



## Humanising Rights and Responsibilities Series: I'm OK, You're Ok and that's OK

2012 Conference

Living and Learning Diversity in the Irish Education System



Conference host, Clare Intercultural Network is made up of various agencies and individuals within the community. The agencies in partnership include; Ennis Community Development Project, the Clare Women's Network, Clarecare, Clare Immigrant Support, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick and the Equality Authority.



## Clare Intercultural Network

Clare Intercultural Network is a community based project based in Ennis, which works to assist and support people of all different nationalities and ethnicities including Irish people residing in County Clare. The aim of the network is to foster interculturalism and integration through training as well as social and cultural activities of importance. The vision of Clare Intercultural Network is:

***“A world where all are accepted and can interact and connect with one another positively and peacefully”***

## Intercultural Development Education Centre (IDEC)

The Intercultural Development Education Centre, otherwise IDEC-Ireland, was initiated in 2010 by the Clare Intercultural Network in collaboration with the University of Limerick, School of Education and Professional Studies and the Ubuntu Network. IDEC - Ireland explores areas of concern and interest on intercultural issues and development education.

Partners of IDEC are interchangeable depending on the area of work which it is exploring and involved in at any given time. For the purpose of this series the partners include Mary Immaculate College, the University of Limerick, the Equality Authority, the Clare Women’s Network, Ennis Community Development Project and Clarecare. Through discussion among the various partners and consultation with the broader community, it was agreed there was a need to explore issues of diversity within schools among young people in relation to religion, ethnicity, inclusion and a range of other critical areas of importance. It was envisioned the findings could inform and support the curriculum, policy development and inform the training and development of educators. It was agreed this could be highlighted through a public conference, due to the broadness of the many issues involved, it was considered to be more effective to run a series of conferences, this would also serve the dual purpose of keeping these critical issues being discussed publicly.

The principal aim of the series was to start a discussion with students and various stakeholders about diversity in education. The following article from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was central to this.

- Article 29(d) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that education will be directed to:

***The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin.***

### **Starting the Conversation**

Three years ago in 2010 the Intercultural Development Education Centre (IDEC) held the first in this series of conferences which was titled “Starting the Conversation”. At this conference the following was identified

- To carry out research in the Munster area to explore diversity, interculturalism and religious beliefs among students in post primary, secondary and third level institutions.
- **Insert other findings and recommendations here from Ronan and other speakers if necessary**

As an outcome of the 2010 conference, IDEC planned to carry out research with young people. IDEC worked throughout 2011 to develop and design the research. The design of the research was launched at the second conference in the series called “*Listening to the Voices of Young People*”, with a view to engaging with schools in the Munster Region throughout 2012.

The research was carried out by the University of Limerick and Mary Immaculate College, is the subject of this third conference entitled “*Living and Learning Diversity in the Irish Education System*” and will be presented to you today at the 2012 conference by, Dr Eimear Enright, Deirdre O’ Rourke Dr Orla McCormack and Maurice Harmon.

### **Living and Learning Diversity in the Irish Education System**

#### **Anne Loftus - Clarecare**

Anne Loftus of Clarecare and the Clare Intercultural Network welcomed everyone and introduced local poet, Martin Vernon to read a poem he had written about people’s

human rights. The poem is explicit in the light which it shines on the plight of those whose human rights are being unmet or violated at any given time in almost all parts of the world to some degree or another. Martin continued at interval throughout the day to read the thirty articles outlined in the International Declaration of Human Rights. Anne introduced the chairperson of Clare Intercultural Network Alphonse Basogomba to contextualise the lay out of the day.

### **Alphonse Basogomba -Coordinator of Clare Intercultural Network**

Alphonse welcomed everyone to the conference. He began by stating how important it was to be here, to hear the wide variety of interesting speakers and participate in the important discussions but also to collectively celebrate and mark International Human Rights Day.

International Human Rights Day which was first held on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December 1948, after the atrocities and suffering of people in World War 2. Although it is necessary to welcome the improvements which have been made, it is also critically important to monitor closely the violations which still take place today. It is enormously important to continue monitoring globally what happens in relation to people's universal rights, we must remain aware that violations of human rights are happening in our immediate surroundings. He emphasised the need to work individually, collectively, locally and globally by highlighting and discussing the issues of importance.

