

## 5. Looking at multicultural classrooms in Ireland: Teacher educators' perspectives

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‘Good intercultural teacher education is one of the greater challenges we face in the European Union.’ (Gundara 2000: 124)

### *Introduction*

The face of Ireland has changed dramatically over the last thirty years, with economic and social transformations taking the country through the recession of the 1980s, the boom of the Celtic Tiger in the mid-1990s, and back to the current economic downturn. With its competitive economy, Ireland became an attractive destination, during certain periods, and immigration numbers grew extensively, albeit not consistently. However, it was not until the biggest enlargement of the EU to date in May 2004 that Ireland was faced with mass net migration, especially from the newly admitted states. According to Central Statistics Office data (<<http://www.cso.ie>>) immigration to Ireland peaked in 2006 and 2007 with numbers as high as 107,800 and 109,500 respectively and, based on statistical data, it is possible to assume that a majority of immigrants to Ireland did not have English as their first language. Due to recent economic trends inward migration has certainly levelled out (57,300 in 2009 and 30,800 in 2010)<sup>2</sup> yet Irish society remained highly multicultural<sup>3</sup> with many immigrants choosing to stay (Barrett 2009, DES<sup>4</sup> and OMI<sup>5</sup> 2010: 9-13) despite mass exodus forecasts.

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<sup>2</sup> CSO data for 2007 to 2010 is preliminary.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this chapter terms ‘interculturalism’ and ‘multiculturalism’ are used interchangeably.

<sup>4</sup> DES – Department of Education and Skills, previously Department of Education and Science.

<sup>5</sup> OMI – Office of the Minister for Integration.

A multicultural society can create an opportunity to better understand other people, thereby minimizing cultural ignorance and racism; however, it can also present many new challenges as various aspects of the functioning of that society are influenced, with language playing a major part in the equation. One of the main issues Ireland has faced so far seems to be the impact immigration has had directly on first and second level education, and indirectly, on teacher education. Many of the young migrant students who have been arriving in Ireland have very limited or no knowledge of English but still need to cope with the new academic demands that face them. The dynamic of Irish classrooms was thus transformed, from largely homogenous to multicultural and multilingual contexts. Demand for new approaches, and possibly curricula, aiming to better accommodate students' needs arose and this in turn would also suggest a desired impact on teacher education programmes.

### ***Embracing cultural diversity***

The following sections briefly summarize some important documents concerning the various issues surrounding multiculturalism which are relevant to this research. The list presented below is, however, by no means finite due to the constraints of this chapter.

#### *Examples of policy: The United Nations and the EU*

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, presented by the United Nations in 1948, refers to education as an indispensable human right and it emphasizes its role in encouraging acceptance and appreciation of other people. It was followed by the Council of Europe's publication of the *European Convention on Human Rights* in 1950. These two documents were further augmented by the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations 1989). More recently two policy statements were issued – the Council of Europe's *Framework Convention*

*for the Protection Of National Minorities* (1995) and the *Charter Of The Fundamental Rights Of The EU* (EU 2000).

Apart from these fundamental texts a number of other publications important to the context of this study need to be mentioned. In 2004 Council of the European Union published a press release from its 2,618th meeting where it presents its conclusions regarding immigrant integration policy in the EU (Council of the European Union 2004: 15-25). The most significant message of this document was an acknowledgement that inward migration is a permanent feature of the EU and, furthermore, that it is a ‘dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation’ (EU Council 2004: 17). The value of cultural diversity is further discussed in the Council of Europe’s White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (2008). The recent scale of migration within the EU has presented many challenges to the educational systems of the member states hence the following were published: EU Commission: Green Paper *Migration And Mobility: Challenges And Opportunities For EU Education Systems* (2008) where the emphasis is placed on schools as leaders in creating an inclusive society, and the Council of Europe’s ‘Policies and Practices for Teaching Socio-Cultural Diversity- *A Framework Of Teacher Competencies For Engaging With Diversity* (2009). The latter is intended for initial teacher educators as well as student teachers. By focusing on reflective practice it aims at assisting future teachers who find themselves in culturally diverse classrooms.

