



Humanising Rights and Responsibilities Series: I'm
Ok, You're Ok and That's Ok
Interculturalism, Equality and Religious Diversity in Irish
Education: Starting an Important Discussion



This conference was hosted by Clare Intercultural Network and had inputs from the Equality Authority, University of Limerick and Mary Immaculate Collage.



December 10th2010

Starting an Important Discussion

1. Introduction

Since 2004 Clare Intercultural Network (CIN) has been involved in activities that support its vision for a world where we all are accepted and can interact and connect with one another positively and peacefully.

CIN, through its development education activities (IDEC) aims to create opportunities and to participate in initiatives for intercultural awareness, interculturalism and integration among communities in Ireland.

The *Humanising Rights and Responsibilities Series* is one such initiative. As part of this initiative CIN organised a conference for Human Rights Day 2010, **'I'm Ok, You're OK and That's OK'**, to broaden the discussion on the intersection between religion and diversity, interculturalism and equality in the Irish education. This report captures the essence of the discussion which took place. The **'I'm Ok, You're OK and That's OK'** conference in 2011 aims to build on this discussion with a view to contributing to:

- a) The debate about how the education curriculum can support young people to understand and value diversity, interculturalism, equality and religion in Irish Schools.
- b) A growing body of research on Article 29 of Children's Human Rights Convention.

CIN's approach is to create a space that maximises meaningful participation and interaction so that all perspectives are listened to respectfully. This includes engaging with communities of interests across all sectors, faith groups and non-faith groups, locally and nationally. Of particular relevance to this *Human Rights and Responsibilities Series* are the voices of young people and the different experiences of the education system.

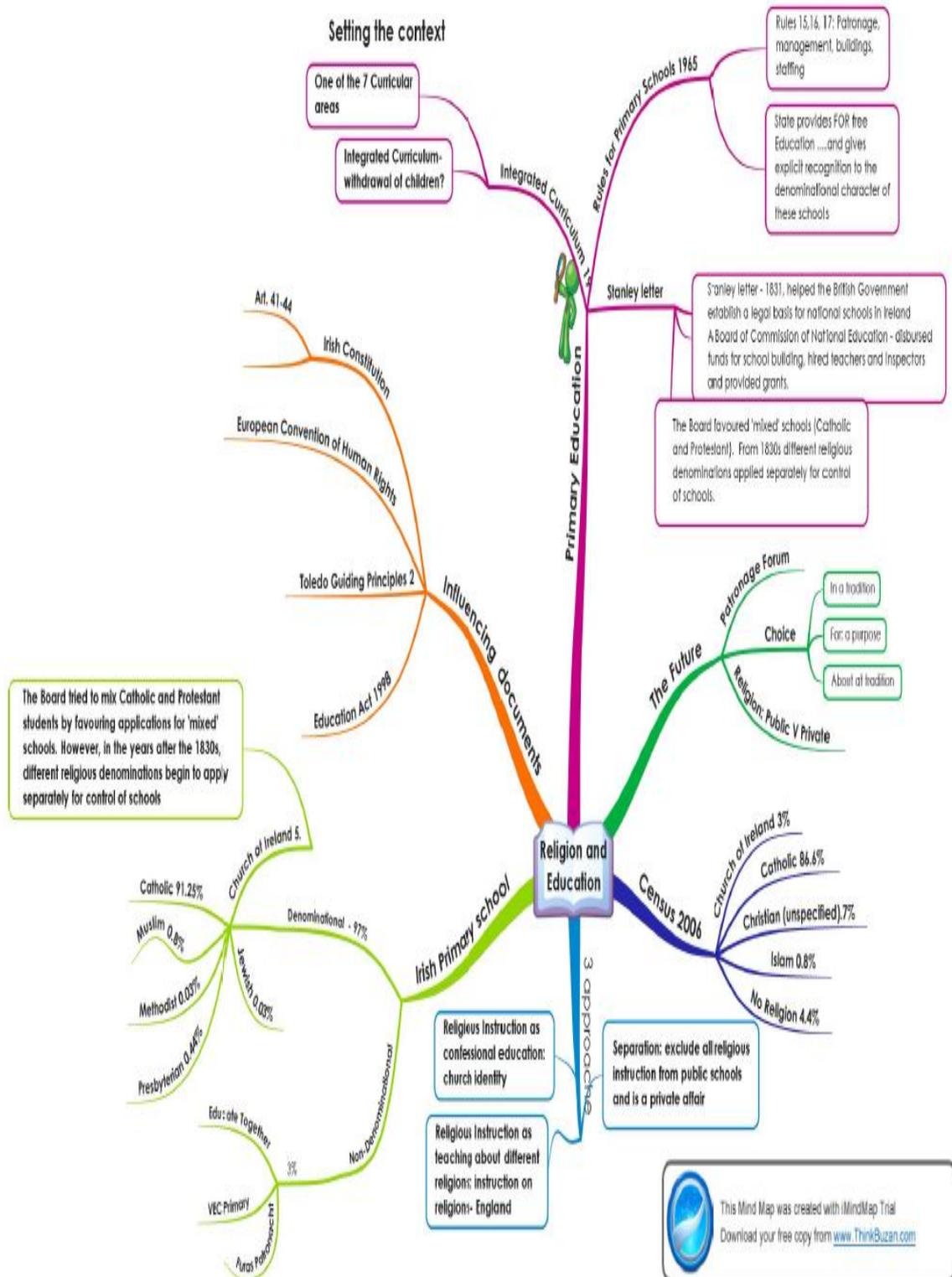
Part 1 of this report pulls together the inputs made at the **'I'm Ok, You're OK and That's OK'** conference in 2010. It also highlights the important questions which were identified through discussion on the day which inform the design and content for the planned 2011 **I'm Ok, You're OK and That's OK' Listening to Young People's Voices** conference.

