

# **OIDEAS**

**Earrach/ Spring 2005**

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## Nóta ón Eagarthóir

San eagrán seo d'*Oideas* táimid ag filleadh ar an ngnáthfhormáid agus cuirimid páipéir de shaghsanna éagsúla, nach bhfuil aon cheangal ar leith eatarthu, faoi bhráid ár léitheoirí. Baineann siad go léir le hábhar, áfach; baineann tráthúlacht leo agus ciallóidh siad rud éigin, a bheag nó a mhór, don speictream leathan den phobal oideachais a ndéanaimid freastal orthu.

Sa pháipéar ag an **Dr Treasa Kirk** ar na féidearthachtaí a ghabhann le teagasc comhoibritheach maidir le múinteoireacht agus foghlaim a fheabhsú, rianaíonn sí cúlra stairiúil na teicníce bainistíochta ranga seo agus déanann sí iniúchadh ar an mianach atá ann chun tuiscint leanaí a fhorbairt. Is cabhrach áisiúil an léirmheas a dhéanann sí ar an taighde is bun le cleachtaí comhoibritheacha agus, rud atá antábhachtach, leagann sí amach ina céimeanna soiléire sraith pleananna ceachta a chuirfidh ar chumas oidí an teoiric a choigeartú chun cuid dá stráitéis ranga a dhéanamh de.

Déanann an **Dr Brian Mac Giolla Pádraig** iniúchadh ar an gcomhthéacs stairiúil as ar fhás cumainn tuismitheoirí agus díríonn sé ar an tábhacht mhéadaitheach a leagann rialtais ar thuismitheoirí mar chomhpháirtithe i bhfiontar an oideachais. Rianaíonn sé torthaí suirbhé a rinne sé ar ghafacht tuismitheoirí i mbunoideachas sa tír seo agus is é tátal a bhaineann sé as ná gur beag scoil a bhfuil cumann ionadaíoch do thuismitheoirí inti ainneoin go bhfuil cumann tuismitheoirí ag beagnach gach scoil sa tír. Ag éirí as sin déanann sé amach go bhfuil gá le gníomh oifigiúil a dhíreodh ar shaghsanna áirithe scoile agus aicmí áirithe tuismitheoirí nach bhfuil, de dhealramh, a gcion ionadaíochta acu sna scoileanna sin ina bhfuil cumainn tuismitheoirí bunaithe.

Nóisean is ea meastóireacht a ghineann míshuaimhneas i measc oidí agus is é a áitíonn **Ronan Ward**, bunmhúinteoir, ina pháipéar go dtiocfadh le hoidí, ach dóthain ullmhúcháin a dhéanamh, breathnú ar an bpróiseas mar bhealach fiúntach chun a gcuid gairmiúlachta a fhorbairt. Rinne an Dr Catherine Furlong an talamh seo a threabhadh i bpáipéar ar an téama céana in *Oideas 47* áit a ndúirt sí go raibh an mheastóireacht ar cheann de na hionstraimí ab fhearr ag scoil chun cur ar a cumas bheith ina haonad fuinniúil a thagann i dtír ar bhuanna na múinteoirí uile. Áitíonn an tUas. Ward go dtiocfadh leis an meastóireacht cur ar oidí bheith freagrach as a bhféinforbairt agus go laghdódh sí an t-uaigneas nó an t-aonrú a mhothaíonn a lán múinteoirí. Ach is bunriachtanas an rúndacht chun é sin a bhaint amach agus sin a fhágann cruachás ag rialtais a shíleann meastóireacht a nascadh le tuarastal agus ceardchumainn fhaiteacha múinteoirí a gcuireann na himpleachtaí inní orthu.

Múintear na mílte leanaí ar fud an domhain i suímh ilranga agus ní beag an chorrabhuais a chuireann sé ar scoileanna aghaidh a thabhairt ar leagan amach nua seachas an gnás oide in aghaidh an ranga má bhíonn orthu malairt chleachtais a tharraingt chucu i ngeall ar athruithe i gcúrsaí daonra. Ní hé an chuid is lú den chorrabhuais chéanna sin an inní ar oidí nach mbeidh siad os cionn a mbuille leis an socrú nua agus go dtitfidh na caighdeáin. Ach dearbhaíonn an **Dr Catherine Mulryan Kyne** go léiríonn taighde idirnáisiúnta nach mbíonn aon difríochtaí

suntasacha idir torthaí cognaíocha agus neamhchognaíocha daltaí, bídis i ranganna singile nó in ilranganna. Tagraíonn sí dá cuid taighde féin a léiríonn chomh casta is atá sé tuiscint a fháil ar an dóigh a bhfeidhmíonn ilranganna agus ar an dóigh a dtarlaíonn teagasc agus foghlaim iontu. Déanann sí iarracht daoine a chur ar a suaimhneas sa mhéid go ndeir sí gur dóichí gur mó go mór a bhraitheann foghlaim thorthúil ar fheabhas na modhanna múinte ná ar straitéisí eagraithe. Níl aon amhras uirthi ach go bhfuil an leagan amach ilrangach níos deacra ná an rang singil, ach tugann sí faoi deara i gcás oidí a n-éiríonn leo i suíomh ilrangach go n-úsáideann siad an t-am go cruthaitheach agus go n-éiríonn leo dul in oiriúint do na tosca ina mbíonn siad. Agus os rud é gur beag atá ar eolas faoi nádúr an teagaisc ilrangaigh agus a chomhthéacs, níl amhras uirthi ach go bhfuil géarghá le tuilleadh taighde san achar seo.