### *The international context*

Although a relatively recent phenomenon in Ireland, multicultural and multilingual education has long been the experience of countries such as England, Australia (Burns 2003, Carder 2008, Davison 2001) or Canada (Ashworth 2001, Carder 2008, Cummins and Swain 1986). Bearing in mind constraints of this chapter as well as specific features of the educational systems in the

nation states mentioned above, this section will briefly present the integration of EAL issues into the school curriculum and teacher education in England.

The approach to teaching EAL students underwent a significant change between 1950s and mid-1980s, from four different types of language support – full time/part time language centres, full time language classes/ part time language classes within ordinary schools – to mainstreaming, which involves placing EAL learners in an age appropriate class where he/she follows the National Curriculum (Leung and Franson 2001: 153-176). The current model of teaching in multicultural schools supported by policy is that of Partnership Teaching where the subject and EAL teacher develop the curriculum together (Leung 2005: 97, see also Creese 2000, Franson 2007).

Similarly to the Irish context, the question of EAL and initial teacher education has sparked a considerable debate. As Leung points out EAL is not an available main subject specialism for student teachers and pre-service EAL teaching training courses were withdrawn from third level institutions in the early 1990s (Leung 2005: 98, Leung 2001: 45). Despite presenting teaching English to EAL pupils as the responsibility of all teachers (SCAA 1996 in Leung 2005: 97), specialist teacher training is limited mainly to in-service programmes which are ‘non-qualificatory, voluntary and localised’ (Leung 2005: 98). Although the current approach to EAL practice has resulted in the integration of students into the mainstream schooling, the ‘lack of systemic attention to EAL [...] has served to reduce the expertise base in the school system’ (Leung 2005: 108, see also Creese and Leung 2003), while limiting the discussion mainly to classroom strategies (Leung 2001: 45). Therefore Leung postulates not only a formalized discipline-specific training but also rigorous professional development (2001: 46).

### *The Irish context*

One of the first and most fundamental policy documents in Ireland to acknowledge cultural diversity and the role of education in the new society is The 1998 Education Act (Office of the Attorney General 51 of 1998), which states that the education system should respect ‘the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society’. In terms of other documents relating to teaching and learning in multicultural settings, three publications produced by the DES have been of significant interest for this research. Firstly, the White Paper in Adult Education *Learning For Life* (DES 2000) which emphasizes that an intercultural education system ‘must work towards a view of difference as something to be celebrated and which is enriching to the totality of the society rather than as the basis for enmity’ (p.34). In 2003, the DES, in conjunction with the Equality Authority, published *Schools And The Equal Status Act* where characteristics of an inclusive school as one which ‘(...) respects, values, and accommodates diversity’ (p.1) were further highlighted. Finally, in 2008, the DES brought out its strategy for the years 2008-2010 where the main objective was defined as the provision of high quality education for all individuals which, in turn, would result in Ireland’s social, cultural and economic development.

In 2005 and 2006 the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) published intercultural education guidelines for primary and post-primary level which are one of the major steps taken in order to respond to cultural diversity in schools. The guidelines provide practical advice for teachers in areas such as classroom planning, approaches, methodologies and assessment. As Gundara (2000: 65) points out, intercultural education should be embedded in the mainstream curriculum to prevent, as far as possible, the development of racist reactions. Therefore, both primary and post-primary level guidelines suggest how intercultural education can be integrated into the curriculum. Intercultural education for all learners, as expressed in the guidelines, pays special attention to increasing

pupils' awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity currently existing in Ireland. This idea was further emphasized in the report prepared by the DES in cooperation with the Council of Europe (2008). Unfortunately, despite the publicity those publications received, many teachers still have them on their 'ever increasing pile of stuff' to be implemented (DICE<sup>6</sup> 2006: 29), or are simply not aware of their existence.

