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### **Newcomer pupils: facing up to the cultural and linguistic challenges**

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### **Academic Biography**

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### **Abstract**

*The paper considers the challenges for in-service school teachers of the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of their pupils. Having set the international context, the research focuses on one particular region (Northern Ireland) which is experiencing unprecedented inward migration as it emerges from conflict into a period of relative stability and prosperity. The paper makes specific recommendations not just for Northern Ireland but also for an international audience, with a central proposal that all schools urgently receive additional funding for training and resources to meet the needs and seize the opportunities presented by newcomer pupils.*

**Key words:** inward migration, linguistic and cultural diversity, culturally heterogeneous student body, newcomer children, newcomer parents, English as an Additional Language (EAL), tolerance, intercultural understanding, multi-cultural events, active and collaborative tasks, new cultural diversity, linguistic challenge, diversity-related burn out, Toolkits for Diversity, inclusion, peace dividend, school system, segregation along religious lines.

### **Introduction**

The cultural and linguistic challenges faced by teachers in areas experiencing significant inward migration have been well documented in recent years in numerous international studies. Much has been written particularly in relation to pre-service teachers and the need to prepare them better for the diversity of the modern classroom. It is particularly important to

address this need as research suggests that pre-service teachers often have little contact with people from minority populations and cultures (Zimpher 1989) and begin their initial teacher education with little prior cross-cultural knowledge or experience (Melnick & Zeichner 1997; Wiggins & Follo 1999). Leavy (2005, p.172) noted that 92% of the pre-service teachers in her Irish study were from hegemonic national, religious, and cultural groups in Ireland and concludes, 'these restricted experiences with people of diversity pose a significant challenge to educators whose task is the preparation of teachers to teach in a diverse student population'. Several research studies into short-term diversity visits (as part of a teacher education programme) in the U.S. suggest however that even brief visits can have a profound impact on student teachers' views and can lead to greater cultural sensitivity (Causey, Thomas & Armento 2000; Finney & Orr 1995; Gomez & Tabachnick 1991; Jordan 1995; Mahan 1982; Noordhoff & Kleinfield 1991; Pohan 1996; Wiest 1998; Zeichner 1992).

There is less research evidence in relation to the attitudes of inservice teachers. However in the U.S. Byrnes, Kiger and Manning (1997) found in their research into 191 serving teachers' attitudes towards linguistic and cultural diversity across three states (which had experienced significant immigration) that positive attitudes were associated with formal training (suggesting that confidence and competence could lead to positive responses) and also prior experience (where prejudices are dispelled). They conclude by stressing the value of carefully structured practical experiences:

Formal training in teaching linguistically diverse children should include carefully planned presentations and field experiences that focus on attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate language development and cultural diversity. (Byrnes et al 1997 p.642)

Youngs and Youngs (2001) concur with these findings in a study involving 143 junior/middle school teachers in

the US Great Plains, adding that important factors in predicting positive attitudes included not only prior foreign language or multicultural education training, work/travel abroad and prior exposure to pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) but also gender, with female teachers on average expressing more positive attitudes towards newcomer pupils than their male colleagues.

It is also clear that uncertainty and lack of confidence as well as lack of resources to meet effectively the needs of newcomer pupils can lead to teacher stress. In Israel, from their study of 280 teachers, Tatar and Horenczyk (2003) note the existence of 'diversity-related burn out' suggesting that teachers' well-being can be negatively affected by coping with a culturally heterogeneous student body on a daily basis. They found higher rates of burn out among primary school teachers and also among home-room tutors (those teachers with additional pastoral responsibility). Interestingly, and in contrast to other studies (such as Freeman, Brookhart & Loadman 1999), Tatar and Horenczyk found that the level of burnout was actually lower in schools where there was a higher level of diversity. In interpreting this finding, they suggest that this may be due to the fact that, above a certain level, schools can no longer ignore the needs of the newcomer children and often are forced to provide more support on a whole-school basis, thus reducing the onus and level of stress experienced by individual teachers.