Oidí nach bhfuil cur amach acu ar theagasc na mbodhar, soiléireoidh páipéar **Robert Fourie** dóibh é, agus iad siúd ar saineolaithe iad sa réimse sin ba cheart go bhfaighidís nithe solasmhara agus fiú nithe dúshlánacha ann. Is údar imní dó stádas íseal Theanga Chomharthaíochta na hÉireann agus meánn sé an t-áiteamh a dhéanann lucht na labhartha (iad siúd a sheasann an fód ar son modheolaíochta labhartha) i gcomparáid le lucht na láimhseála (iad siúd a mholann úsáid a bhaint as Teanga Chomharthaíochta mar a seasann comharthaí seachas focail do choincheapa). Agus é ag tagairt 'd'fhinscéalta fill' (mar shampla an nóisean gur amhlaidh a mhúintear teanga agus nach ngabhtar í), ní léir dó cúis ar bith nach bhféadfadh leanbh bodhar ar bith teanga a shealbhu sa ghnáthshlí má chuirtear Teanga na Comharthaíochta ina threo: dealraíonn sé nach ndéanann an inchinn aon idirdhealú idir teangacha na comharthaíochta agus teangacha labhartha toisc go bhfuil saintréithe teanga acu araon. Sa deireadh iompaíonn sé ar an gcleachtas coitianta leanaí bodhra a chur le chéile i scoileanna éisteachta. Cuireann sé cúpla fainic orainn ar eagla gurb é contrárthacht a bhfuil á lorg a bheadh mar thoradh. Molann sé go gcuirfí samhlacha teanga i bhfoirm teangairí do Theanga na Comharthaíochta ar fáil chomh maith le cúntóirí ranga ar úsáideoirí dúchais Teanga Comharthaíochta iad.

Bhí rith an áidh leis an Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta chomh fada is a bhain le mianach na n-oidí úd a chuir iad féin chun cinn mar ábhair chigirí ceoil thar na blianta. Aimsíodh fir mhórchumais lándíograis agus shaothraigh siad go heiseamláireach ar son na Roinne. Tá cuimhne fós orthu sna scoileanna agus tráchtar orthu le meas mór. Ach ar airigh mórán daoine trácht ar Peter Goodman? Ba é céad chigire ceoil na hÉireann é agus déanann **Mary McAuliffe Ryng**, bunmhúinteoir, cur síos ar a shaol agus ar chúinsí a linne i bpáipéar a mbaineann cruinneas taighde agus mórchuid faisnéise leis. Bhí baint lárnach ag Goodman leis an gceol a thabhairt isteach sna bunscoileanna sa bhliain 1900 agus bhí baint an-lárnach aige le hoiliúint inseirbhíse a chur ar fáil d'oidí ó cheann ceann na tíre. B'éachtach an fear é cinnte, agus is iomaí duine a mhisnigh sé fan na slí. Ag leanacht di, pléann Ms Ryng an chodarsnacht idir an soláthar inseirbhíse a bhí ann breis is céad bliain ó shin agus an chaoi a bhfuil cúrsaí faoi láthair, is trua léi ré na gcigirí ceoil bheith thart agus impíonn sí go mbunófaí seirbhís chomhairleach le haghaidh ceoil sna scoileanna.

Cuirfimid gach a bhfuil anseo faoi bhráid ár léitheoirí le súil go mbainfidh sibh idir thaitneamh agus thairbhe as an saothar.

## EDITORIAL COMMENT

This edition of *Oideas* reverts to its more usual format and offers readers a variety of papers that are linked in no particular way. But they are relevant and timely and each one, to some degree at least, will have a certain resonance for the wide spectrum of the education community that we serve.

In her paper on the possibilities of enhancing teaching and learning through co-operative learning, **Dr Treasa Kirk** details the historical background of this classroom management technique and explores its potential for the development of children's understanding. She provides a useful review of the research that underpins co-operative practices and, importantly, she sets out in clear steps a series of lesson plans that will enable teachers adapt the theory to form part of their classroom strategy.

**Dr Brian Mac Giolla Phádraig** looks at the historical context that has led to the establishment of parents associations and highlights the growing importance attributed by governments to parents as partners in the education enterprise. He outlines the results of his survey on parental involvement in primary schools in this country and concludes that although the majority of schools do have a parents association, many nevertheless operate without a representative body for parents. This leads him to highlight a need for official action to target certain types of schools, and some categories of parents too, who do not appear to be adequately represented in those schools where in fact a parents association has been established.

The notion of appraisal can generate considerable unease among teachers but primary teacher **Ronan Ward** argues in his paper that with an adequate level of preparation teachers can come to see the process as a valuable means of developing their professionalism. Dr Catherine Furlong underlined this in her paper on the same theme in *Oideas 47* in which she characterised appraisal as one of the best instruments available to a school to enable it become a dynamic entity that capitalises on the talents of all its staff. Mr Ward argues that appraisal has the potential to enable teachers assume a greater responsibility for their own growth and can reduce the sense of isolation felt by many. But, a critical element in securing this is a requirement of confidentiality and therein lies the dilemma for governments who seek to link appraisal with pay, and for fearful teacher unions that are fearful of the implications.

A great many children throughout the world are taught in multi-class settings and the prospect of changing from the old scenario of one class to one teacher generates no little anxiety in those schools that are faced with a reorganisation along these lines because of changing demographics. Much of the unease is rooted in a fear of failing to cope and that standards will suffer, but in her paper on multigrade class arrangements **Dr Catherine Mulryan Kyne** asserts that international research on multigrade teaching has shown no significant differences between the cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes of pupils in single-grade and multigrade classes. She refers to her own research study that serves to highlight the complexity involved in attempting to understand how multigrade classes function and how teaching and learning take place therein, and offers some reassurance in her observation that successful learning is likely to be more dependent on the quality of instructional practices than on mere

organizational strategies. She is in no doubt that the multigrade classes scenario of any kind is a more difficult prospect than the single-grade but she finds that successful multigrade teachers use time creatively and successfully adapt to the setting in which they find themselves. And, given that so little is known about the nature of multigrade teaching and its contexts, she is in no doubt that further research in the area is necessary.