Setting the Scene: Religion and Education

Maurice Horan: Mary Immaculate Collage

Maurice set out the context for education in Ireland, its historical and legal basis, the documents and rules that have influenced the development of education, the

three main approaches practiced in Primary schools and the present makeup school populations:
 See below for clearer Diagram of setting the context:



This Mind Map was created with iMindMap Trial
 Download your free copy from www.ThinkBuzan.com

permitted. Three of the nine grounds have a particular relevance to intercultural work:

- Race
- Religion
- Membership of the Traveller community

A core concept applied by the Equality Authority in relation to education is that of the 'inclusive school'. It is defined as having three objectives:

- Positive experiences and outcomes across all nine grounds
- A sense of ownership and belonging for all students and teachers
- Recognises, accommodates and values diverse identities across all nine grounds

The Education Act says that the school plan must state:

- – the objectives of the school relating to equality
- – The measures it will take to achieve those objectives.

A school development plan for an inclusive school will ensure that the school does not discriminate in enrolment, that the school celebrates and recognises those of all faiths and none in both school ceremonies and teaching.

The Equality Impact of Stereotyping

Deirdre Toomey: The Equality Authority

Understanding and challenging the impact of stereotyping has a role to play in supporting interculturalism, equality and religious diversity in Irish Education. Stereotypes are over-simplified generalisations which are often based on assumptions and inaccurate information. They are also often based on only one aspect of a person's or a group's identity such as their religion or ethnic background. The complex diversity which makes up individual and group identity is ignored.