Finally, two research projects published by the ESRI<sup>7</sup> (Byrne et al. 2009) and the OECD (2009) should be mentioned with respect to this chapter. 'Adapting to Diversity: Irish Schools and Newcomer Students' (Byrne et al. 2009) focuses on the integration of newcomer students in primary and secondary schools. Results of the ESRI study indicate that the largest group of teachers working in language support for English as an Additional Language EAL students are mainstream teachers and only a minority holds formal ELT (English Language Teaching) qualifications. Furthermore, the survey also shows existing dissatisfaction with the amount of time allocated to EAL students, which ranges from 30 to 45 minutes per student or group. Considering how little time a Language Support Teacher has at his/her disposal, it becomes clear that effective English language learning in multicultural educational systems cannot be the exclusive task of these teachers, but is best achieved by efforts from all educators across the curriculum (Corson 1998, Leung 2001 and 2005, IES<sup>8</sup> 2010). The report on migrant education prepared by the OECD (2009) examines policy and practice at all educational levels in Ireland. The main suggestions arising from the OECD work, which are important for this research, include the following: prioritizing initial education and in-service development opportunities for all teachers in the area of EAL and interculturalism; developing one point of contact for teachers, educational managers, researchers and policy makers for bilateral information exchange; determining whether the current school patronage model is

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<sup>6</sup> DICE - Development and InterCultural Education.

<sup>7</sup> ESRI – Economic and Social Research Institute.

<sup>8</sup> IES – *Intercultural Education Strategy 2010-2015* published by the Department of Education and Skills and the Office of the Minister for Integration in October 2010.

appropriately responding to cultural diversity among children and, lastly, supporting a whole school approach to multicultural education.

One of the central issues in research and literature discussed is the provision of EAL. According to ‘Migration Nation’, a document launched by the Office of the Minister for Integration (May 2008), there were, at the time, almost 2,000 posts for language support teachers allocated across primary and secondary level, subject to the requisite number of EAL learners being in a school. However, budget cuts were introduced in the final months of 2008 and the DES Circular 0015/2009 reads as follows ‘the level of EAL support will generally be reduced to maximum of two teachers per school as was the case before 2007’. Table 5.1 presents a comparison the between level of EAL support in 2007 and 2009 (Circular 0053/2007 and Circular 0015/2009).

Table 5.1: English as an Additional Language Support in Ireland, 2007-2009

<b>English as an Additional Language Support</b>			
<b>Circular 0053/2007</b>		<b>Circular 0015/2009</b>	
<b>No of teachers</b>	<b>No of EAL learners</b>	<b>No of teachers</b>	<b>No of EAL learners</b>
1	14-27	1	14-30
2	28-41	2	31-90
3	42-64	3	91-120
4	65-90	4	120 and more
5	91-120		
6	120 and more		

The two-year cap on language support provision has been objected to by a number of teachers (DICE 2006) because ‘many children acquire only a functional knowledge of English in this time’ (p. 35). The mention of functional knowledge hints at a common linguistic distinction which is appropriate here, that is, the difference between conversational fluency and academic fluency, the former being achieved earlier in most cases (Cummins 2008). Ideally, this division should be reflected in policy, pedagogy and assessment. Although in the English context,

Leung suggests a differentiated EAL curriculum focusing on teaching of lexicogrammar, pragmatics and academic genres in the context of the main curricular subject areas (2005: 108).

There are certain initial conclusions stemming from the short review of literature and research in the area presented in this section. First of all, in the context of multicultural and multilingual classrooms, all teachers, apart from being subject specialists, also become language tutors as well and, as such, play a vital role in the linguistic development of EAL learners (Council of Europe 2009; ESRI 2009; OECD 2009), hence appropriate English Language Teaching (ELT) education should be offered to teachers of all subjects and levels. Furthermore, knowledge and skills in the areas of EAL, cultural diversity and intercultural education should be developed comprehensively across all the stages of teacher education (OECD 2009). Finally, immigrants' entry into the teaching profession should be supported at all educational levels (OECD 2009). Having briefly presented main research in the area of EAL both internationally and in Ireland, the next sections will focus on the methodology of data collection and theoretical frameworks respectively, thus providing further context for this research.

### ***Data and methodology***

The research described in this paper aims to investigate teacher educators' perspectives on cultural diversity in Irish education. This study is a part of a larger project looking at the discourse of educational multiculturalism among key stakeholders (teachers, teacher educators and representatives of professional organizations) and the influence of multiculturalism and multilingualism on classroom practice.