Readers who are unfamiliar with the teaching of the deaf will find **Robert Fourie's** paper illuminating, and those who are specialists in the area will find much therein that is enlightening and perhaps provocative. He is concerned about the low status of Irish Sign Language and considers the rival claims of the oralists (those who champion an oral methodology) and the manualists (those who advocate the use of Sign Language, with signs representing concepts and not words). Referring to 'insidious myths' (such as the belief that language is taught and not acquired), he sees no reason why any deaf child cannot acquire language normally once exposed to Sign Language: it appears that the brain does not distinguish between signed and spoken languages as both have the formal properties of language. Finally he turns to the widespread practice of mainstreaming deaf children into 'hearing schools', he tenders some caveats lest what is achieved becomes the opposite of what is intended and he calls for access to language models in the form of Sign Language interpreters and classroom assistants who are native users of a Sign Language.

The Department of Education and Science has been fortunate in the quality of those teachers who have offered themselves as prospective music inspectors down through the years. People of great talent and admirable commitment were recruited and they served with great distinction. They are remembered and are still spoken of in schools. But who has heard of Peter Goodman? Goodman was Ireland's first music inspector and in a well-researched and informative paper primary teacher **Mary McAuliffe Ryng** details the life and times of a man who played a central role in the introduction of music to primary schools in 1900 and who subsequently played a vital part in the delivery of in-service to teachers throughout the country. Truly he was a remarkable man who inspired a great many. Further, Ms McAuliffe Ryng goes on to contrast the provision of in-career development some one-hundred years ago with that of today, she laments the passing of the music inspectorate and she makes a plea for the establishment of a music advisory service for schools.

We commend these papers to our readers in the confident hope that they will find them a source of some stimulation and pleasure.

Treasa Kirk

## **ENHANCING TEACHING AND LEARNING THROUGH CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING**

*Treasa Kirk, PhD, is an inspector of schools with the Department for Education and Science. She previously worked as deputy principal and primary school teacher and has been involved in the design, organisation and delivery of professional development courses for teachers. She has completed training modules on co-operative learning, conflict resolution, assessment and leadership at the Co-operative Learning Centre, University of Minnesota and has served as curriculum trainer with the Primary Curriculum Support Programme. In 1997 she was awarded a Doctorate at Trinity College for her research on co-operative learning.*

*ABSTRACT: The term group work is used whenever a teacher decides to organise activities in small groups. Co-operative learning belongs to this category of group work, but not all group work in classrooms is co-operative learning. Within co-operative learning we can distinguish several different strategies, from very simple structures to more complex methods of instruction and learning. This paper attempts to highlight that co-operative learning entails more than arranging furniture in a non-traditional way, and raising questions to discuss in 'the group'. Having defined co-operative learning and outlined its historical background, the paper summarises the research on co-operative learning and gives an overview of the different models of co-operative learning. A detailed description of the organisational principles of the 'Learning Together' model and the teacher's role is provided. The concluding section focuses on a description of an experimental study undertaken in a primary classroom in Ireland, while the appendices address practical issues in relation to the successful implementation of co-operative learning.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

*'Teamwork divides the task and doubles the success.'*

The *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) reflects the educational, cultural, social and economic aspirations and concerns of Irish society. One of the aims of primary education as outlined in the curriculum is to enable the child to develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others and to contribute to the good of society (*Primary School Curriculum: Introduction*, 1999, p.7). The classroom is a microcosm of our society. Students come from different cultures, religions, ethnic groups, socio-economic backgrounds and possess different ability levels. This diversity can have a positive or negative effect on the classroom, depending largely on whether structures are organised along competitive, individualistic or co-operative lines.

From the perspective of co-operative learning, education no longer centres solely on the traditional three R's of reading, writing and mathematics, but is extended to include the development of relationships, respect and responsibility in students. The need for the teacher's instruction to take into account the personal development of students as well as their academic development is highlighted in the *Education Act, 1998*, section 22(1). The objective of promoting best practice in pedagogy is further affirmed in section 6(f) of the *Education Act, 1998* with regard to the diverse needs of students and the development of skills and competencies in teachers.

The paper begins with a definition of terms associated with co-operative learning. The next two sections detail the historical background of this classroom management technique and consider the rationale for using co-operative learning. A synthesis of the relevant research is presented, benefits of co-operative learning are highlighted and attention is drawn to criticisms of the approach. An outline of the various models of co-operative learning is next presented. This is followed by a description of the organisational principles, both formal and informal, of the "Learning Together" model of co-operative learning. Examples of three other models namely 'Jigsaw', Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD) and 'Complex Instruction,' are presented in Appendix A. The following section considers the importance of the teacher's role in facilitating a co-operative lesson. Finally a summary of the research outcomes of an action research study undertaken in a primary school in an urban disadvantaged setting in Ireland is provided.

## **DEFINITION OF CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING**

It is important at the outset to differentiate between co-operative learning and co-operative teaching. Co-operative teaching, or team teaching as it is often described, is a method of organising teaching in which large numbers of pupils are taught by teams of teachers, as opposed to the more traditional one-teacher-per-class system (Page et al, 1977). It differs from collaborative teaching, where each teacher is informed of what the other is doing but the work done by each may be distinct and separate (Blythman and MacLeod, 1990). Mixed ability teaching, where pupils of a wide range of abilities and aptitudes are taught together at the same time (Page et al, 1977) differs from co-operative learning in that the co-operative learning groups place a stronger emphasis on the promotion of interdependence.