There is also variation between teachers in terms of the degree to which the individual cultural background of the pupils is respected by their new schools. Schiff (2008) discovered in a qualitative study in suburban Connecticut that most of the 14 school leaders favoured an assimilation model over a celebration of diversity, with one school leader stating that "the immigrant students are treated like the rest of the students; they are absorbed in the general population". It would appear therefore that the melting-pot metaphor remains pertinent in some contexts (see Glazer & Moynihan 1963; Esteve 1992).

### **The Northern Ireland context**

In the past decade political progress in Northern Ireland has provided the necessary stability for the regeneration of Belfast and indeed the whole of the province to begin. Following the IRA ceasefires of the mid 1990s and the signing of the Belfast ('Good Friday') Agreement by most of the rival political parties on 10 April 1998, brokered by the London and Dublin governments, Northern Ireland now has its own devolved Assembly whose executive comprises representatives from all five main political parties including rival Unionist (largely Protestant) and Nationalist (largely Catholic) parties. Undoubtedly Northern Ireland has benefited enormously from the so-called 'peace-dividend' whereby foreign (often U.S.) companies have begun to invest in the province (Saul 2008).

This of course stands in sharp contrast to the period of civil unrest from the late 1960s till the mid 1990s, frequently referred to as the 'Troubles', when political tensions between Protestant and Catholic communities were at their height and when an IRA bombing campaign reduced much of central Belfast to rubble (Bardon 1992). One U.S. political scientist referred to Belfast at this time as 'ugly, sore to the eyes, the will to go on gone...a modern wasteland...Only the ghettos have their own vitality. By early evening Belfast is abandoned' (O'Malley 1983 cited in Bardon 1992, p.818). At this time of fear and instability investors in the city were scarce and there were few if any tourists or immigrants.

A further, largely unforeseen consequence of the terrorist ceasefires and economic growth has been the influx of migrant workers from other parts of Europe to meet the demands of expanding local industries. This number has increased further following the accession to the European Union in 2004 of the A8 countries (eight countries from Central and Eastern Europe: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia). Recent figures published in 2009 by The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

(NISRA) suggest that in recent years there has been a steady growth in net migration levels rising to almost +10,000 per year. This stands in sharp contrast to the net population fall seen in the 1970s, where, for instance in 1973/74 almost 14,000 more people left Northern Ireland than came to live there. By way of comparison to other parts of the United Kingdom, between May 2004 and March 2009 Northern Ireland had a third more new workers registering on the Worker Registration Scheme than in England, Scotland or Wales. Furthermore, almost 10% of babies born in Northern Ireland in 2009 were born to mothers who themselves were born outside Northern Ireland compared to less than 3% in 2001 (NISRA 2009).

That the rapidity and extent of the inward migration to Northern Ireland has caused challenges at all levels of society is incontrovertible. The Northern Ireland government's Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) has published guidance on working towards a "Shared Future" (OFMDFM 2005a) and a Racial Equality Strategy (OFMDFM 2005b) but has had to admit that:

The speed and extent of the increase in numbers of migrant workers in Northern Ireland – and the sheer diversity of the people involved – pose complex challenges for Government and society alike. (OFMDFM 2005b, p.22)

Although tensions between rival Protestant and Catholic communities have eased in recent years, there has been a rise in racially-motivated crimes (OFMDFM 2005b). For instance in June 2009 more than one hundred Romanians were forced to flee their homes in South Belfast following a spate of racist attacks which led many to fear that Northern Ireland's centuries-old sectarianism is now mutating into racism (BBC 2009).