### *Interview as a research tool*

The data presented in this chapter was collected with the use of individual interviews (see Data sub-section for details). There is a great variety in classifications of interview as a research method, for example, Patton (1980), LeCompte and Preissle (1993) and Bogdan and Biklen (2007) to name just a few. Interviews conducted for the purpose of this research fall into the qualitative category thus bearing the following characteristics (as outlined by Kvale and Brinkmann 2009: 29) ‘life world, meaning, qualitative aspect, specificity, deliberate naivete, focused, ambiguity, change, sensitivity, interpersonal situation and, finally, positive experience’. However, constituting a part of a larger study, the interviews conducted to date also function as a source of quantitative data as the answers obtained are used to establish regularities, gain description of the context and for comparison (Cohen et al. 2000: 272). As such, interviews used for this research can be classified as standardized open-ended interviews (Patton 1980: 206) where questions were predetermined and asked in the same order. This allowed for increased comparability of data and aimed at reducing bias. Standardized open-ended interviews, however, allow for little flexibility thus the researcher allowed for basic questions to be expanded and enhanced by probes if deemed necessary, therefore, qualifying the process as a semi-structured interview (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999: 149). Interview data was analysed with content analysis techniques (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009: 203) and further presented as re-occurring themes. The majority of themes discussed stem from interview questions, however, some developed spontaneously in the course of the interviews.

### *Data*

The data presented in this chapter was collected over the course of individual interviews with six teacher educators. Each of the interviews took approximately 30 minutes and the following

topics were discussed: the impact of multiculturalism on teacher education, the response of the education system to cultural and linguistic diversity, EAL learners and teacher education, student teachers' attitudes towards working in multicultural environments, continuous professional development of teachers and, finally, policy issues (see Appendix 1 for guiding interview questions used).

Table 5.2 summarizes profile information of the participants. In the interest of confidentiality all interviewees have been assigned pseudonyms.

Table 5.2: Participants' profile information

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Experience</b>	<b>Areas</b>	<b>Primary/ Post- Primary Education</b>
Diane	F	3 years	Intercultural education, development education, TP supervision	Primary level teacher education
Alice	F	10 years	Mathematics education	Primary level teacher education
Tracy	F	19 years	Religious education, theology	Primary level teacher education
Charlotte	F	11 years	SPHE <sup>9</sup> education and health promotion	Primary level teacher education
Mia	F	10 years	History of education	Post-primary level teacher education
James	M	19 years	General Pedagogy, science pedagogy, TP supervision	Post-primary level teacher education

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<sup>9</sup> SPHE – Social, Personal and Health Education.

This table shows that both professional experience and teaching areas are hugely varied, which might allow an assumption that a broader spectrum of views was expressed. Given the complex nature of issues examined, all participants received the interview questions in advance. It should be emphasized that participants were made aware that questions were in no way limiting and any additional comments and reflections were welcomed throughout the interviews. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that the following study is work in progress and the analysis of the interviews, which is presented in the following sections, is theme-based as the size of the data set does not allow for quantitative investigation at present.

### ***Theoretical frameworks***

The following sections present theoretical frameworks used to conduct the research with the following issues being discussed: data collection and analysis. The first subsection discusses the issue of reflective practice and its place in modern teacher education. The second subsection focuses on the notion of linguistic face and importance in multicultural classrooms.

### ***Reflective practice***

One of the issues embedded in all the interviews was that of reflective practice for teachers working in multicultural contexts. Modern education systems aim to implement the Reflective Model of teacher education (Banfi 1997, Wallace 1991) where practitioners possess two types of knowledge – received and experiential. Received knowledge is part of the official educational curriculum while experiential knowledge results from everyday practice and reflection on it. As data collected in this research indicates, it is especially a space for reflection that is needed by teachers. However as Head and Taylor (1997: 9) suggest, there is a clear distinction between teacher training and teacher development with the following features,

among others, being juxtaposed: competency based vs holistic, short term vs long term, one off vs ongoing, top-down vs bottom up. For the Reflective Model of teacher education to be fully implemented there is, therefore, a need for teacher training and further professional development to form a continuum with reflective practice constituting an integral part throughout the process. Although reflective practice is underlying modern teacher education, there is also a requisite for it to become an integral part of classroom teaching. In the context of this research, reflective practice allows practitioners critically consider their pedagogical approaches in the light of a particular learning situation and thus identify potential areas for development as well as good practice.