Co-operative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together towards a group goal to maximise their own and each other's learning (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1993; Slavin, 1987). A co-operative group may be defined as two or more individuals in face-to-face interaction, each aware of his/her membership in the group, each aware of the others who belong to the group, and each aware of their positive interdependence as they strive to achieve mutual goals (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1993). It involves the formation of carefully structured heterogeneous, mixed ability groups who work together co-operatively to complete assignments, study for tests or solve problems. Sharan and Sharan (1994) see the different backgrounds, values and abilities of co-operative group members as a group's greatest asset. Within co-operative learning groups, students are given two responsibilities (1) to understand and learn the assigned material and (2) to make sure that all other members of their group do likewise. Students therefore have two means of succeeding, academically and socially.

Each student in the group is accountable and responsible for doing his/her share of the work without "coasting" or "hitchhiking" on the efforts of others. If appropriately structured, individuals seek outcomes that are beneficial to themselves and to all other group members. If in difficulty, group members are encouraged to request help from each other, remembering the motto "Asking for help is a strength and not a weakness". The members need each other to succeed as a group and are positively interdependent. The mentality of the group should reflect a "WE" rather than a "ME" type thinking.

Co-operative learning involves more than assigning students to groups and instructing them to work together. It involves students not just working *in* groups, but working *as* groups (Hargreaves, 1994). The explicit teaching, role-playing and practising of social skills (e.g. explaining, checking, listening and encouraging others) to maintain effective working relationships highlight a major difference between co-operative learning and traditional, unstructured small group activities. Co-operative learning requires students to engage simultaneously in task-work and teamwork. It is a student-centred approach reflecting the principle of shared leadership. It teaches basic life skills including listening, respecting the viewpoint of others, communicating effectively, resolving conflicts and working together to achieve a common goal. Students are actively engaged in evaluating their own learning and provide feedback to each other on their behaviours during the teamwork sessions. Co-operative learning gives teachers more instructional flexibility to accommodate the increasing heterogeneity in schools.

## **ORIGINS OF CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING**

The idea of students working co-operatively is not a new concept in education. As early as the first century Quintilian argued that students could benefit from teaching one another. Seneca, the Roman philosopher, promoted co-operative learning through such statements as "Qui Docet Discet" (When you teach, you learn twice). Comenius (1592-1679) also believed that students would benefit both by teaching and being taught by other students. There was a strong emphasis on co-operative learning within the Common School Movement in the United States in the early 1800's. Dewey (1924) as part of his well-known project method of instruction encouraged teachers to place students in groups to investigate and solve problems.

The social interdependence perspective theory, developed by Koffka during the early 1900's and refined by Lewin (1935) has guided research on co-operative learning (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1993). Koffka proposed that groups were dynamic wholes in which the interdependence among members could vary.<sup>1</sup> Deutsch expanded on the theory of co-operation and competition in the 1940's. He conceptualised two types of social interdependence: co-operative, where students are positively interdependent and view others in positive ways, and competition, where students are negatively interdependent and see others as a threat to their success. Deutsch's basic premise was that the manner in which interdependence is structured determines how individuals interact with each other, which, in turn, largely determines outcomes. Consequently there are three types of learning environment teachers can create in their classrooms. This theory of co-operation and competition had a major influence on David Johnson, who with his brother Roger began to develop and apply the ideas of Deutsch to education by training teachers in the use of co-operative learning in the classroom in the mid 1960's.



From their efforts the Co-operative Learning Centre in Minnesota was established in 1975 and the "Learning Together" model was developed in 1978. Educationalists such as Cohen (1994), Davidson (1990), Kagan (1993), Sapon-Shevin (1999), Sharan (1994), Slavin (1998), Smith (2003) and others have continued to research and build on these theories to the present day.

Following an extensive review of the research, it is evident that co-operative learning has received very little attention in educational research in Ireland (Kirk, 1997), despite the fact that *Primary School Curriculum* of 1971 placed great emphasis on the importance of guiding students to develop understanding through exploration, discussion, practical work and on learning "by doing." Egan (1981) found that discovery methods were used to a much greater extent in infant and junior classes than in middle and senior classes in the teaching of mathematics in primary schools in Ireland. The results of a survey undertaken by Department of Education Inspectors in Ireland showed that insufficient time was devoted to oral work and that too much emphasis was placed on textbooks and workbooks (Kellaghan, 1985). A report of the International Assessment of Educational Progress (Lapointe *et al*, 1989) revealed that compared to pupils in the other samples, Irish pupils tended to spend a relatively large amount of time listening to the teacher or working alone, and comparatively little time working in groups. The findings of *Fifty School Reports: What Inspectors Say* (2002) point out that while whole-class and group teaching are reported on, inspectors conclude that a greater emphasis is placed on whole-class teaching approaches in primary schools in Ireland. This publication notes that only up to 15% of inspectors' reports give credit to primary schools for encouraging co-operative learning and paired learning. In these cases inspectors recommend the development of whole school policies on teaching methodologies, a greater use of group work and differentiated learning, more activity-based learning and more attention to individual needs. The fact that collaborative/co-operative learning is one of the approaches and methodologies advocated in *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) has important implications for educational practice in Ireland with regard to the future research of teaching and learning outcomes, both academically and socially.

Competition, while it brings out the best in some people, means winning for a few and losing or failing for most. The motto of a competitive classroom is "*If I win, you lose, if you win, I lose.*" It must be acknowledged that competition has a positive value if students are taught to compete against their own previous achievement in a co-operative setting. In an individualistic setting, students work alone, at their own pace and compete (if they choose to), against themselves to see how much they can accomplish. Individualistic efforts teach students that success is dependent on one's own efforts and that others are irrelevant to one's success. The motto of an individualistic classroom is "*We're all in this alone.*" In the co-operative setting, students view their peers as important and valuable sources of knowledge. They have an opportunity to interact, to listen, to share their views, to celebrate their accomplishments with their team members within their co-operative groups. Unlike most forms of group work, co-operative learning is carefully structured to ensure pupils take responsibility for their own learning and to seek outcomes that are beneficial to all in the group. The teacher is no longer the major resource. The motto of a co-operative classroom is "*We need each other in order to succeed.*"

The three types of setting (competitive, individualistic and co-operative), which teachers create, all help students develop particular attitudes towards other students, teachers or other adults.

