commenced in a dialogue and consultation with the teachers and pupils.

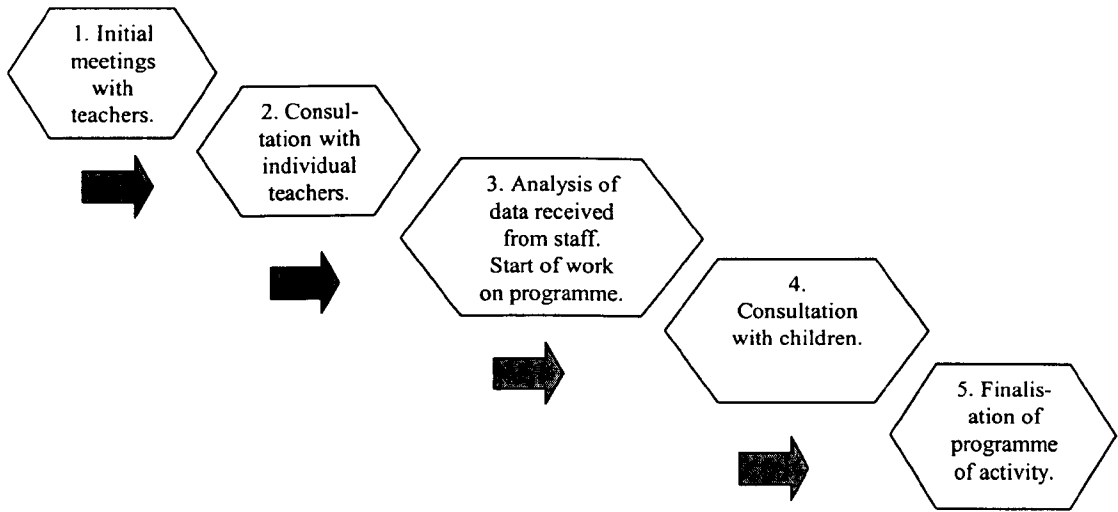
Together the staff examined the detailed input and guidance of the teachers and the pupils. It became clear that to provide a framework for the action research project within the school, it was necessary to develop a school policy on human rights education. The teachers sought to develop a human rights school and saw it as their role to help the Board of Management to formulate the core values they wanted to promote and the methods and procedures they will use to promote them in the form of a written agreed policy:

A focal role of the human rights educator is thus to help a school to define the values which it shares (Lyseight-Jones, 1991: 77).

In parallel we worked through a series of steps towards implementation, starting with input from the school community, analysing the current reality in the school, assessing the needs, and developing methodological and content strategies to address the needs. This process was followed across what were identified as the three critical dimensions of the school architecture, the staff, the curriculum and the organisation.

Table 1

Process of engaging teachers and pupils



This iterative process took time, and may not have garnered the ideal level of input and commitment from all partners, but it successfully resulted in the production of a shared programme for human rights education which had a whole-school perspective, was process oriented, and owned by the entire school community.

The programme spanned all eight classes in the primary school system and at the structural level required between eight and ten formal lessons, with additional project work. Key issues and themes were advanced at each level in the school, and whole-school initiatives formed part of the work plan for all classes.

There were a series of whole-school initiatives intertwined throughout the programme with the intention of involving a wide range of children in the activities. These served to underpin the holistic participative learning processes essential to human rights education. For practical purposes the staff agreed that the whole-school initiatives should be coordinated by one named class so that there would be clear lines of responsibility for the activities. The aim of these sessions was to change the way the school is managed and run, so that the school operates in a more inclusive and democratic way.

The basis of democratising classroom management is, of course, the democratisation of school life in general. Herein lies a very important issue. School life is a very complex reality, beginning with what we may term the bureaucratic dimension (the administrative aspects of running the school) and culminating in a wide range of psychosocial and affective aspects. The school is a living entity in which numerous relational networks develop between the different actors: teachers, pupils, administrative and auxiliary staff, parents, etc. The democratisation process must start with this, the internal life of the school (Paun, 1994: 19).

In addition these initiatives strive to develop the way the children learn and the way the teachers teach by introducing a human rights based approach. This concept of merging human rights education with teaching methods and practices suggests that rather than teaching about human rights in a formal way, human rights must be experienced by the pupils (Henaire, 1995: 9).

The structure agreed through the consultation process resulted in the allocation of between eight and ten lesson periods of approximately one hour. In addition it was understood that the whole-school initiatives and the project work would take additional less-formal time and effort from all. The programme of work laid out for introduction during these periods was designed with three criteria in mind:

- age appropriate at all levels
- cumulative and progressive
- process oriented and experiential

A series of eight themes were agreed, one for each class level, and the content of the lessons within each theme was finalised in discussion with each class teacher.