Recent inward migration has also had a significant impact on the school population in Northern Ireland. Statistics from the Department of Education (DENI 2010) show that there has been a six-fold increase in what are termed "newcomer children" between 2001/2 (1366 children) and 2009/10 (7899 children) in all schools in

Northern Ireland, with two thirds of these children in the primary school phase in 2009-2010 (DENI 2010). And, where once these migrant workers came on six-month or one year contracts and were concentrated in one or two industrial areas of Northern Ireland, government statistics show that more migrants are now choosing to settle and to bring over their families and children to Northern Ireland (NISRA 2009). Some initiatives to promote greater respect for diversity have already been introduced to Northern Ireland. Connolly & Hosken (2006) and Connolly, Fitzpatrick, Gallagher & Harris (2006) have demonstrated in Northern Ireland that such initiatives can be highly successful but need to begin as early as possible with pre-school children, where already cultural prejudices are evident. In April 2009 the Department of Education also published a long-awaited policy on *Supporting Newcomer Pupils* (DENI 2009) in which the Department clarified the roles and responsibilities of schools, the Department the Inclusion and Diversity Service and the Education and Training Inspectorate for Northern Ireland.

Finally any discussion of linguistic diversity in Northern Ireland must make reference to the Irish language. There has been in recent years a resurgence of interest in the indigenous Irish language, which traditionally had been taught only as a second or third language and predominantly in Catholic schools. Indeed there are now 21 stand-alone Irish medium schools across Northern Ireland attended by 2608 pupils (less than 1% of the school population), as well as 12 Irish-medium units attached to English-medium host schools (DENI 2010). As these schools are attended by local pupils, they do not however form part of the later discussion.

In light of the international literature and contextual situation, the study set out to answer the following research questions:

- (i) What are the attitudes of teachers (and others in the school community) towards newcomer pupils?
- (ii) What are the opportunities and challenges faced by schools in welcoming these newcomer children?

(iii) What language strategies are currently being implemented to support the integration of newcomer pupils with English as an Additional Language?

### **Methodology**

The sample for this study was a cohort of teachers and other educational professionals who attended a Continuing Professional Development course on a part-time basis in one institution which specialises in Teacher Education in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Interest in this new course was so high that an additional course had to be offered immediately afterwards to meet the demand. This in itself can be seen as emblematic of the urgency with which serving teachers were/are in need of additional support as they face the unprecedented challenges of so many newcomer children in their schools.

In accordance with ethical standards (BERA 2004), steps were taken to obtain voluntary informed consent, ensuring that all participants in the research understood the process in which they were engaged, and how the data would be used and reported. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw at any stage from the research, and were assured that the data collected would be treated confidentially and anonymously. Participants were made aware that the data would be stored securely and used solely by the researchers for the purposes of this study.

The structure of the questionnaire reflected the research questions (see above) and was as follows: (i) background detail of respondents - where they taught, numbers of pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) (ii) teacher attitudes towards newcomer pupils (iii) opportunities and challenges of diversity, and (iv) school and classroom strategies for supporting language development of newcomer pupils. The question items comprised a range of open and closed questions, recognising the potential shortcomings (in terms of irrelevant information or lack of guidance) of too many open-ended questions or conversely the limitations and inflexibility of too many closed

categorised questions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007). The questionnaire was first piloted to address issues of reliability, validity and practicability (Oppenheim 1992; Morrison 1993).

Following the piloting process, all 70 participants on the course were invited to complete the revised questionnaire, which was distributed in class and collected anonymously. In total 44 respondents completed the questionnaires (a response rate of 63%).

### **Results**

#### ***Background Information***

Just over half (52%, n=23) of the respondents were primary school teachers, while more than a quarter taught in post-primary schools (30%, n=13). Among the other respondents were pre-school teachers, adult literacy tutors, peripatetic outreach literacy tutors and part-time supply teachers.

For the majority of the teachers who responded to the questionnaire, the numbers of pupils with EAL remains relatively small, with almost half reporting that they currently had no such pupils in their classes, but expected this situation to change in the coming years. Among those who *were* teaching pupils with EAL, most commonly they had just one or two pupils in their class, with the school total averaging 18 pupils. When asked about the origin of these pupils, of those who reported teaching pupils with EAL, 45% (n=20) reported that they had pupils from Eastern Europe (mostly Polish but also significant numbers of Lithuanian children), 41% (n=18) taught pupils from Asia (mostly Chinese and Indian but also some Philippino), while only 10% (n=4) had pupils from other Western European countries in their classes (mostly Portuguese).