As many students have learnt to operate mostly in individualistic and competitive ways within the home, school and community, children need to be given the opportunity to learn and practise the skills necessary for effective and productive group work.

## **RATIONALE FOR USING CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING**

Society has gone through immense change in recent years, and the effects of these changes become very evident when we look at the lifestyles of today's school children. A 1999 survey in the United States reported that children between the age of two and seventeen with access to home computers and video games spent an average of 4 hours 48 minutes per day in front of a television screen or computer monitor (Stanger and Gridina, 1999). The television and the computer screen occupy children's attention for much more time than the time spent in interacting with family and friends. Concern has also been raised that children who form "electronic friendships" with computers instead of friendships with their peers might be hindered in developing their interpersonal skills (Griffiths, 1997). More than one-fifth of all children between the age of eight and eighteen report having a computer in their bedroom (Roberts *et al*, 1999). This research suggests that the computer may be used frequently in solitude, robbing children of time for other social activities and interfering with the development and maintenance of friendships. By the time the average person reaches the age of seventy, he/ she will have spent the equivalent of seven to ten years watching television (Strasburger, 1993). This may be one of the key contributing factors to the lack of basic social skills such as listening, sharing, taking turns and resolving conflicts constructively. Yet these skills have never been more important for success in school and college, in the home and in the workplace, arguably as important as academic skills taught in classrooms. For today's employers an employee must be flexible, co-operative and caring, with an ability to work with others, adapt, change and learn new tasks.

Co-operative learning is a flexible classroom management methodology, which can be adapted and integrated into every subject area and at every level of education. In a co-operative learning classroom, children actively engage in learning that involves discovery, inquiry and problem solving. Both teachers and children benefit in that there is a deepened interpersonal communication present, as children are more involved and assume responsibility for their own learning and behaviour. Children receive the opportunity to explain material to their classmates in a simple manner. Such exploratory talk and discourse help children internalise new ideas, formulate new concepts and regulate and monitor their own performance (Gettinger and Stoiber, 1999 cited in Westwood, 2003). Self-regulation in learning requires the student to think about his/her thought processes, to talk to oneself and modify his/her learning strategies, to weigh up possible alternatives and to seek outside help if necessary (Westwood, 2003).

It is wise to master the fundamentals of this classroom management technique and assimilate various methods and approaches within the technique over time. Johnson and Johnson (1998) have suggested that it takes three to five years to become skilled at implementing co-operative learning in the classroom. The principles of co-operative learning are equally applicable to school development planning procedures and staff development programmes.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING?

The benefits of co-operative learning have been well documented in more than 800 studies (Cohen, 1990; Slavin, 1989; Johnson and Johnson, 1990; Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1998). The long-term academic and social benefits are overwhelmingly positive (Putnam, 1997; Slavin, 1985; Johnson and Johnson, 1989). Much of the research to date has focused on the comparative effects of co-operative, competitive and individualistic learning structures. Many positive outcomes have been demonstrated with the use of co-operative learning including higher achievement, increased motivation, more positive interpersonal relations among children (McGagh, 1998), more positive attitudes towards subject area and teacher, greater commitment towards learning and improved social skills (Slavin, 1983, 1990; Johnson and Johnson, 1989a, 1990; Nastasi and Clements, 1991, Cohen and Lotan, 1997).

Co-operative learning has been shown to help children learn course material faster, retain it longer and to develop critical reasoning power more rapidly than working alone (Sapon-Shevin, 1994). Other studies have shown that co-operative learning experiences tend to promote increased self-esteem and improved attitudes towards school (Stoll and Fink, 1996; Kirk, 1997; Johnson and Johnson, 1989, 1994) and interracial friendliness and trust (Slavin, 2001). Children view teachers who utilise co-operative learning groups in their classrooms as fairer than teachers who do not, and they like those teachers and school better (Johnson and Johnson, 1989). Carefully structured co-operative activities are effective both cognitively and linguistically and give public status to learning and achievement (Wrigley, 2000). Westwood (2003) believes that co-operative learning has the effect of increasing transactional talk (i.e. talk specifically directed to another and requiring a reply) by almost three times the level present under whole-class conditions. The benefits of working together in small groups are also highlighted in *Social, Personal and Health Education Teacher Guidelines: Primary School Curriculum* (1999) and in *Draft Curriculum Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities* (2002).

Slavin (1995) refers to over one hundred studies comparing the achievement of students using co-operative learning to traditional teaching methods over periods of at least four weeks. The results have consistently favoured co-operative learning as long as (a) some kind of recognition or group reward is provided so that group members see it in their interest to help group members learn (O' Donnell, 1996) and (b) there is individual accountability. Studies of co-operative learning methods that incorporate group goals and individual accountability also show substantial benefits in achievement levels and in all types of school (Ellis, 2001; Slavin, 1995).

## CRITICISMS OF CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING

According to Harris and Aldridge (1983) teachers are slow to implement co-operative learning due to concerns about accountability, the giving up of control of the classroom, the perceived lack of parental support and the fear that ultimately less learning will occur. Training students to work effectively in groups, the establishing of new procedures and the planning for group work all require additional time and effort (Hawley and Rosenholtz, 1984).