Table 2

<u>Overview of the programme</u>	
Junior infants (4-5yrs)	Kind and caring
Senior infants (5-6yrs)	Fair and not fair
First class (6-7yr)	Respect for others
Second class (7-8yrs)	Building and understanding of human rights
Third class (8-9yrs)	Convention on the Rights of the Child
Fourth class (9-10yrs)	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
Fifth class (10-11yrs)	Equality
Sixth class (11-12yrs)	Conflict and war, conflict resolution

An overall monitory framework for the action research project was established before implementation commenced, and was set in the context of the research aims. The challenges to a qualitative research methodology were debated among the staff team and a series of reflective questions on the programme impact in the areas of knowledge, skills and attitudes, were developed to guide the teachers when they were conducting a qualitative analysis after implementing the programme.

Knowledge

- 11) What new information did the children learn in relation to human rights, human rights instruments, human rights defenders and human rights organisations?
- 12) What is their assessment of the worth of this knowledge to them as part of their broader learning needs?
- 13) Has this knowledge led them to change anything in the way they behave or think?

Skills

- 14) How have the learners' intellectual skills developed throughout the programme - expression, communication, judgement, and critical analysis?

- 15) How have their social skills - acceptance, relationships, conflict resolution, participation, taking responsibility, improved?
- 16) How do the children assess the usefulness of these skills in everyday situations?
- 17) How might the acquisition of these skills be having an impact on the learner's understandings of and attitudes to others?

Attitudes

- 18) What has changed about the way the learner thinks about others?
- 19) What has changed about the child's attitude to participation and cooperation?
- 20) How might these changes be of benefit to the children for the future?

A range of questions, which the teachers could use to record the quantitative outputs, were also elaborated.

Participation

- 10) How many teachers took part in the programme?
- 11) How many pupils were involved in the programme?
- 12) If teachers dropped out, why?

Delivery

- 13) To what extent did teachers manage to complete the entire plan?
- 14) In cases where they did not, why?
- 15) Did teachers go beyond the plan in any area, and why?

Outputs

- 16) Were all planned outputs delivered?
- 17) If they were not, why?
- 18) Were any additional unplanned outputs generated?

The observation and recording methodologies, which could be used by the staff to frame the qualitative and quantitative measurement exercises, were established and discussed.

Action research relies chiefly on observation and behavioural data (Cohen and Manion, 1996: 192).

- a) Staff meetings. The teaching staff at the school agreed early in the process that the action research initiative should be a standing agenda item at the monthly staff meeting.
- b) Diaries. Colleagues agreed to keep notes after each lesson.
- c) Cohort longitudinal analysis. Observation using the two cohort groups, the pupils and the teachers.

The monthly group discussions with the teaching staff throughout the implementation phase illuminated the experiences the staff had with the programme, the successes as well as the challenges. The feedback gave an insight into the evolving pedagogical environment in which the action research was implemented. The consultations with colleagues at the end of the school year included interviews and a questionnaire which yielded a range of results in relation to the project.

Seven of the eight teachers implemented the plan, though with varying degrees of success and breath. The exception was fourth class (nine/ten year olds) which was taught by a number of substitute teachers during the year and the inconsistent contributions from these different class teachers made it difficult to track progress and implementation.

Findings

Cluster one: process

- 1) Overview: There was unanimous endorsement and welcome for the human rights education processes in the school, by both the teachers and the pupils.
- 2) Attitudes: Teachers felt that the attitudes the process cultivated, and will cultivate through continuous reflective interaction with others, equip the children to better live in a changing, more intercultural, more diverse, and more challenging society in Ireland and the world.
- 3) Relationships: All teachers reported that cooperation, and understanding appeared to improve between the children in their classes, with increased evidence of interest in relationships and communication.
- 4) Openness: One teacher in particular observed that the processes created a more open environment where the children could talk about concerns such as bullying or fighting, and it also opened up a space where the children spoke about their feelings more.
- 5) Atmosphere: While a small number of teachers went so far as to say that the human rights education programme brought nothing new to the school curriculum, it was noted by the majority that the framework, structure, and content of human rights education does provide a strong focus which lifts the visibility of the social skills programme in the school, and brings coherence to the processes involved.
- 6) Participation: Colleagues stressed the fact that the pupils genuinely enjoyed learning through participation. They eagerly anticipated the next human rights education sessions, and they were looking forward to the methodologies, more so perhaps than to the content.

7) Behaviour: The use of a rights based approach to classroom and school management appeared to result in positive trends regarding behaviour, interaction, and relations. Nearly all children consulted after the implementation phase felt that the human rights education programme had contributed to stemming bullying and unfair treatment in the school. On the other hand concerns emerged about a number of the active methodologies and the manner in which some children tended to dominate or misbehave.

8) Consequences: In a number of cases the open discussion brought the raw responses to the fore, and gave pupils an opportunity to engage with human reality to a point where it gave rise to certain stresses, ambiguities and challenges according to some teachers.