#### ***Attitudes towards newcomer pupils***

In a series of questions respondents were asked to assess their attitudes towards newcomer pupils. Using a ranking scale of 1-5 (where 1 was 'not at all positive' and 5 was 'very positive') 79% (n=35) reported that they

held either 'positive' or 'very positive' attitudes towards these children. This figure was lower for the perceived attitudes of other teachers (69% [n=30] 'positive' or 'very positive'), and, interestingly, considerably lower for the perceived attitude of native-speaker parents (only 44% [n=19] 'positive' or 'very positive').

In additional comments recorded on the questionnaires there was a strong sense that these newcomer children offered more opportunities than challenges, but that teachers were urgently in need of support and strategies to face what for most was a new phenomenon for which they had to date received no formal training (whether in preservice or inservice courses).

When the first Polish pupils came to our school and into my class, I thought it was great because our numbers were low and this would give us a much-needed boost. They were also lovely children. The other pupils (and I!) knew nothing about Poland then, but we do now: it has been a very positive learning experience for all of us. (Primary teacher)

I have no problem with all these new pupils from other countries: in fact I think it gives us a great chance to talk about diversity and respect. (Post-Primary teacher)

Great opportunities for us! Just wish we had learnt more about teaching in a multicultural classroom when we were in College. (Primary teacher)

**Opportunities and challenges of diversity**

A further series of questions explored the issue of diversity in more detail: how the presence of newcomer children contributed to greater intercultural understanding but also how the same presence could create problems which needed to be addressed in the school context. First the cultural potential of the presence of EAL pupils was investigated through a question which proposed a number of positive opportunities which might be offered. Respondents were asked to judge which of the opportunities had been exploited in their class. The results are displayed below (Table 1).

**Table 1: Exploitation of Positive Opportunities offered by Newcomer Pupils**

Positive opportunities	Percentage of respondents
Learning about another culture	95%
Learning tolerance	85%
Learning about social relationships	73%
Learning about another religion	66%
Learning and using words and phrases from another language	66%
Learning about geography	63%
Learning about history	27%

The results show that almost all (95%, n=42) of the respondents recognised that the presence of immigrant children presented an opportunity to learn about another culture, with 85% (n=37) reporting that the children were also able to learn about tolerance at the same time. Almost three quarters of the respondents (73%, n=32) also recognised the potential to learn about social relationships. Interestingly the cultural aspect appears to have been exploited to a greater extent than

the religious or linguistic aspects (both 66%, n=29). Only a quarter (27%, n=12) of the teachers in the survey reported that they had taken the opportunity to learn more about history through the presence of children with EAL, although this may be due in part to the sheer diversity of origin of the children.

In order to promote further the concept of diversity, 57% (n=25) of respondents noted that their schools

displayed other languages (e.g. on signs), but only 48% (n=21) displayed multicultural objects and a mere 41% (n=18) made efforts to bring EAL pupils' parents into school. Many respondents noted that they promoted diversity through assemblies, multi-cultural events, food tasting, the marking of festivals such as Chinese New Year, citizenship in the post-primary curriculum, and providing opportunities for the non-native children to talk about their own cultural background. In one school a non-native father comes in to the primary school, cooks a traditional dish, and talks about it using a PowerPoint presentation. In another case a primary school principal explained what their school does in the local area to try to reach out to the newcomer families as a whole:

We set up a project to support families arriving into the area. We provide English classes for mums and dads and family members. We have art/cookery/baby massage classes to help integrate families.

In terms of addressing racial or ethnic prejudice, many teachers recognised the value of circle time discussions (in primary schools in particular), assemblies, the use of reading texts which deal with diversity issues, tackling the issue of prejudice through the citizenship curriculum, promoting the school buddy system, and coffee mornings to enable native and non-native parents to meet and get to know each other.