We were reminded that violations to people's human rights has implications for and affect each of us. This was illustrated by John F. Kennedy when he stated

***“The rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened.”***

International Human Rights Day was used as the backdrop to contextualise the day and the wide variety of presentations and discussions which we would be listening to and having throughout the day.

#### **Themes**

Human Rights

Human Rights Charter – Responsibilities and Obligations

How human rights charter and international human rights day was born from tragedy and atrocity and why it exists

The need to raise our awareness of the Human Rights Charter in order to recognise when a person's human rights are being violated

The importance of how they have been developed but the necessity to continuously monitor locally and globally

### **Hannah McGinley, PHD Student in NUIG**

Hannah spoke about teachers and Travellers in education. She shared with us the lived experience as a student, a teacher and coming from a disadvantaged background.

Hannah addressed extensively the exclusion that she has felt as a Traveller woman at important times of her life. Some of the experiences which Hannah highlighted included:

- People from the travelling community are not a homogenous group, all Travellers are different.
- Of not ever hearing anything positive being said about the Traveller community
- The absence of anyone addressing the fact that she was a member of the Traveller community and the confusion attached to this for her because she lived in what we term as a “settled” way. Hannah pointed out that describing Travellers as “settled” removes them from their identity.
- The lack of ability of members of the Traveller community to see the benefits of education and what it may have to offer.
- The realisation that negative attitudes towards Travellers are very real and was not her imagination as she had previously thought.
- There is a lack of support to access second level education for those in the Traveller community. There is a dependence on goodwill from key decision makers such as the school principle or good experiences with individual teachers.

*“I did not identify as a Traveller I had learned this was not in my best interest. I wanted to be a teacher. Although my English teacher inspired me, he told me that he did not believe Traveller children could be educated; I was devastated when I heard this and yet again had my fears reinstated. I was a newly qualified teacher, my brother was in the school. I did not want him to be identified as someone who was troublesome or it to be thought that this was a characteristic of being a Traveller. I decided to take a year out. I had been teaching Traveller children, they often asked me if I was a Traveller, they never waited for an answer because it was beyond their conception that a Traveller could be a teacher. I didn't ever pursue giving them an answer and so I was asking myself what message I was giving to them, was I reinforcing the conspiracy of silence.*

*After a year off, I decided to go on to do my masters, it was the first time I said publicly that I was a Traveller and I was so embarrassed and I wondered where my shame came*

*from I know that it did not come from home. To be honest if I could home-school my child, I would. Then I would be able to protect her and not to put her into the same environment which I had to experience; at home I could teach her to be proud of who she is. This seems like a terrible thing to say as an educator. It was only when a researcher came into the organisation I worked in and she asked me about my experiences growing up as a Traveller that I started to really think and examine this and look back over my life and what I had to overcome to gain access to an education. I began to think about never having anyone to play with as a child, being isolated. There were some families who allowed their children to play with us but mostly those who didn't".*

### **Themes**

Stereotyping

Exclusion

Shame

Difference/Other

Majority/Minority

Unspoken and often spoken messages of discouragement

Acceptance on part of those experiencing exclusion to be excluded

Lack of clear policy of acceptance of diversity (dependence on good will)

Lack of communication and addressing of issues

Conspiracy of silence – Collusion by not speaking out

### ***Discussion - Based on your personal experience are we living and learning diversity in the education system.***

The audience were invited to participate in a round table discussion based on their own personal experience and the presentation which Hannah had given. The following are the statements and feedback from the discussion.