9) Knowledge. The children demonstrated that they had retained a lot of the information they had been taught, and in anecdotal comparisons across other subject areas this would be regarded as a better than the average level of retention by the staff.

Cluster two – methodologies

10) Methodologies: Teachers reported that the methodologies employed in the programme such as group work, debates and art work, were appealing to the children and contributed to the level of enthusiasm the children had for the programme.

11) Time: The methodological approach clearly placed additional demands on the teachers regarding time-management and the allocation of time, with a view that it could be too time consuming to engage in participative learning across the curriculum in the long term given the pressure on teachers to complete courses.

12) Preparation: While the lessons were self-contained for the most part, some background reading and related preparation was required, and teachers reported that they were unable to do this research to their satisfaction citing lack of resources or time.

There was a sense that the level of effort and energy required might not be sustainable over a longer period of time.

Cluster three - curriculum

13) Whole-school: The staff often commented on the similarity between elements of the process and the overlap of lesson content in other areas, perhaps not so much as a concern, but as a demonstration of how central participation and openness were to the school work plan already. In noting that the skills and attitudes in question must be cultivated through the school, teachers stressed that a whole-school approach was required but recorded how demanding this would be on staff.

14) Progression: A predictable weakness found in the pedagogical process was linked to the reality that none of the children, at any age, had learned in or of human rights previously, at least not in a coordinated and planned way. This posed problems as the older children had difficulties with the language and the understanding required to engage with age appropriate issues.

15) Integration: The integration of human rights with other subjects was thought to be beneficial in terms of reinforcing the concepts, and ensuring that the same value system permeated across the curriculum, but again the difficulties were highlighted by teachers.

16) Appropriateness: The appropriateness of the content to the younger children was remarked upon positively, which contradicts a view often held by adults that the content of human rights education might be too difficult for younger children (Brown, 1996).

Cluster four – training and support

17) Pre-service training: When asked specifically about training in human rights education the staff felt that it should be a compulsory aspect of the Bachelor of

Education course, and highlighted the primary need for far more training in the use of facilitation techniques such as group work within the constraints of normal classrooms (for example; space, pupil/teacher ratio, poor resources, and limited time).

18) Ongoing training: Teachers pointed out that the approaches and techniques required demand a degree of motivation, and energy, and accordingly suggested in-service support as one tool that would be necessary.

19) Evaluation: The contributors highlighted the need for a reflective ongoing analysis and review as part of the process. The learning, listening, experiential process challenges the current school culture and requires a whole-school approach to evaluation which should be supported by training.

20) Resources: The level of knowledge required to support the learning process demands that resources, including teaching manuals, information materials, and CD ROMs, be available to the teachers and the pupils.

21) Research challenge: Despite the positive reflections of teaching colleagues, at a deeper level the epistemological analysis was problematic for the teachers. Establishing or mapping the knowledge base which was part of the human rights education programme, and assessing the process whereby the consideration of this information resulted in increased understanding and attitudinal change to a point where it influenced the children's behaviour is complex. Additional research is required in this area to support classroom level implementation.

Recommendations

School level

1. The action research pilot project has shown that the human rights education process has had a positive impact on the school, and more particularly on the pupils, including on the way children think, and behave, and accordingly it should be fully incorporated as part of the formal school plan for the future. The democratic dialogue with pupils instigated as part of the process is taking hold within the school, but will need to be nurtured and promoted by all if it is to have long-term impact on the way pupils learn, and the attitudes they form.

2. The whole-school democratic approach to integrated participative learning, involving the entire management, and teaching staff, and based on agreed school policies and plans, will need continued and ongoing investment of time and energy at staff meetings, school planning days, board meetings, and in the classroom if it is to become embedded as part of the school culture.

3. School provision of basic support mechanisms including training, peer-to-peer support, availability of resources, and information technology should be progressively developed for, with and by the teaching staff.

4. More elaborate monitory and reflective approaches will need to be developed to evaluate and record experience, and build on past practice to ensure that a progressive learning environment exists.

National level

5. The evidence presented on the challenges facing Ireland at a societal level highlights the responsibility on the school system to provide a learning environment which

stimulates active and positive citizenship. The pilot project provides evidence that a human rights school can thrive in the context of current Irish national curricula, and government policy. The Department of Education and Science, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, and schools should seek to promote and encourage decision-making at school level to embark on a participative approach to learning.

6. The Department of Education and Science, the teacher training colleges, and education centres, have a obligation to bridge the identified gap in the provision of training and support (in-service and pre-service) for teachers seeking to promote participative learning, including in the areas of methodologies, classroom management techniques, planning and evaluation.