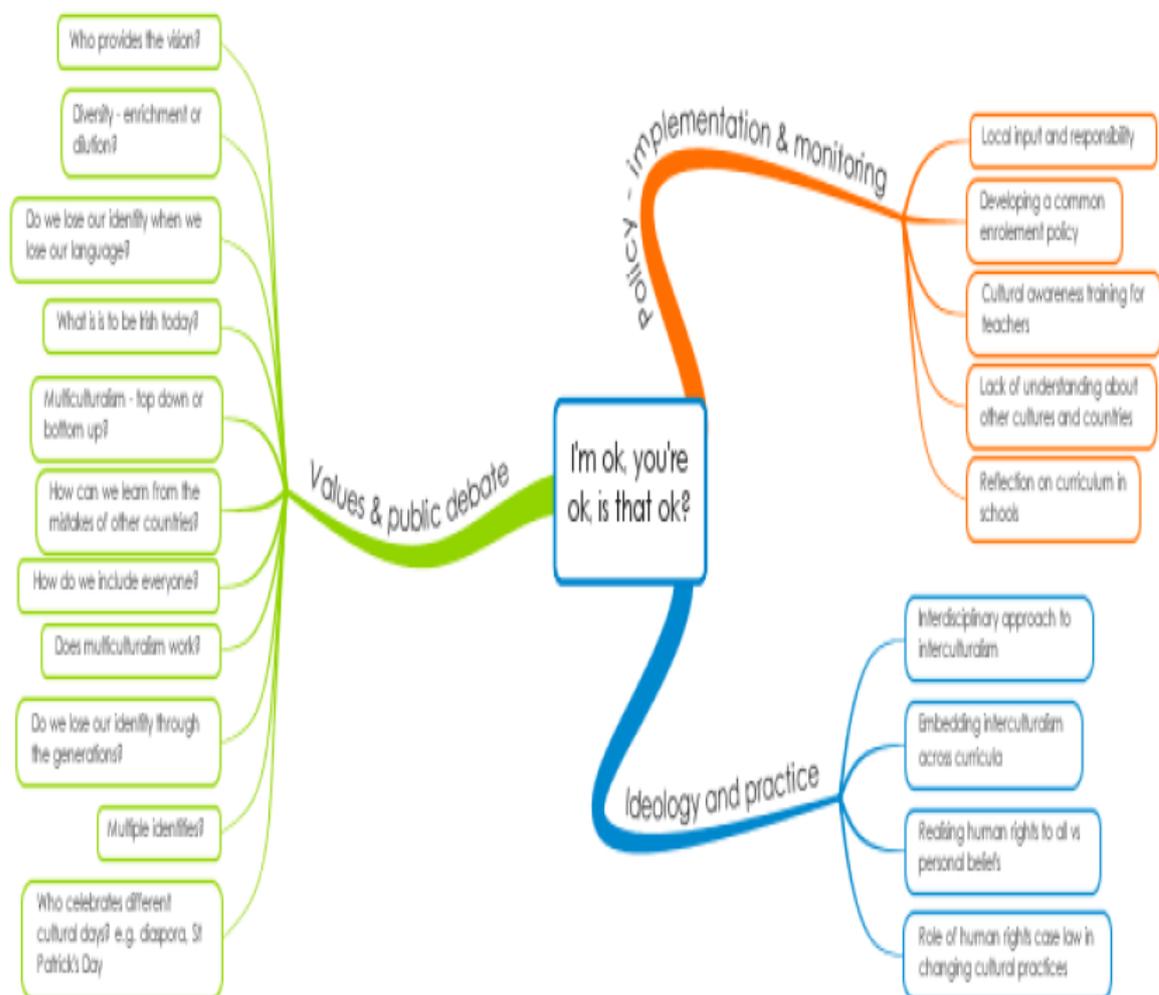
Stereotyping informs our ideas and beliefs and works to justify our prejudices, which in turn influences our behaviour. It enhances our view of ourselves and the group we belong to and excludes those who we see as outside our group. Stereotypes can support key structures in society to be maintained without constructive questioning, including our economic structures, our education structures, our decision making structures and our cultural values. It can inform the ethos, policies, procedures and practices of organisations and institutions.

The impact of stereotyping on individuals and groups is that it can result in lack of status or lack of recognition within society. Stereotypes shape people's expectations of themselves and the social group to which they belong. Stereotypes also shape people's expectations of others and the social groups to which they belong. Therefore, stereotypes limit the development potential, opportunities and choices of individuals and groups in society. In certain circumstances stereotyping can lead to discrimination.

Education initiatives which work to challenge stereotyping include:

- *Spotlight on Stereotyping* – teaching resource for the Civil, Social and Political Education (CSPE) curriculum published by the Equality Authority and the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). The resource was developed and piloted in partnership with CSPE teachers, education experts and community and voluntary organisations. It is available on www.equality.ie and www.pdst.ie
- *Yellow Flag programme* - a national pilot project by the Irish Traveller Movement - provides a practical series of 8 steps that brings issues of interculturalism, equality and diversity into the whole-school programme and allows schools to apply them to the day to day running of the school. http://www.itmtrav.ie/keyissues/yellow_flag