### **Themes which came up in “World Café” discussions.**

#### **Diversity and how it is understood.**

- *Those tasked with delivering diversity awareness are not always the best person to do it. Black skin does not mean you have the skills or knowledge nor an educated Irish person knows how to explain being different to others.*

- *We are losing the chance to embrace diversity – cultures are separating to make own groupings*
- *Visible diversity would be less today, but invisible diversity still exists today*
- *Step by step people need to be willing to change*
- *Mutual regard for all*

### **Integration**

- *Educate children how to integrate with other students at schools, help them to integrate with other children.*
- *Self-integration is needed in the school*
- *The system lets people down if you are not one of the better students. You are looked down on if you leave school early because you don't fit in.*

### **Segregation**

- *Segregated education - all Travellers together is a bad experience.*
- *There are low expectations for Travellers in the segregated education system and a lack of dedication from teachers to give an education. The experience of being taught by the nuns could be very varied.*
- *The future for Traveller education should be access to a proper education*
- *It is important that all children participate in the education system and don't miss days.*
- *Feelings of separation, no education*
- *There is a feeling of missing out on education*
- *Loss of education*
- *Exclusion - not feeling wanted*
- *Embarrassed not to be able to read and write*
- *Discrimination is very slow to change in Ireland*
- *I had same experience as Hannah I hide the fact I am a Traveller.*
- *Discrimination is very slow to change in Ireland*
- *No representation of travelling culture in the schools*

### **Privilege/Class**

Middle class versus advantage

- *Rich versus poor - different traits*
- *Treated differently*

### **Religion**

- *Religion is a huge factor*
- *Church is a big factor in diversity*

### **Exclusion**

- *Exclusion - not feeling wanted*
- *Embarrassed not to be able to read and write*
- *I wanted them to guide the process – to be participative centred.*

### **Themes**

Diversity and how it is understood

Integration

Segregation

Privilege/Class

Religion

Exclusion

## **Research Presentation-“Listening to the Voices of Young People”**

**Presented by: Dr Eimear Enright University of Limerick, Deirdre O’ Rourke, Mary Immaculate College, Dr Orla McCormack University of Limerick and Maurice Harmon, Mary Immaculate College.**

The research was done in partnership with Mary Immaculate College and the University of Limerick as members of the IDEC committee of Clare Intercultural Network. The research was carried out with a number of post primary, secondary and third level students in the Munster region. The purpose of the research was to identify the student’s experiences of diversity within the education system. The findings of the presentation were presented in two sections.

The principal aim of the research was to find out students views on diversity in education.

- Article 29(d) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that education will be directed to:

***The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin.***

- Rhetoric of inclusion in government policy documents versus the reality of practices in schools
- Young people’s voices and experiences are notably absent from the debates that do take place on migration, integration and diversity both in schools and in research (Bushin & White, 2009)

### **Methodology**

**Photo-voice:** Young people are given the opportunity to take photographs, discuss them collectively

**Scrapbooking:** Photographs, school documentation, text from books, magazines and newspapers, screen prints from internet sites, drawings, stickers, song lyrics and student writing

**Identity boxes/posters:** select objects that represent identity and create a visual representation using/within a box.

## **Dr Ann Louise Gilligan, Director Centre for Progressive Change**

*As agents of change - are educators facilitating the learning and the living of diversity?*

Ann Louise spoke under a number of themes when addressing diversity. The importance of research in this area was emphasised and how it has the capacity to influence policy. The importance of recognising that educators play an enormous role and the privilege of being a teacher. Ann Louise highlighted the role of parents as primary educators, the significance and symbolism of this and yet their exclusion from the education system.

Ann Louise discussed the origins of the meaning of “difference”, one thing as separate from the other, for example; mind /body. One becomes better than the other, racism, sexism, homophobia; one becomes superior to the other. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century the whole notion of difference was played down through liberalism and the notion that we are all the same. Today difference is really coming through as we are all different; we are all ‘other’. Until we get this into our core, I am ‘other’ than you and you are ‘other’ to me, we will struggle with progressing difference and diversity.

Aristotle said “*when you use the word equal always ask yourself equal to what, equal to whom*”.

### **Gender**

In the executive summaries of the research, gender did not come up as a primary issue in the secondary school. One of the reasons it does not come up in primary school is because when girl children are young they feel they could rule the world. In transition into adolescence and puberty, girl children realise they do not live in a world which has mutual regard for girls and boys. They are living in a world that ‘male’ is the normative. Philosopher Luce Irigaray suggested ‘*the majority difference is we are either born male or female, we share common humans*’. The normative way to be in most countries is to be male. This is not an anti- male statement, there are two ways to be human and if we do not recognise this, the world we live in elevates one over other and elevates male over female.