Finally respondents were asked if they had experienced any specific behavioural problems with newcomer children in their classes. Almost half of the respondents (48%, n=21) noted that they had not experienced any such problems and indeed many remarked on how well behaved the children were and on how they made considerable efforts to progress in their learning of English. One post-primary teacher who had Greek and Lithuanian pupils in his/her class claimed that the pupils were generally very well behaved and were "more advanced academically for their age". Moreover they noted that the pupils "seem to have a more positive attitude to education" and they "seem to understand fully the importance of education and often comment

on the standard of discipline in Northern Ireland as being rather low in comparison to their country of origin". Another teacher in a primary school, where 70% (n=31) of the pupils were Indian, reported that the presence of these children helped teach good manners to the local children!

In contrast the remainder (52%, n=23) of the respondents did acknowledge that there were some specific behavioural problems with newcomer children and here the responses focused predominantly on pupils' frustration and boredom (especially during primary literacy) as well as attention-seeking behaviour and emotional outbursts. One primary school teacher explained:

Usually the children are keen to learn however behavioural problems can occur when they become frustrated, especially in subjects like RE [Religious Education].

Another post-primary teacher outlined what they saw as a 'classic' case where a newcomer pupil with EAL was poorly accommodated by the school with very negative consequences:

A girl [with EAL] in our school was set in the lowest ability class due to her language skills (she did not know much when she arrived). She was also taught (withdrawn from class) with other SEN students (non-EAL speakers), therefore her general attitude changed. Even though she is bright and has taken up the language so extraordinarily well, she doesn't show any ambition and finds school in general boring and is not willing to improve.

School and classroom strategies for supporting language development

In terms of language support offered to newcomer pupils with EAL, a number of trends can be discerned from the questionnaire data. It is clear that many schools are engaging in a broad range of strategies both in and out of the classroom to facilitate the language development of children with EAL. First, on a whole-school level, a majority of schools (59%, n=26) carry out an initial assessment of the child's talking and listening, reading and writing skills, most commonly conducted by

the class teacher either with an assessment instrument or through informal observation. Following this initial assessment, in 60% (n=26) of the schools represented, pupils are withdrawn from class for specialist EAL support, while a further 23% (n=10) of schools provide in-class support from another adult. Over half of the schools (60%, n=26) also operate a buddy system where a native speaker pupil is paired with a child with EAL to offer ongoing practical support and, importantly, friendship throughout the school day.

Second, there are interesting conclusions to be drawn from the respondents' attitudes towards the various

classroom methodologies for supporting the language development of the children with EAL. Respondents were given a list of possible classroom strategies and asked to say if they had found them effective. The results are displayed below (Table 2). From the table it can be seen that there is broad agreement on what works best in the classroom to support children with EAL: the most effective strategies were perceived to be the use of visual aids (found effective by 84% [n=37] of respondents), displaying key vocabulary (70%, n=31), providing key words in advance (65%, n=29) and engaging the children in active, collaborative tasks (65%, n=29).

**Table 2: Teacher Feedback on Effective Classroom Strategies for Working with Children with EAL.**

Effective Classroom Strategies	Percentage of respondents
Providing visual aids	84%
Displaying key vocabulary	70%
Providing key words in advance of a lesson	65%
Providing active, collaborative tasks	65%
Using other pupils to demonstrate or act out	58%
Providing a differentiated way of answering questions	58%
Role Play	56%
Providing a writing frame	49%
Displaying learning intentions	47%
Preparing a text in advance to make it more accessible	47%
A home-school journal	42%
Having a specific language target in the classroom	40%
Providing charts or grids or outlines to complete	35%
Providing a summary of the learning points to take home	28%

A further area of focus in the questionnaire aimed to determine what teachers saw as the most important needs for the children with EAL in their schools. Respondents were given a list of seven possible needs and were asked to rate these on a scale of 1 (least important) to 5 (most important). Here the results reveal that teachers saw the greatest needs to be to learn enough English to interact socially and to access the curriculum fully (in both cases 98% [n=43] of

teachers saw the needs as 'important' or 'very important'). A further 91% (n=40) of respondents thought that the need for a supportive adult was 'important' or 'very important'. Respondents felt that it was less important for pupils to be part of a multi-cultural environment (68%, n=30), for them to have buddies (63%, n=28), and for them to be given the opportunity to use their own first language in the classroom (36%, n=16). A number of other suggestions

were made by several respondents such as the need for good home-school links and a welcome booklet (either in simple English with visuals or translated into the pupil's first language). Some of the respondents noted with some frustration that it was difficult to establish links with parents of children with EAL, partly due to linguistic difficulties and partly because of a perceived unwillingness on the part of some parents to engage with the school.