McGagh (1998) found that the preparation necessary for co-operative learning classes was time consuming but believes it was time well spent when one considers the benefits for the children especially the low achievers. Stoddard and Pike (1990) refer to the concern reported by many teachers and students that the more capable students would be left with the responsibility for all the work. Matthews (1992) reported that many gifted students were resentful or uncomfortable with co-operative learning structures. Johnson and Johnson (1993) rejected this criticism on the basis of the small sample size of fifteen students and the lack of a clear definition of a “gifted child”. Linnemeyer (1992) suggests that in heterogeneous co-operative groups the gifted students have no one who can adequately give them the critical feedback assumed to produce high achievement. On the other hand researchers have suggested that co-operative learning can be beneficial for gifted students particularly if teachers are well trained and the process is implemented well (Gallagher, 1991; Mills and Durden, 1992; Slavin, 1991). Gifted students seem to benefit as they provide elaborate explanations to classmates (Brown and Palincsar, 1989; Collins, Brown and Newman, 1989; Webb, 1985).

Slavin (1985) suggests that there is an inherent danger that the low-achieving students in heterogeneous co-operative teams may have little to contribute and that the high-achieving students may belittle the contributions of the low-achievers. There is a great possibility of this difficulty occurring if all students involved do not possess the necessary social skills to cope in such a situation. This potential disadvantage however is overshadowed by research evidence documenting the effectiveness of co-operative learning strategies. Sapon-Shevin and Schniedewind (1992) argue that if co-operative learning is to reach its full potential, it must be embraced as a teaching philosophy and a set of principles, rather than as a teaching gimmick.

## **CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING APPROACHES**

Although all co-operative learning approaches are based on peer interaction, there is some variation within the field of co-operative learning in terms of how much specific attention, time and emphasis is placed on the explicit teaching and evaluation of students’ social behaviours and social skills during co-operative learning. There is no one “right way” to develop co-operative learning. Teachers will quickly see ways to adapt co-operative learning methods or develop new models that match the unique requirements and range of needs of an individual class. Factors such as the age of students, their own particular teaching style and lesson content need to be considered. Co-operative learning may be structured either formally or informally.

Slavin (2003) suggests that co-operative learning methods fall into two broad categories. Group study methods (Slavin, 1996) involve students working together on a well-defined body of information or on well-structured problems or tasks (Cohen, 1994). The other category is often referred to as project-based learning or active learning (Stern, 1996). Such tasks may focus on open-ended problems, which typically have less of a clear expected outcome or instructional objective. Webb and Palincsar (1996) refer to such methods as collaborative learning methods.

## INFORMAL CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING STRUCTURES

Informal co-operative learning groups last from a few minutes to one class period. An example of informal co-operative learning is when students are requested to turn to the person sitting next to them and check each other's spelling, explain a concept or summarise the main points of a lesson. Other informal co-operative learning structures include paired reading, summary pairs, book report pairs, interactive writing pairs, paired maths, peer editing pairs, team projects, homework check-up pairs, computer groups, roundtable (written) and roundrobin (oral). Numbered Heads Together, developed by Spencer Kagan (1989), is a method of reviewing information that has been previously presented through direct instruction of text. Students are numbered off in groups of four, the teacher poses a question, students huddle to determine the answer, the teacher calls a number, student/students may respond in unison or individually. This approach works well with unambiguous factual questions that allow students to come to a consensus. It is also useful for recall or comprehension. In Team-Pair-Share, developed by Lyman and associates (1981), a problem is posed, students think alone about the question and record a possible solution. After a specified amount of time the students discuss and compare answers with a partner, share with another pair and finally with the whole class. Team-Pair-Share is a valuable methodology for all discussions. Informal co-operative learning methods lacking group goals and individual accountability have not generally had positive effects on student achievement (Chapman, 2001; Klein and Schnackenberg, 2000; Slavin, 1995).

## FORMAL CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING STRUCTURES

Formal co-operative learning groups using specific roles generally last from one class period to several weeks. Co-operative base groups are longer-term groups and may last for a term or up to a year. There is a wide variety of formal co-operative learning structures including Teams-Games-Tournament (DeVries and Slavin, 1978); Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (Slavin, 1983); Co-operative Integrated Reading and Composition (Slavin, 1987); Team Accelerated Instruction (Slavin, 1991a) and Group Investigation (Sharan and Sharan, 1976). Each of these approaches shares the concept of a co-operative goal structure and exhibits much diversity in terms of task structure and reward structure. The main thrust of this paper is on the "Learning Together" model of co-operative learning. The reader is referred to Appendix A in which an outline of the Jigsaw method, Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD) and Complex Instruction is provided.

### ***"Learning Together" Model***

The "Learning Together" model of co-operative learning is based on the work of Johnson and Johnson (1978). The following features of the "Learning Together" model distinguish this approach from others.

- 1) *It involves the explicit teaching of social interpersonal skills necessary for group functioning.*
- 2) *It emphasises team-building activities before students begin working together.*
- 3) *It should be continuous with the curriculum rather than an isolated add-on and engage students in exploring and applying the content currently being taught.*

- 4) *During a co-operative learning activity, each working group of three/four students works on the same task simultaneously and pools his/her resources. Only one completed activity sheet is submitted from the group. Each student within the group makes his/her own verbal/written contribution to this activity*
- 5) *As in complex instruction, students are assigned specific roles (tasks) in order to facilitate the smooth running of the group work.*
- 6) *Students are given the opportunity to reflect on and self-evaluate their own helpful and unhelpful behaviours during co-operative group work.*

Johnson and Johnson (1994) highlight the importance of ensuring that there is evidence of shared leadership, shared responsibility and direct instruction of social skills for the successful implementation of co-operative learning. The teacher's role is one of observer and mediator, intervening by asking questions, encouraging students, suggesting possibilities on specific academic and co-operative interactions and providing feedback during group processing. For co-operation to work well, Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1993a) propose that the following five essential elements be included in each lesson:

- (i) Positive Interdependence*
- (ii) Individual and Group Accountability*
- (iii) Face-to-Face Promotive Interaction*
- (iv) Teaching Students Social Skills*
- (v) Group Processing*

Each of these elements will be described in turn in the following paragraphs.