7. A dedicated human rights education unit to provide leadership, support and backing for schools and teachers, including policy guidance, resources and practical direction, should be provided by the Department of Education and Science, regarding such issues as school management, integrated implementation of the revised curriculum, whole-school approaches, and time allocation, if teachers are to feel empowered to fully embrace participative and holistic learning approaches.

8. There is little academic research capacity in the area of human rights education in Ireland, and the Department of Education and Science together with academic institutions should seek to develop and resource research programmes in this area as a matter of importance.

C) Implications of these recommendations internationally

9. The curriculum review process in Ireland which involves all school stakeholders and is consultative and inclusive in nature has resulted in curricula which allow a human rights culture to emerge in schools and should be studied by human rights educators in other countries.

10. The post-conflict, rapidly changing, social dynamic in Ireland has created a culture of change which runs through all aspects of society including the education system, and provides researchers with an extremely interesting case study on the impact of rapid social change on schooling, and the demands placed on educators for researchers internationally.

11. The emergence of human rights education as one tool to promote active citizenship in response to this change has been stimulated by work done in other countries, particular the UK and the emerging programmes in Ireland should similarly inform human rights education elsewhere.

Citizenship Education in the Republic of Ireland

**in: A. Osler (ed.) Teachers, human rights and diversity:
educating citizens in multicultural societies (2004)**

Colm Ó Cuanacháin

Context

Ireland, at the beginning of the twenty first century, is experiencing a period of considerable change and some uncertainties. The economy is booming, with an average annual growth in Gross National Product of 9.3 per cent over the last decade. Unemployment has fallen from 17.4 per cent in 1986 to 3.9 per cent at the end of 2000. The peace process continues to grind along a slow but steady path. Yet Irish society is facing real challenges, and life for many feels less satisfying. Arguably, it is citizenship, and the values that underpin it, that are in crisis. As Ireland emerges from its recent history of deep and lingering sectarianism, the country faces growing challenges relating to racism, crime, and social exclusion. Economic growth coexists with social and civic decline, as Ireland and its people slide backwards across a range of key social indicators. The development of racist attitudes and behaviour are indicative of the problems facing Irish society.

Ireland's recent economic success is associated with an unsurprising yet unprecedented change in social demographics. The numbers of migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees settling in Ireland continue to grow. By 2003 there were 277,600 foreign born people resident in Ireland of whom 118,700 or 3 per cent of the total population, were born outside the European Union (EU) (Central Statistics Office, 2003). This represents a marked increase over previous years. At the same time, racism is gaining strength. The Equality Authority reported that in 2003 race discrimination overtook gender

discrimination in the number of cases instigated under the Employment Equality Act 1998; one third of all cases cited race-related grounds (Crowley, 2003). 62 per cent of young people (15-24 years) believe that the Irish are becoming more racist (Irish Times/MRBI, 2003). Institutional racism is also a problem: a judge, speaking in a district court in February 2003, warned that 'coloured' people may soon be banned from shopping centres as a consequence of shoplifting incidents (NCCRI, 2003: 4). When people from ethnic minorities living in Ireland were asked about their experiences, 80 per cent believed racism to be a serious problem. Nine out of ten black people questioned said they had experienced racism (FAQ, 2001).

Racism is not a new phenomenon in Ireland. The appalling treatment of Travellers is sad testimony to that fact (O'Connell, 2002). Central to debates on discrimination and the promotion of citizenship in Ireland are nationalism and the festering legacy of sectarianism that has been linked to it for over 400 years of Irish history:

Irish nationalism has meant the hegemony of a Catholic, 'white', sedentary collectivity over both state and society, without reference to the truly multi-ethnic nature of Irish society (Lentin, 2002: 163).

However, the rise in racism is but one dimension to the developing social chasm. The gap between the richest and the poorest citizens in Ireland is now the biggest of any EU country (SVP, 2003). During the course of the recent economic boom, levels of relative poverty actually increased. In 1994, 17.4 per cent of the population were living on less than half the average income. This had risen to 20.9 per cent by the year 2000 (O'Toole, 2003: 63). In 1999, 5,234 persons were recorded as homeless, twice as many as in 1996 (Simon Community, 2003). Serious crime increased by 23 per cent in 2002 alone (Garda, 2003: 86).

There are tensions across economic, social, cultural, civil and political life that make it difficult for the country as a whole to reap the full social rewards from the recent boom.

The clear challenge is to ensure that that people can embrace economic development in a framework informed by justice, peace, equality, non-discrimination and inclusion. Education is central in ensuring such a framework for citizenship. While much progress has been made in the areas of policy and curricula, training and resources also need to be made available so that teachers are able to implement policies in the classroom.