Hilary Clinton says this is the issue which must be addressed, enabling women and girl children to reach the potential in their lives. She states you will never have prosperity in a country until you enable girl children to reach their full potential. It is another example of difference that women and men learn differently, but learning is taught in a male dominated way.

If we are to be real agents for change we must address this. It needs to be at the forefront of our minds. Feminism is about the historical violence which is used against women which gives permission to men to violate the goal of feminism. The goal is not to create a matriarchal society but to have a dual society. The young Pakistani girl Malala

Yousafzai is trying to recover in hospital from being shot six times because she tried to gain an education.

The second topic I wanted to identify as teachers and agents of change is one close to my heart is LGBT issues. As a lesbian woman I am still troubled that we are quite silent about these issues, what is our participation in the structured silences in which we live. A system controlled by the Catholic Church.

What would happen if the minority were the majority and the majority were the minority?

The time has come that we really need to address our prejudices and examine diversity and difference as part of the 'in service' training and the development of imagination. It is our most important faculty; let us imagine a world beyond prejudice. Those who have developed imaginations, can imagine what it might be like and then cannot but, be an agent for change.

#### **Themes**

Diversity/Difference

Other

Gender

Sex -two types of human

Male normative society

Women and girls reaching full potential

Conspiracy of silence – complicit by not speaking out

Enabling discrimination by being silent.

State and religion

LGBT invisibility

Addressing prejudice

Creativity/Imagination

**Gerry Mac Ruairc** is the Director of the Masters Studies In Education, Fellow In Teaching and Academic Development at UCD, Dublin

## **Diversity**

Patterns of power and privilege are prevalent in the education system. This is due to the neo liberal reshaping of education.

When speaking about diversity, a holistic approach that includes; systems, structures, heart and mind, as critical to the changes in the education system. Leadership is central to creating a culture of working with diversity; a transformational leadership is necessary. I am referring to leadership in its broadest sense but speaking about schools in this instance, the leader is central to the culture of the school, they are key to all of this work.

A diverse range of theoretical perspectives is the key approach necessary to change and will strengthen new models. Inclusion, social justice, equality, equity and democracy should be part of this approach. Identifying the inequalities in the first instance is crucial and this can be done through advocacy agency and change agents working in the field.

## **Education System**

The current education system cannot do this alone; it is forever expanding, perpetually unequal and never changing. The existing system creates winners and losers – someone always has to fail. This is reinforced by current economic, political and corporate models in use, neo liberalism and capitalist approaches.

## **Challenges**

The challenge is including diversity to such a point that groups become more visible and the dominant groups coming from traditional privileged backgrounds are less visible. Groups become more cross cutting – the inclusion of diversity will enable schools to act on its visibility

The past has incorporated individualistic failure. There has been a lack of clarity in approaches to special needs which are required, the inclusion of the Traveller community, LGBT community and other groups which traditionally have remained invisible because a fundamental system change has not occurred. There is a lack of will to develop school leadership. Recent OECD reports have not made reference to, diversity, inclusion, equality class, so therefore little will exists to improve and broaden the systems and structures which will bring about inclusion and make way for a holistic approach to education.

## Overview of models

There are some credible examples of inclusion of African and Latino feminist leadership and the development of frameworks which have illustrated good outcomes. There are always some superheroes within the system, the favourite or innovative teacher or principle. Stories of courage and strength bring about transformation, this is advocacy in action. We need to harness the hero's and the learning. This leaves many questions of how it is done, who will do it, who will develop a framework, how is the learning harnessed and how is the knowledge being documented. We need to question research, we need to note the absence of policy development in this area and address it or send it back.

### Themes

Neo Liberal Model

Power and Privilege

Visibility/majority/minority

Lack of recognition of issues and therefore will to address

Leadership

Advocacy

Identifying actors, superheroes

Documentation

Noting absence of policy development in this area

Policy Development to include all stakeholders, advocates and operate holistically with all considerations.

Research