*(i) Positive Interdependence*

Research shows that co-operative learning is only effective in promoting students' achievement when the groups are structured so that the students are positively interdependent and individually accountable (Johnson and Johnson, 1989; Slavin, 1995). Positive interdependence involves the giving of a clear task and group goal, so that students believe that they sink or swim together (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1994). It is the building block and the glue that holds the group together. Petty misbehaviour issues are eliminated if positive interdependence is sufficiently strong. When group members perceive their potential contribution to the group as being unique, they increase their efforts (Harkins and Petty, 1982). There must be a "one for all and all for one" attitude present. This relationship does not happen automatically and must be continually encouraged by the teacher.

Interdependence occurs in a group when students realise that it takes all members to achieve a predetermined goal (Breedon and Mosley, 1991a). As in any team sport, no one player can score without the help of his/her team-mates. Similarly, in a co-operative group, students must believe that each person's effort is needed. The success of one depends on the success of the others. Positive interdependence has been established when students are engaged in their work and willingly encourage each other to learn. Typical productive behaviours include using quiet voices, staying with the group, sharing materials, asking for and offering help, actively listening, explaining and checking for understanding, using encouraging words and gestures and staying on-task.

In all classrooms teachers are familiar with students who resist group work, students who strive to dominate a group, those who piggyback on the work of others and those students who tend to be passive and withdrawn. Positive interdependence provides an extrinsic motivator for students and creates peer encouragement and support for learning. In time and with a conscious and continuous effort from the teacher, students will internalise the reasons why co-operation is valuable. Through practice and experience, students become intrinsically motivated to work together as a team and enjoy learning.

The creation of positive interdependence is necessary and can be achieved using a combination of the following strategies:

*a. Teambuilding*

Teambuilding and friendship building strategies are essential to the successful implementation of co-operative learning. The purpose of these exercises is to initiate relationships, to give students practice at sharing feelings, to encourage openness, trust and risk-taking. Teambuilding creates enthusiasm, trust and mutual support, which lead to more efficient academic work (Kagan, 1992). Teambuilding results in the creation of an inclusive classroom, where students learn to value their own uniqueness and respect others. Kagan (1992) identifies five aims of teambuilding within a classroom: getting acquainted, building class identity, experiencing mutual support and valuing individual differences and synergy. Synergy refers to the increased energy released when individuals are working in co-operation.

*b. Environmental Interdependence*

Classroom organisation and arrangement are central to lesson planning in co-operative learning. Almost all student and teacher behaviours can be affected by the way the classroom is arranged (Johnson and Johnson, 1994).

*c. Identity Interdependence*

Group cohesiveness is reinforced when students select a mutual identity through a unique group name, flag, logo, motto, rosette, song, group mobile or some other symbol of their joint identity, thus reflecting each group member's interests, hobbies and goals.

*d. Resource Interdependence*

Co-operation is promoted when each member of a team realises that s/he does not personally have all the resources required to achieve the goal and therefore must share the resources with other members (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec 1998). Lessons are far less likely to be disrupted by misbehaviour when suitable material and equipment are carefully prepared and readily available (Fontana, 1995). Limiting the resources given to any group will strengthen positive interdependence.

*e. Positive Goal Interdependence*

Positive goal interdependence exists when a mutual/joint goal is established so that individuals perceive that they can attain their goals if and only if their team members attain their goals. Success is only achieved when all members of the group succeed. Being responsible for others' success as well as for one's own gives co-operative efforts a meaning that is not found in competitive and individualistic situations (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec 1998).

*f. Task Interdependence*

Positive interdependence can be achieved through a division of labour so that each member has to complete his/her task in order for the next group member to complete his/her responsibilities. Each member may make a separate contribution to a joint product.

*g. Role Interdependence*

The allocation of roles and responsibilities to students has a positive effect on classroom organisation (Fontana, 1995). Positive role interdependence exists when each member is assigned complementary roles that specify responsibilities that the group needs in order to complete a joint task. Such roles are vital to high quality learning and help ensure equal participation (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec 1998). Role cards, which may be pictorially represented, provide team members with a visual reminder and clear understanding of what to say and how to perform their assigned roles, thus preventing dominance by some students. They help the group achieve its goals and help members maintain effective working relationships with each other. Students should be assigned both task and maintenance roles. The roles prescribed will depend on the task given to the group. Examples of task roles include: reader, recorder, explainer, checker of understanding, summariser and time-keeper. Students may be assigned group maintenance roles such as praiser, encourager of participation or active listener. Different academic tasks require different roles. Roles should be rotated within each co-operative group, so that each member has an opportunity to experience each role in order to strengthen weaker skills, reinforce stronger skills and learn new skills. Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1998) highlight the importance of prior direct instruction of the skills represented by the assigned roles in co-operative learning groups.

*h. Reward Interdependence*

Students' efforts to learn and promote each other's learning are increased when they know their efforts are observed, recognised and celebrated (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1998). Students should preferably be rewarded on the basis of pre-set criteria, which are realistic, achievable and sufficiently challenging for all students. Extrinsic rewards are helpful in assisting students to make the transition from competitive and individualistic learning to co-operative learning. Extrinsic rewards may be removed as soon as the intrinsic motivation inherent in co-operative learning is developed i.e. when students feel rewarded by simply wanting to work with the group.