Policy

The Irish education system is undergoing its most significant review in 150 years. Over the past decade the Department of Education and Science (DES) has led in a series of innovations, including a National Convention on Education 1993, the 1995 White Paper *Charting Our Education Future*, the Education Act 1998 and revised curricula across all levels. Elements of education for citizenship permeate the new-look education system. *Charting our Educational Future* sets out the government's obligations to promote and protect fundamental human rights (Government of Ireland, 1995: 3-4). The Education Act 1998 placed democratic school systems and structures on a statutory footing for the first time. It requires school boards to provide 'information to students and student councils' about school matters (Government of Ireland, 1998a: 26). The participative and shared approach to learning implicit in any citizenship education programme is now underpinned in law. The revised primary school curriculum lists a set of issues identified through review processes, including 'pluralism, respect for diversity and the importance of tolerance'. It highlights 'the function of the curriculum in contributing to equality and fairness of access to education' (Government of Ireland, 1999a: 9). These examples indicate how citizenship studies based on human rights principles are now recognised as a fundamental aspect of Irish education.

Although the educational policy framework aims to promote citizenship, it is important to remember that discrimination is often so pervasive, historically reinforced and commonplace that even those experiencing it may not be fully aware of how it operates (Taran and Gachter, 2003). An education system that seeks to promote active citizenship needs to be located within a broader society that welcomes positive and participative

citizenship. Currently, there is no integrated government educational or social policy framework on citizenship. The limited initiatives relating to ethnic minorities, antiracism and discrimination are generally uncoordinated. The resultant contradictions and inadequacies are stark and are to be found across all policy areas. So, for example, there is, as yet, no official acknowledgement of institutional racism. Policies to tackle institutional racism in education and to encourage recruitment of teachers from ethnic minority communities are urgently needed. Schools need guidelines and procedures to support them in responding to diversity, for example, in the appointment of language assistants for children whose native tongue is not English. The government has accepted that the current law is inadequate in addressing racially motivated crime, but there is no system for reporting and recording such crimes, and further legislation is needed. These examples highlight some of the gaps that need to be addressed in the development of a comprehensive policy framework to promote and foster active citizenship in Ireland.

Curriculum

The primary (4-12 years) and post primary junior cycle (12-15 years) curricula have been revised considerably over recent years, while the post primary senior cycle (15-18 years) programme is being revamped at the time of writing. This review has been stewarded by the governmental National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). The NCCA curriculum reform processes and outputs have been very encouraging for educators dedicated to participative learning and citizenship studies. The NCCA chief executive, Dr Anne Looney, clearly understands the importance of human rights education:

[T]he stratification of knowledge within the curriculum creates abstractions and compartmentalisation which inevitably favour certain sectors of the population. Add to this an assessment system which supports this stratification of knowledge, and curriculum becomes not a site for human rights education but a source of human rights concern. Equality is not possible when knowledge is this stratified (Looney, 2000: 20).

The NCCA has consistently sought to design curricula through comprehensive, in-depth consultation processes with stakeholders, generating content that is integrated and a holistic structure where the methodological, management and structural dimensions to schooling are interdependent. Lister (1984) has informed an approach to education *in, for and through* rights that has found its way into some aspects of the revised Irish curricula. This approach has been developed in 'about-through-for' dimensions to citizenship education (Davies, 2000: 10). Any Irish educator seeking to implement this approach in the classroom would find ample scope in the current curricula.

Primary (Age 4 - 12)

The revised primary school curriculum includes a specific aim 'to enable children to develop a respect for cultural difference, an appreciation of civic responsibility, and an understanding of the social dimension of life, past and present' (Government of Ireland, 1999a: 34). The revised curriculum includes Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) as the core subject area through which citizenship is to be driven in the primary school. SPHE provides opportunities to help the child become 'an active and responsible citizen' through a 'framework of values, attitudes, understanding and skills' (Government of Ireland, 1999b: 2). It includes a unit where children 'learn about individual and group rights and responsibilities, particularly in the context of their school and local community' (Government of Ireland, 1999b: 17).

The revised curriculum was introduced on a phased basis, and SPHE came on stream in 2003/2004. The syllabus envisages that children will experience SPHE through a positive school climate. The SPHE curriculum fosters in children respect for their own dignity and that of others and promotes a healthy lifestyle and a commitment to the democratic process (NCCA, 1998: 7). Teachers involved in the Curriculum Committee that drafted the SPHE programme characterised it as follows:

SPHE is concerned with a number of interrelated human qualities... These qualities are life-enhancing, prosocial, promote a healthy lifestyle, are respectful of human dignity and diversity and foster the democratic way of life. As children develop these qualities they are given a foundation of values, attitudes, skills and understandings about themselves, other people and the society in which they live (Kavanagh and Sheils, 1997: 71).

Post-Primary Junior Cycle (Age 12- 15)

The DES introduced a new course to the junior cycle of secondary schools in September 1996 following a nationwide pilot project. The course, entitled Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), 'is a course in citizenship, based on human rights and social responsibilities [that] aims to develop active citizens' (Government of Ireland, 1998b: 5). Its aim is 'to enable and empower students to become participative, aware and responsible citizens' (CDU, 2002: 5).