Finally in terms of language itself, respondents were asked to identify challenges facing the teacher in relation to EAL pupils. The vast majority of teachers agreed that challenges included finding enough time for one-to-one support and time to adapt lesson teaching, as well as finding and making resources and visual aids. Others added challenges such as the difficulty of developing closer home-school liaison, because of linguistic and cultural differences; the short length of time which some of the EAL children spend here before returning to their native country; the continuing difficulty of integrating EAL pupils into the wider school population, particularly if there is a large single group of common ethnic origin; the need for training for staff, not least classroom assistants; and combating negative attitudes among colleagues and native-speaker parents. For most however the largest single challenge remains that of time, as the following comments exemplify:

The biggest challenge is the first few weeks when a child with no English arrives. I feel guilty for not spending enough time with them and what do you give them to do? How do they fill in a long day? Practical subjects are fine – but they can't colour/cut out all day!! (Primary Teacher)

The main problem is that you either teach the EAL pupils or the rest of the class. As a teacher your loyalty is with the majority. It is difficult to even find 10 mins per day for the EAL pupil without interruptions and this is not really satisfactory. (Primary Teacher)

Teachers also noted the valuable contribution offered by other organisations such as the new Northern Ireland Inclusion and Diversity Service (see section 5 below), interpreting services, outreach support, student

teachers and local church volunteers, as well as the value of cluster meetings and the sharing of good practice among neighbouring schools.

### Discussion

It is clear even from this small-scale study that the challenges faced by teachers in Northern Ireland are considerable, both in terms of the new cultural diversity brought by the immigrant children in recent years, but also by the linguistic challenge of working with children for whom English is not their first language.

However in many parts of the world the extent of cultural diversity in Northern Ireland in terms of the percentage of pupils with EAL, less than 2.5% (DENI 2010), would not merit attention at all. In inner London, for instance, around 54.1% of the pupils have English as an additional language (DCSF 2010). The issue however, as the Northern Ireland devolved administration admits itself (OFMDFM 2005b, p.22) has been the "speed and extent" of the increase of migrant children into a province which historically and especially over the previous four decades has been characterised more by migration (due to political instability, social unrest and economic weakness) than by immigration. Consequently, the subject of how to accommodate the needs of pupils with English as an Additional Language rarely featured on preservice course programmes, and where multi cultural education did exist, it tended to concentrate on bringing together the two indigenous Protestant and Catholic traditions in Northern Ireland, rather than focusing on wider cultural diversity (Hagan & McGlynn 2004).

Moreover, this study suggests that in most cases the incoming numbers of pupils with EAL is on average just 18 per school, with teachers having to work on average with just one or two pupils with EAL in their classes. However as Tatar and Horenczyk (2003) suggest, this relatively low influx of newcomer children into schools can actually lead to a higher incidence of "diversity-related burn out", as the number of pupils may have fallen short of the critical mass required to instigate



whole-school planning and resourcing. Further research would be required to investigate further the link in this study between the number of pupils with EAL per school and the degree of stress experienced by the teachers in the school.

Given the concerns raised by the participating teachers in the study there are a number of recommendations and conclusions which must be noted:

First, in areas where there are significant numbers of newcomer pupils, there is a need for greater training of inservice teachers to be made available, both in terms of broader multicultural education and also in relation to teaching children with EAL. In this case some part-time Continuing Professional Development courses (such as the one which forms the focus of this study) do exist, but they were slow to be developed, are few in number, and tend to be concentrated in Belfast, making them harder to access for teachers in more remote areas of Northern Ireland. The potential for online/distance learning must be explored as a priority. From this study it is evident that there is a particular need for guidance on practical strategies for schools in supporting children with EAL, from the initial welcome through to the assessment of their level of English and their allocation to the right class. However this study has also highlighted that there is a need for training for inservice teachers in tackling the management of diverse classrooms to ensure that all pupils remain motivated and on task in their learning.