### *Face*

The second issue which was prominent and connected to general discourse of multiculturalism was that of *face*. As a linguistic concept *face* was defined by Goffman as the ‘the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact’ (2006: 299). Goffman’s notion of face is therefore constrained by the line others think he/ she is taking and thus as a social value it is dependent on others and can change from one moment to another (Watts 2003: 103). Brown and Levinson further develop concept of face as ‘public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself. [...] something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction’ (2006: 311). Apart from introducing a dualistic distinction between positive face (self-image to be appreciated and approved) and negative face (claim to non-distraction), Brown and Levinson also differ from Goffman in their assumption that face is constructed prior to interaction and is desired to be upheld by society (Watts 2003: 103-107). Although this conceptualization of face does not exclude change, it indicates less room for interactional negotiations than originally suggested by Goffman (Watts 2003: 103-107). It is

then the face as presented by Brown and Levinson that comes into play in multicultural educational contexts as a conflict between professional image assumed by teachers and classroom reality presenting difficult challenges. Mainstream teachers working in multicultural and multilingual contexts may feel their professional face of authority within their subject area to be threatened by their limited pedagogical knowledge of EAL teaching. This in turn might have a negative impact on their classroom practice and, as a result, on the teaching/learning process. This issue is further exemplified and discussed in the results section later

## ***Results***

This section presents the outcomes of the study described above with findings being divided into seven subsections according to interview themes. In addition, some initial thoughts on the discourse of multiculturalism will be presented in the second part of this section.

### *Multiculturalism and teacher education*

Considering the focus of the interviews, quite naturally the first question presented to participants was that of interculturalism impacting teacher education – has there really been any impact? Interviewees seem to be rather evenly divided into three groups in their opinions on the subject.

Two participants considered the influence to be quite significant and positive at the same time. It was emphasized that changes in the classrooms happened quite rapidly and the education system responded quickly and appropriately with changes in teacher education programmes such as awareness raising in modules across the curriculum but also by sending intercultural education guidelines to schools (NCCA 2005 and 2006).

Another two interviewees agreed that there was an influence but initially it came from teachers themselves not the teaching colleges and the DES. This was referred to as a bottom up rather than top down approach. Secondly, the change took place on the conceptual level more than on the practical level. Here, both participants stressed two issues. First, there seems to be a lack of communication between the key stakeholders (teachers, teacher educators, the DES) and within those groups and, as a result, all the efforts are rather 'piecemeal' and only 'surface level when it should go deeper' (Diane). Consequently, a 'huge gap between theory and practice' (Tracy) was created. In order to bridge this gap, as suggested by some of the interviewees, teacher education programmes should be augmented with more inclusive content where issues connected to interculturalism permeate the whole curriculum. Furthermore, the student teacher should be exposed to multiculturalism which they might not have experienced as primary or secondary learners themselves (Diane and Tracy).

Finally, the remaining two teacher educators had a rather pessimistic outlook stating 'extremely limited impact' and 'no impact' (James, Alex). When asked to further elaborate on those answers familiar themes were present – 'Multiculturalism is disjointed. Teacher educators do it but it's each to their own. For it to have an impact it needs a common discourse' or 'Multiculturalism hasn't translated into teaching' and finally 'Teacher educators haven't had the exposure to multiculturalism themselves'. There is also some criticism of the Irish education system with Alex maintaining that multiculturalism is treated as a politically correct add-on characterized by the lack of overarching policy while it should have been made a national priority with Ireland learning from countries with long traditions of immigration such as the UK or USA. Furthermore, James pointed out that an integrated curriculum based on intercultural foundations (here specifically understood as different ways/ traditions of thinking) should be implemented from primary to third level education.