World cafe discussion themes that emerged from 2010 conference

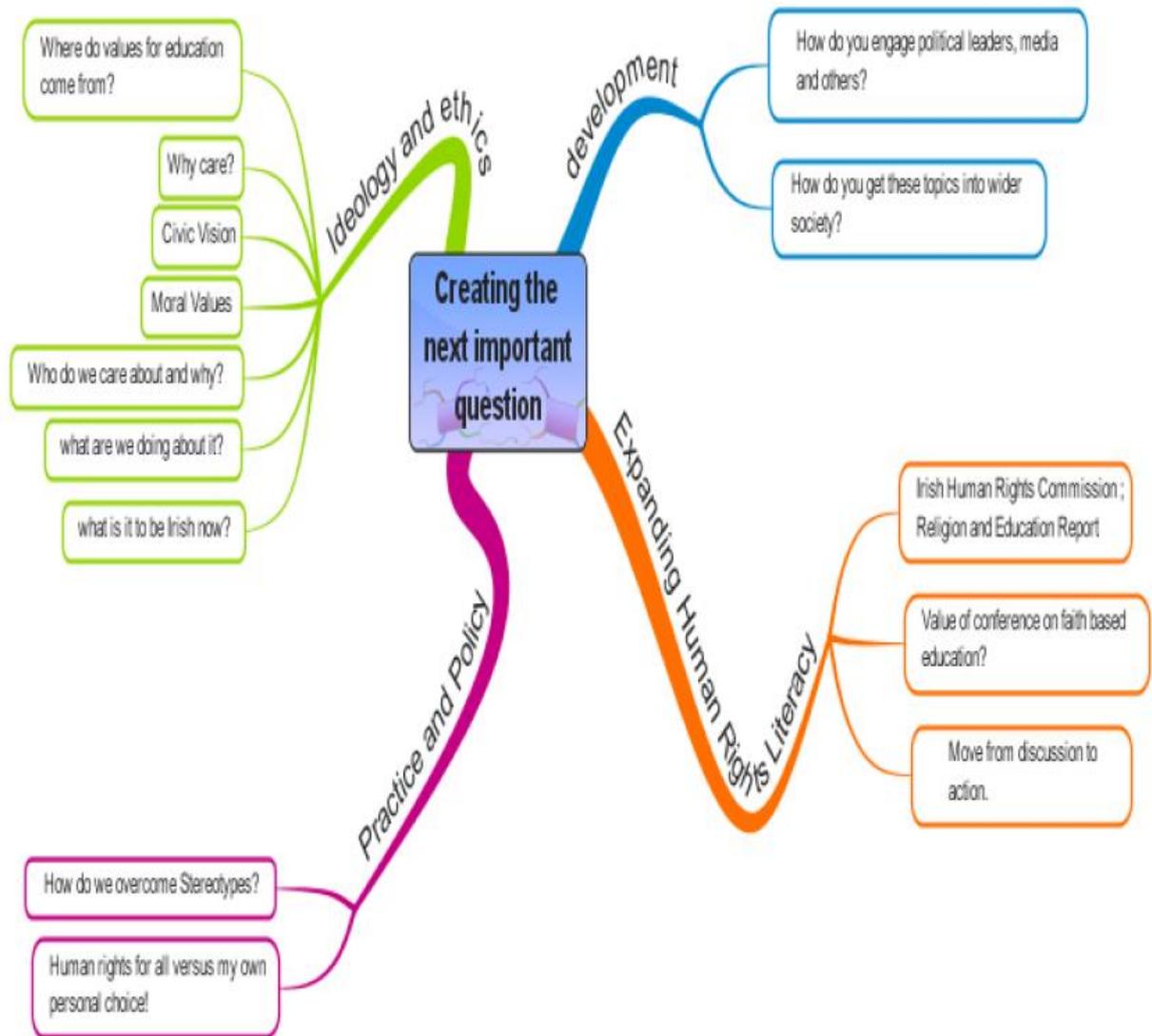


The World Cafe Discussion Mind-Map 1

The following Diagram represents what participants felt were the themes emerging from the discussion in addressing the question: – ‘I’m OK, you’re OK, is that OK?’

Creating the next important question’ –

The second Diagram, Mind map 2, represents what participants felt were the next important questions emerging from the discussion. ‘



Part 2: Conference December 2011

The conference will launch the research project – Listening to Young People’s Voices, Helping the Education systems to Value Diversity: Context setting will explore the place of equality, social and cultural values and gender, human rights and the right to a belief system.

Participants will advance the important conversation and discussion on exploring the intersection between interculturalism, equality, religious diversity and human rights in Irish education. Participants will also hear of some of the tools that are designed for diversity and education in practice.