The programme covers four units: the individual and citizenship; the community; the State – Ireland; and Ireland and the World. It is envisaged that teachers will adopt a thematic approach to the subject and exploring specific e given themes, including human rights, across all of the units:

Within these broadly defined units teachers have much scope and flexibility to select and deal with specific issues such as gender equity, racism, interculturalism, work and unemployment, poverty, homelessness and the environment (Osler and Vincent 2002: 84).

CSPE is assessed at the end of a three-year study programme on the basis of a written exam (40 per cent) and an action project (60 per cent). The projects are based on participation in some form of civic, social or political actions at school or community level (Hammond et al, 2001 : 5).

Having completed the Junior Certificate Examination, post-primary students generally move on to the Transition Year (TY), which is a programme that is activity based and aimed at developing life-skills through use of very different methodologies and curriculum content. TY is seen as an opportunity to reinforce and build upon the main aim of CSPE, to develop active and participatory citizenship in pupils with regard to human rights and social responsibilities. Social justice in action is a central element to the TY programme. Students can opt to work in the local community with a social justice project. Alternatively, the programme can involve a yearlong programme of events, talks, and projects on social justice and citizenship.

Post-Primary Senior Cycle (Age 15-18)

The current leaving certificate curriculum includes citizenship education across a number of subject areas. For example, in the recently launched Home Economics, Social and Scientific syllabus, there are strong elements of citizenship studies, with themes on home, family, environment, and global studies presented in an interdependent framework (Government of Ireland 2001). Unfortunately, there is no coordination or other attempt at coherence between various subjects.

A number of contributors, notably the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU), is making a strong case for a continuation of a dedicated syllabus on citizenship from junior cycle into the senior cycle (CDU 2000; Hammond, 2002; Ward, 2002). Significantly, the NCCA set out the directions for development of the senior cycle based on feedback received during the consultation process. In addition to envisioning a future where school management, organisation, and school/community linking is more participative and conducive to citizenship learning, the NCCA anticipates 'short courses in politics and society, media studies, social, personal and health education, and European and global studies' will be part of the programme (NCCA, 2003: 6).

Disappointingly, the comprehensive consultations conducted as part of curriculum review have not generated educational policies or strategies that are inclusive of new

ethnic minorities in Ireland. While this unsatisfactory situation is not unique to Ireland (Osler and Starkey, 2001a) the opportunity now exists within the revised senior cycle curricula to redress this.

Teacher Training

Citizenship education is not a formal or compulsory element of pre-service teacher training at either primary or post-primary level. The Equality Authority (2003: 11-12) outlines the challenges facing Irish schools, including the accommodation of diversity and in helping children develop ideas and values. It also stresses the role of schools in helping students to understand the causes of inequality and empowering them to challenge these inequalities. The National Action Plan Against Racism Steering Group (2003) identified the need to build an intercultural and antiracism dimension to education and training policy in Ireland. It identified this area of education as a priority for the government, advocating a whole school approach to include school management, policies, planning and evaluation. Lack of training in intercultural and antiracism education was also highlighted as a concern by the Irish National Teacher's Organisation (INTO, 1998: 24, 35-37).

In its First National Report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Irish Government is silent on the preparation of teachers in antiracism and interculturalism. In fact, the only reference to teacher training is a general statement reporting that at primary level 'the new curricula are supported by in-service training, teacher guidelines, and full-time staff development teams' (Government of Ireland: 2004: 161).

Primary Level

In-service training in SPHE is supported by a team of ten trainers. The trainers are available to schools across the country and their role is to provide training and mentoring services for over 20,000 teachers across some 3,200 primary schools. This

team are responsible for supporting the entire SPHE programme, and not just citizenship. This level of support is inadequate, particularly as this is a new subject and therefore a new demand on teachers. The introduction of the new SPHE curriculum to all schools from 2003 means that the teacher training colleges will now provide pre-service citizenship studies training. Additionally, the Development and Intercultural Education (DICE) project, launched in 2003, aims to incorporate development and intercultural education into primary initial teacher training. The DES facilitates a programme of optional summer in-service courses at both primary and post-primary levels, which are usually organised by independent trainers or organisations and include courses in citizenship studies.

Post-primary Level

Post-primary teachers receive pre-service training through the Higher Diploma in Education, offered in a number of Irish universities. In response to the introduction of the CSPE and TY programmes at post-primary level, these courses now include basic elective modules in citizenship studies.

The DES established the Second Level Support Service (SLSS) to oversee staff development and curriculum innovation at post-primary level. SLSS provides support for both the TY and CSPE programmes. As at primary level there are serious concerns about the lack of resources for in-service training at post-primary level (Drudy and Coolahan, 2002). This has implications for all subjects and is particularly acute at a time when new curricula are being introduced.