### *English as an Additional Language and teacher education*

The issue of linguistic diversity is nearly inseparable from discussions on interculturalism. Irish schools are currently a meeting ground for over 200 languages (Gallagher, <<http://www.irishtimes.com/timeseye/howeare/p3bottom.htm>>) and, as a consequence, multilingualism and multiculturalism is an everyday experience for many teachers. Therefore, in the next question the relationship between EAL learners, comprising an estimated 16 per cent of all pupils in Ireland (Byrne et al. 2009 XIV), and teacher education was explored.

Only Charlotte had a rather positive opinion and emphasized not only the fact that multilingualism is discussed across the curriculum but especially in the modules devoted to language teaching and literacy in both Irish and English. Furthermore, Charlotte believed that principles of teaching Irish are similar to those of EAL so all teachers are indeed equipped with the knowledge and practical tools to help their EAL students, at least at the primary level.

Both Diane and Alex suggested that only a limited relationship existed and described the status quo as ‘hit and miss’. They claim that there isn’t much input available to student teachers and, as such, EAL and linguistic diversity is not integrated into the curriculum. These claims are consistent with Leung’s criticism of the position of EAL within teacher education in England (Leung 2001, 2005, 2007).

James proposed that ‘teacher-centred didactic should change into a learner-centred approach’ and Diane stated that every future teacher should have EAL training. An interesting point was raised by Mia, who thinks that the EAL situation in terms of identifying pupils in need of language support is rather clear at the moment but teachers may face a much greater challenge with second generation migrants. This statement is very much in line with the recent OECD reports according to which many second generation immigrants experience considerable literacy difficulties in both languages – the mother tongue (or the language of their parent/s country) and the host country’s language).

### *Student teachers' attitudes towards a multicultural work environment*

Another interesting issue centred on how future teachers themselves feel about working in an intercultural and multilingual environment. Here all five participants saw both positive and negative sides. Firstly on the more optimistic side, student teachers are perceived as positive and enthusiastic, very open, interested in other cultures and willing to learn about them. Although many students admit that multicultural classrooms might present various challenges, generally they meet those challenges with positive attitudes.

However, as reported by their tutors, even though student teachers might be ready theoretically, they definitely lack the practical skills and tools – ‘Guidelines are helpful but not enough’ (Tracy). At the same time a certain discourse of fear seems to be emerging, where student teachers are described as ‘nervous and afraid to make a mistake’ (Alex), ‘afraid to get it hopelessly wrong’ (Diane) and ‘concerned with lack of knowledge’ (Tracy).

### *How multicultural are we really?*

It is interesting to note that this ‘multicultural self-reflection’ surfaced rather spontaneously without it being specifically prompted by the interviewer. All but one participant agreed that a majority of the student population up to now has been of Irish background thus creating a very homogeneous group. This situation is occasionally altered by exchange students coming mainly from western European countries, especially the UK, the USA or as part of the Erasmus programme. Although these students may add an interesting cultural aspect as well as present an alternative point of view, as the interviewees emphasize, cultural differences are not that pronounced and in some cases students share a common first language. Furthermore, most exchange students stay in Ireland only for one or two semesters and do not take part in student teaching practice; hence their impact on the learning process of other student teachers is rather limited. This lack of diversity amongst student teachers translates into homogeneity of teachers

in classrooms and as Diane said ‘I would love for it to change. It would be a great model for children in schools’.

The situation is quite similar at the faculty level, especially in primary teaching colleges with the Irish language proficiency requirement in place. Here the participants claimed that cultural diversity among faculty could, first of all, help student teachers understand what multiculturalism in classroom really is as opposed to the ‘imagine if’ scenarios (Diane, Tracy). It was also pointed out by three of the interviewees that the quality of education could benefit from ‘expertise from outside’ (Alex) – from outside of Ireland and within the country. Teacher educators agreed that an alternative route of entry where the Irish language is not a requirement should be introduced, however, they had no specific ideas regarding implementation. As Alex said ‘It’s critical to get kids from traveller population and other backgrounds [into teacher education colleges] because they will be the faces of our schools and classrooms’.