From the review of the literature it is clear that there is also merit in facilitating study visits for teachers to other countries and/or other schools closer to home which have already developed effective strategies to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of the newcomer pupils. As Youngs and Youngs (2001) further suggest, the need for training and encouragement is often greater among male teachers than their female colleagues.

Second, there is a need for better classroom resources to be made available centrally and more quickly. Since the collection of the data for this study, the new

Inclusion and Diversity Service in Northern Ireland has launched three new Toolkits for Diversity (post-primary, pre-school and special education) in March 2010 to add to the existing Primary toolkit, launched in 2007 (SCoTENS 2010). Speaking at the launch of the toolkits, Northern Ireland Minister of Education Caitríona Ruane expressed her commitment to the dissemination of the toolkits to every school and noted the enrichment which the new diversity has brought to the country:

Over recent years we have been given the opportunity to welcome many newcomers who have chosen to work and raise their families all over Ireland. This has enriched the diversity of our population, our cultural perspectives and has greatly changed the range of languages here and we are very grateful for that. However, for our newcomer pupils there can be very many challenges, not least the language barrier.

Each toolkit has four sections: Section 1 ("Getting Ready") tackles issues which schools must face to be welcoming and inclusive; section 2 ("Early Days") focuses on the integration of newcomer pupils with a particular emphasis on language and communication; sections 3 and 4 ("Moving On" and "What next?") reflect the fact that the effective inclusion of newcomer children is an ongoing process.

While the publication of such toolkits is clearly welcomed, it is clear from this study that such resources have been in considerable demand for several years now in Northern Ireland and ought to have been made available much sooner than has been the case. Moreover the publication of a resource should not be seen as a substitute for high-quality training of teaching staff in how to use the resources contained within.

Third, this study would suggest that there is considerable variation among schools in Northern Ireland regarding the extent to which the presence of immigrant children is fully exploited in the curriculum. While positive and creative examples did emerge from the study (such as the newcomer parent who was invited in to cook) there remain many schools which are

still failing to embrace the wealth of opportunities presented to learn about the language, religion, history or geography of another country and indeed to form more meaningful relationships with the parents and families of these newcomer children. Once again, it is hoped that future training, resourcing and sharing of models of good practice between local schools will lead to schools being able to seek out opportunities to integrate the opportunities for diversity into everyday classroom teaching.

Fourth, in the literature the one body of opinion which is regrettably missing is that of the voice of the newcomer children themselves. If schools are serious about adhering to Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF 1989), then it is of central importance in the formation of policy and practice on both a macro and micro level to listen to the experiences of the newcomer children and to ask them what schools could do better to facilitate their learning. From the paucity of research in this area it is clear that too often the views of the very newcomer children themselves are overlooked. Further research into this area is urgently needed.

### Conclusions

The challenges faced by Northern Ireland are in many senses not unique: they have been experienced in many parts of the UK and the world where there have been positive outcomes as a result of an investment of training, resources and the sharing of expertise. What is perhaps unique is that Northern Ireland, as a province which is still emerging from conflict has seen such an influx of migrant workers and their children as a “peace dividend” over the last decade.

The remaining irony and perhaps the biggest challenge still to be resolved is that although the past few years have seen a marked increase in cultural and linguistic diversity in classrooms in Northern Ireland (in terms of newcomer pupils from across Europe and beyond) the vast majority of pupils are still taught in a school system segregated along religious lines with state-controlled (de

facto Protestant) and Catholic schools. In facing up to the cultural and linguistic challenges presented by newcomer children, perhaps teachers will in the process come to develop the skills necessary to take this next and perhaps even bolder step towards a *truly* diverse school system for Northern Ireland.

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