Lack of commitment to citizenship studies training is also found in programmes that fall outside the remit of the DES. The Irish Government has cut the financial allocation to a number of key State bodies working to promote citizenship, in areas such as antiracism education and equality. Resources for the Government's antiracism awareness campaigning body, Know Racism, were cut by 63 per cent in 2003 and a further 76 per

cent in 2004. Similarly, the Equality Authority experienced a 5 per cent budget cut in 2003 and a further 2.5 per cent in 2004 (Coulter, 2003).

The Irish Human Rights Commission has observed that:

much excellent work in teaching tolerance and inclusivity is being done in schools, but more funding is needed. Given the gravity and urgency of the issue, a major effort needs to be put in to mainstreaming human rights and anti-racist education and awareness training in all schools and third level colleges through a broad range of subjects right across the curriculum (HRC, 2002: 15).

Resources

While the DES has succeeded in framing a policy and curriculum base that provides for citizenship studies, the lack of training, support and resources appears to be restricting the emergence of best practice and energetic implementation at classroom level. Teachers' organisations and professional bodies are, nevertheless, spearheading a number of successful classroom initiatives. Of course these programmes would not be happening at all but for the solid educational context provided by DES, but much more would be achieved if government invested as much in practice as it has in policy. This lacuna is particularly acute in the area of classroom resources.

The *Intercultural Guidelines for Schools*, produced by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO, 2002) and distributed to all primary schools, are a good example of the positive contribution of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in developing resources. The guidelines set out a robust and holistic framework for a whole-school approach to interculturalism and citizenship in Irish primary schools. They cover every aspect of school life from enrolment policy to inclusive strategies for parents, from whole-school approaches to a sample school charter.

Some other good examples of resources produced by NGOs with and for teachers include:

- The *World in the Classroom* (Ruane *et al.*, 1999) and *80:20 - development in an unequal world* (80 : 20, 2002).
- *Lift Off* (Cross Border Human Rights Education Initiative, 2003) a human rights education resource for primary schools, based on a cross-border initiative that was piloted in twenty schools and which is being introduced to all primary schools across Ireland, north and south.
- the widely used *All Different All Equal* (DEFY, 1994) an anti-racism education resource and *An Activity Pack for Schools and Youth Workers* (NCCRI, 2001), a short and basic manual on antiracism education.
- The *Citizenship Development Programme* is a module delivered in TY in the Republic of Ireland and in Year 13 in Northern Ireland. It is linked to the *Human Rights, Conflict and Dialogue Programme*, which offers post-primary senior cycle students in participating schools the opportunity to explore human rights themes. Both projects are coordinated by St Angela's College of Education, as part of their Transform Conflict initiative.

These resources have common features including the use of inclusive and participative methodologies, whole-school approaches, and a child-centred structure, all of which are critical to citizenship education.

The dearth of government funding in this area is undermining the piloting, development and provision of high-quality teaching resources for use in schools. At least four significant organisations working to provide training and resources for teachers in aspects of citizenship studies have closed over the past two years due to funding constraints.

Citizenship education also needs to be advanced through non-formal channels. Indeed it is critical that young adults excluded from school and already feeling a sense of

marginalisation, be given the opportunities to develop the skills and attitudes required for active citizenship. One World Week (or Global Education Week as it known in a number of European countries) is celebrated annually in Ireland with the production of educational packs on global issues that are circulated to youth groups and non-formal educational organisations and networks. The programme is promoted by an advisory group, a network of partners, and a training programme. In 2003, for example, the theme related to conflict and sought to promote 'a knowledge of and respect for human dignity, with its associated rights and duties' (Sheehan, 2003).

Gaelscoil: a case study

A number of individual teachers and some schools are emerging as examples of best practice in citizenship studies. One such initiative is in *Gaelscoil*, a multi-denominational, co-educational primary school located in the suburbs of a large urban centre (Ruane, *et al.*, 1999). The Irish curricula are devised in a manner that affords schools a wide degree of autonomy in terms of the education programme they implement, working within the broad DES framework. Taking advantage of this, the school decided to specialise in human rights education. A policy and programme on human rights education were developed following consultative processes involving the staff, the board of management, and children. Implementation began during 1999/2000 as part of an action research project conducted by this author. The project, which was monitored, recorded and evaluated as part of the action research process, sought to enable a learning environment in which children would experience human rights and active citizenship first hand: 'For young people to learn about human rights they must experience them and believe in them, as well as know about them' (Osler and Starkey, 1996 : 85).

The human rights education policy generated by the school community identified education for active citizenship as a central aspect of the school ethos. Once devised, the policy was formally included in the school plan, a document required under the Education Act 1998 that sets out the school's policies, structures, procedures, and

curriculum. The policy was implemented through a human rights education programme, which was developed specifically for the school with input from the teaching staff and other stakeholders. The programme sought to promote the knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to equip the children to become active, informed and caring citizens. It was an integrated whole school initiative that was taught in all classes and included a number of cross-curricular units and multi-class modules.