### *Policy issues*

Another important topic discussed was that of policy regarding multiculturalism and EAL. This was the only case where all the participants expressed very similar views. Three sub-themes emerged throughout the discussion.

Surprisingly, most participants started off with a clear concern about the ‘short-sighted’ (Diane) character of policies implemented, specifically in the context of EAL provision and the two-year funding cap applied to it. Interviewees are aware of the problems EAL students in schools are facing every day and admit that although some learners might have good conversational language skills, they still lack the necessary fluency to access the curriculum (Cummins 1992). As Mia said ‘Language support is critical as language skills are critical for cognition, empowerment and enabling integration’. Furthermore, participants suggest this ‘lack of vision’ (Alex) will generate huge social costs in the future.

The second point emphasized by the participants was the aspirational character of the policy in place and its detachment from classroom reality. As emphasized by some interviewees, this aspirational nature of the strategies might be responsible for further shortages of funding as they lack a practical aspect.

Finally, all participants agreed that it is hugely important to have explicit policies in place and also commended on the DES inviting various parties to contribute to those documents (teacher educators, migrant representatives, teachers, parents etc) but the absence of implementation schemes results in policy documents being simply filed away in schools. It was suggested that policy should start at BEd (Bachelor of Education) level in order to give student teachers the necessary strategies they can implement in classrooms and exposure to interculturalism that many of them may have never had.

### *Samosas and saris*

In the course of the interview with the first participant the issue of multiculturalism being superficial in schools arose and the researcher decided to examine this question with other participants. According to Diane, teachers and schools attempt to represent cultural diversity through, for example, changing classroom displays, presenting songs or stories from different countries or inviting parents. However she questioned the sufficiency of these actions. Alex suggested that although 'Africa days, food and dance are not enough it is a good start. It's awareness even if it's superficial'. This claim was also partially supported by Mia who agreed that visibility in schools is necessary but change happens at a deeper level in social contexts ('Tip of an Iceberg' Weaver 1986) and all those involved in education in intercultural settings should aim for those deeper levels.

Participants were then asked what it would mean to take a deeper and more meaningful approach to multiculturalism. All interviewees highlighted the importance of cultivating links

with a pupil's home and his/ her local community because 'good quality interventions are needed, not hunches' (Mia). Every teacher should develop principles of inclusive learning which would highlight the complexity of a lived experience (Tracy). A very interesting point was made by Diane, who suggested that student teachers should begin by examining their own assumptions and prejudices. Understanding one's own identity as a person and the way this identity impacts one as a teacher, Diane elaborated, should be the starting point. Moreover, student teachers, but also experienced teachers, need time to reflect on themselves as practitioners and how their professional practice is influenced by what is happening in the wider context.

Reflective practice is very closely connected to continuous professional development which is in turn one of the pillars of modern teacher education. Participants were thus asked to comment on the in-service development options available to teachers. Interviewees observed a lack of (or very little) knowledge on their part as to what development programmes are offered by DES. It was also unanimously agreed that teachers tend to choose modules from within their own specialization followed by Information Technology and Special Needs Education. However, three of the participants emphasized the need for in-service training for mainstream teachers in the area of interculturalism and EAL. Furthermore, it was pointed out that although intercultural guidelines (NCCA 2005 and 2006) are a great resource, their publication should have been accompanied by a training day for teachers and/or school management. This resonates with findings reported by Devine where she states that the lack of explicit policies results in school practice being informed by teachers' own initiatives and interests rather than critical reflective approach supported by national guidelines and state investment (Devine 2005: 6).

### *A discourse of multiculturalism*

Reflection on the language surrounding interculturalism emerged unprompted during three interviews and was elicited in the remaining three. Participants noticed a very clear dichotomy between an issue to be tackled/ a problem and a resource. It was indicated that there is a general negative perception of interculturalism and, moreover, it is problematized in the classrooms rather than perceived as a way to enrich one's learning experience. Some of the participants acknowledged that there are those who are trying to celebrate cultural diversity. However this phrase also seems to be turning into an empty slogan.

The second issue noted by the researcher, and already signalled in section focusing on linguistic face, is the discourse of fear which seems to be surfacing in relation to student teachers with words like 'fearful' and 'afraid' often being used. There are three suppositions which could be considered in this context. First of all, as reported by the interviewees, student teachers are not sure how to act in multicultural classrooms in a way that is not offensive to anyone. This uncertainty could be analysed from two interconnected perspectives – at a personal level (I as a person) and at a professional level (I as a teacher) – with the latter one being of interest to this research. Doubt in the professional sphere may further lead to student teachers feeling inadequately prepared to work in multicultural contexts, which may result in feelings of failure as teachers. Here the notion of face as public self-image comes to mind (Goffman 1967). Face, as further developed by Brown and Levinson (1978) is emotionally invested and as such can be lost, maintained or enhanced. Furthermore it must be constantly attended to in interactions. Losing face in the classroom, however subjective a feeling this may be, might lead to undermining a teacher's authority and position in class which, in turn, could also negatively impact on the learning process. In some instances it might also possibly lead to forming negative attitudes towards multiculturalism, while as suggested by one of the participants our motto should be 'different is good' (Tracy).

## *Conclusions*

The results of the study presented in this paper concur in many ways with research quoted earlier in the section devoted to international and Irish contexts; however, some additional suggestions are visible. As noted in IES '(...) a significant proportion of the current and future population are and will be immigrants. It is to be expected that immigrants will remain a definite feature of Irish society and education into the future.' (2010: Introduction). Therefore, the needs of those working in this hugely changed social context require prioritizing in terms of funding and time at two opposite ends of the educational continuum – students and teachers. On one hand, as other research suggests (e.g. DICE 2006, ESRI 2009), two years of language support is not sufficient for EAL learners to be able to access the curriculum on a par with their Irish peers. Furthermore, although assistance focused on a specific topic/ skill as that provided by the EAL teacher is vital, there is also a great need for in-class support, which would aid the learning process. Finally, as data suggests, interculturalism should permeate the curriculum in order to allow children to discover and understand other ways of thinking and perceiving our world. Such an integrated curriculum would be intended for both Irish and EAL learners as they will all live in one multicultural society. On the other hand, there might be also a growing need to integrate multiculturalism and multilingualism into initial teacher training and embed it in all subjects. In addition, as stated in IES 'All educators must be aware of the potential to systematically infuse language into their lessons and subject areas. They have a key role to play in developing and enhancing the language competence of all learners.' (2010: 51) It is especially important in those difficult times of economic downturn and spending cuts that mainstream teachers are equipped with appropriate tools enabling them to create a truly inclusive learning environment. These strategies should come from quality initial teacher

education and well-structured in-service professional development programmes (see for example Leung 2001, 2005, 2007).

As statistical data clearly indicates, cultural and linguistic diversity is well represented among pupils in primary and secondary schools. However, student bodies and faculty on teacher education programmes still constitute a highly homogenous group; therefore, as suggested by the OECD (2009) and indicated by the participants of this study, steps should be taken in order to encourage migrants to become teachers. Two major obstacles to this process, as suggested in the course of this research, seem to be the Irish language proficiency requirement present in some teacher training colleges and the predominantly Catholic school patronage system, with the latter being currently examined in relation to its suitability for a more diverse society (IES 2010: 36). It was agreed by the participants that alternative routes of entry into the teaching profession should be identified.

All participants highlighted the significance of policies which clearly indicate the importance of cultural diversity in modern Irish society, however, at the same time the clash between the aspirational character of policy and classroom reality was emphasized. Furthermore, as suggested by the interviewees, communication between policy makers and those implementing it could be improved as many teachers do not seem to be aware of the existence of those documents nor are sure how these resources could be used in their daily work. Consequently, there is a need for a point of dialogue and knowledge transfer between the key stakeholders: teachers, teacher educators, educational managers and policy makers (OECD 2009: 66). In addition, there is a need for structured workshops and training sessions aimed at improving classroom practice through the use of the policy tools and examples of best practice from both local and international contexts.

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