Relevant themes and lesson plans for each class were devised in discussion with the class teacher. The content was appropriate to each age level, and was integrated as part of the broader work undertaken in each class. An emphasis was placed on the use of participative methodologies throughout. Steps were taken to organise and manage the school in a human rights framework where discipline, school organisation, relationships, and learning take place in a shared democratic environment. Examples of these mechanisms, which were part of the action-research project, included school assemblies, class contracts, a school declaration, a school court and a school council. Aspects of development education, peace education, citizenship studies, education for democracy, and conflict resolution were all intertwined in the programme and taught within a human rights framework.

A number of obstacles had to be overcome before the action-research project could be implemented. For example, the lack of training available to teachers (pre-service or in-service) had to be addressed through the provision of an elaborate set of teachers' resources and regular staff discussions. This ran deeper than training in content as methodologies and evaluation techniques also had to be explored with the staff. The initiative required all involved to commit a significant investment of time, particularly in the start-up phase. To be truly experiential the programme had to work at and beyond classroom level, but this proved difficult in practice as coordinating activities with different classes and groupings is not something that school structures are easily equipped to deal with, or used to in practice.

The project was evaluated through interviews, diaries from the teachers, and a longitudinal survey with the children. There was unanimous endorsement and welcome for the human rights education processes introduced to the school, by both the teachers and the pupils. Everybody who contributed to the action research reported that the processes had a positive impact. Teachers felt that the attitudes the process cultivated, and will cultivate through continuous reflective interaction with others, will enable the children to better live in a changing, more intercultural, more diverse, and more challenging society in Ireland and the world. All teachers reported that cooperation and understanding appeared to improve between the children and their classmates, with increased evidence of interest in relationships and communication.

The children said that they enjoyed learning through participation. They eagerly anticipated the next human rights education sessions. They felt that the approaches they had experienced had helped them to see life from a broader perspective, and that it had changed the way they think about certain things. For example, nearly all children consulted after the implementation phase felt that the human rights education programme had contributed to stemming bullying and unfair treatment in the school. They felt that they knew more about others and understood better the problems faced by other people. Comments included a view that the programme helped the children to think about the world in a way that they had not in the past.

The research also reflected the difficulties that the staff experienced in developing, launching and implementing this new pedagogical, structural and curriculum approach. The training, the time, and the cultural difficulties were evident throughout and not all teachers reported on implementation with equal levels of satisfaction or success. For example, it was agreed that a school court would be established as one of the mechanisms used to promote the participation of children in the workings of the school, by allowing them to organise their own court every Friday afternoon to adjudicate on some of the transgressions of the code of conduct by peers. The aim was for an increased awareness and understanding of the impact of misbehaviour on victims arising from the

debate and consideration of their plight. The children would, it was hoped, develop an increased sense of responsibility associated with being part of the justice system. However, plans to establish the court proved too ambitious. As one teacher explained:

The main problem was the amount of time needed. We didn't think through the whole-school dimension enough. It has implications that we weren't ready for. The school court is a wonderful concept, but it is an entire project in itself to get it up and running, accepted and understood, by teachers and by the children.

The project demonstrates that a human rights school can thrive in the context of current Irish national curricula and government policy. The integrated approach adopted in the school for the action research project worked, and can work in other schools. However, steps should be taken to bridge the identified gap in the provision of training and support (in-service and pre-service) for teachers seeking to promote participative learning, including in the areas of methodologies, classroom management techniques, planning and evaluation. Additional leadership, support and backing for schools and teachers, including policy guidance, resources and practical direction, need to be provided by the DES. This should include areas such as school management, integrated implementation of the revised curriculum, whole-school approaches and time allocation. Such support is critical if teachers are to feel empowered to fully embrace participative and holistic approaches.

Conclusion

In a recent study conducted for the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs the youngest age group surveyed (12-24 years) professed to know the least about developing countries. On the other hand, 63 per cent indicated their willingness to learn more about these countries and peoples (Cremin, 2002: 27). What is interesting is the fact that the survey took place six years after the full introduction in Ireland of what is widely regarded as a good curriculum for citizenship studies aimed precisely at the age group surveyed. While the curriculum appears, at face-value, to be strong on citizenship, human rights

and development, it appears that it may not be having an impact in practice. One message that we must take from this is that the curriculum is not enough. If active citizenship is to thrive it will require more than a set of subjects framed to provide opportunities for teachers to explore citizenship. It will require training, resources, structural reforms at school level, and a more committed approach to citizenship studies from educators and society as a whole. In this way the tide of negative social trends in Ireland can be turned.

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