**(ii) Individual and Group Accountability**

After positive interdependence, the key variable mediating the effectiveness of co-operative learning is a sense of personal responsibility for contributing one's efforts to accomplish the group's goals. The success of co-operative learning in increasing student achievement depends substantially on the establishment of group goals and individual accountability (Slavin, 1998). There are two levels of accountability that must be structured into co-operative learning groups. Group members must be accountable for achieving their own goals, completing their individual share of the work and facilitating the work of other group members. Co-operative learning needs the contribution of each member, thereby ensuring that no individual shirks his or her responsibility, as can happen in unstructured group work. Individual roles or tasks are assigned to each group member for this purpose.



The group members must be clear about their goals and be able to measure their progress in achieving them and the individual effort of each of their group members. As each student has a specific task or role to perform, students are accountable to peers as well as to the teacher. Individual accountability arises, not only from the daily random selection of individual students to explain how to do specific problems, but also by regularly assessing individual students. This assists in the identification of students who need additional assistance, support and encouragement. Personal responsibility is therefore promoted by individual accountability. Group accountability may be achieved by ensuring that each team is responsible for completing one assignment signed by each individual member. Students may complete a practice assignment co-operatively and then undertake the actual assignment individually. This reinforces the content of the lesson, particularly for students with learning difficulties and/ or special educational needs.

### **(iii) Face-to-Face Promotive Interaction**

For co-operative learning to work well a high degree of face-to-face promotive interaction must take place. Promotive interaction occurs as individuals become personally committed in encouraging and facilitating each other's efforts in reaching the group's goals. To obtain meaningful face-to-face interaction, the size of the groups needs to be small with two to four members (Johnson and Johnson, 1998). Co-operative learning groups provide both an academic and personal support system for teacher and students. These support systems are developed when students promote each other's successes by sharing resources, explaining, giving and receiving help, teaching each other, listening attentively, connecting past and present knowledge, encouraging and praising each other's efforts to learn. As face-to-face promotive interaction among group members increases, so does accountability to peers, ability to influence each other's reasoning and conclusions, social support, social modelling and interpersonal rewards (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1993).

### **(iv) Teaching Students Social Skills**

It is essential that children participate in an intentionally planned programme of social skills, if they are to develop effective interpersonal skills (Mosley, 1996; Goleman, 1996; *Primary School Curriculum*, 1999). One would be making a mistake to assume that students will demonstrate social skills without building in structures to ensure such behaviour (Cooper, 1990; Johnson and Johnson, 2000). Social skills include using good eye contact, listening, encouraging, checking for understanding, explaining, praising, conflict resolution and many more. Westwood (2003) strongly promotes the need for direct teaching of social skills together with the frequent use of co-operative group work, especially for children with special educational needs. The focus on the need to teach social skills explicitly to students is a particularly appealing aspect of the Johnson and Johnson's "Learning Together" model of co-operative learning.

Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1994) classify social skills into forming, functioning, formulating and fermenting roles. Forming skills are those bottom-line skills without which a group cannot complete the task. These skills include moving into groups quickly and quietly, bringing the necessary materials, staying with the group and using quiet voices. Functioning skills enable group members to work effectively so that the group can accomplish its task and each member can learn the material.

They include skills such as taking turns, encouraging participation, setting and calling attention to time limits, asking for ideas and clarification, offering assistance willingly, using appropriate body language, giving direction to the group's work, paraphrasing to ensure understanding, listening to team members while also reading and recording problems with care. Formulating and fermenting skills include higher-order skills, which deepen students' understanding of the material being learned and provide insights into the points of view of other students. Formulating skills include explaining, restating the problem, checking for understanding, summarising, seeking accuracy and elaboration. The following skills may be categorised as fermenting skills: criticising ideas without criticising people, reaching consensus, differentiating ideas and reasoning, asking for justification of others' conclusions, probing by asking in-depth questions, generating further answers and managing and resolving conflict in a constructive manner.

It is of paramount importance that students in co-operative learning groups are taught the procedures and skills for managing conflicts constructively, as co-operation and conflict are intrinsically related (Johnson and Johnson, 1991). Techniques such as role-play, brainstorming, roundrobin and the use and display of a T-chart to visually describe the skill are beneficial in the explicit teaching of targeted social skills. The skill to be mastered is recorded on top of the T-Chart. On one side of the chart the students list what the skill would look like and on the other side what the skill would sound like. Learning, using and perfecting social skills requires team members to process how effectively they work with each other.

#### **(v) Group Processing**

For co-operative learning to work well, group processing requires the students to discuss at the end of each co-operative activity how well they achieved their goals and maintained effective working relationships. At the end of each lesson students describe (a) what behaviours were helpful and unhelpful and (b) what actions to continue or change. Each co-operative group member engages in meta-cognition when they monitor their own thinking processes, detect errors and make judgements about the material they are studying or discussing. Emphasis on meta-cognition in a co-operative situation may not only directly improve the acquisition of information by the group, but also may serve to generally enhance the meta-cognitive skills of the participating individuals (Johnson and Johnson, 1989). Spurlin *et al.*, (1984) found that knowledge about one's own cognition or thinking processes promoted higher achievement and performance in co-operative rather than in individualistic situations.

Group Processing Reflection Forms may be used in order to focus students on behaviours practised during the co-operative group sessions (see lesson plans in *Appendix B*). Children in junior classes may benefit from the use of pictorial group-processing checklists depicting happy and sad faces. Researchers note that when students are taught social skills, observed by the teacher and given individual feedback with regard to how frequently they engaged in the skills, their relationships became more positive (Putnam, Rynders, Johnson and Johnson, 1989; Johnson and Johnson, 2000a). The teacher gains insights about the learning styles of each individual pupil through a process of systematic observation, which involves monitoring, checking and posing questions to each co-operative group. It is important to give children the opportunity to reflect and comment on their own performance so that they learn to value their own opinion about themselves as well as others' opinions (Mosley 1996).

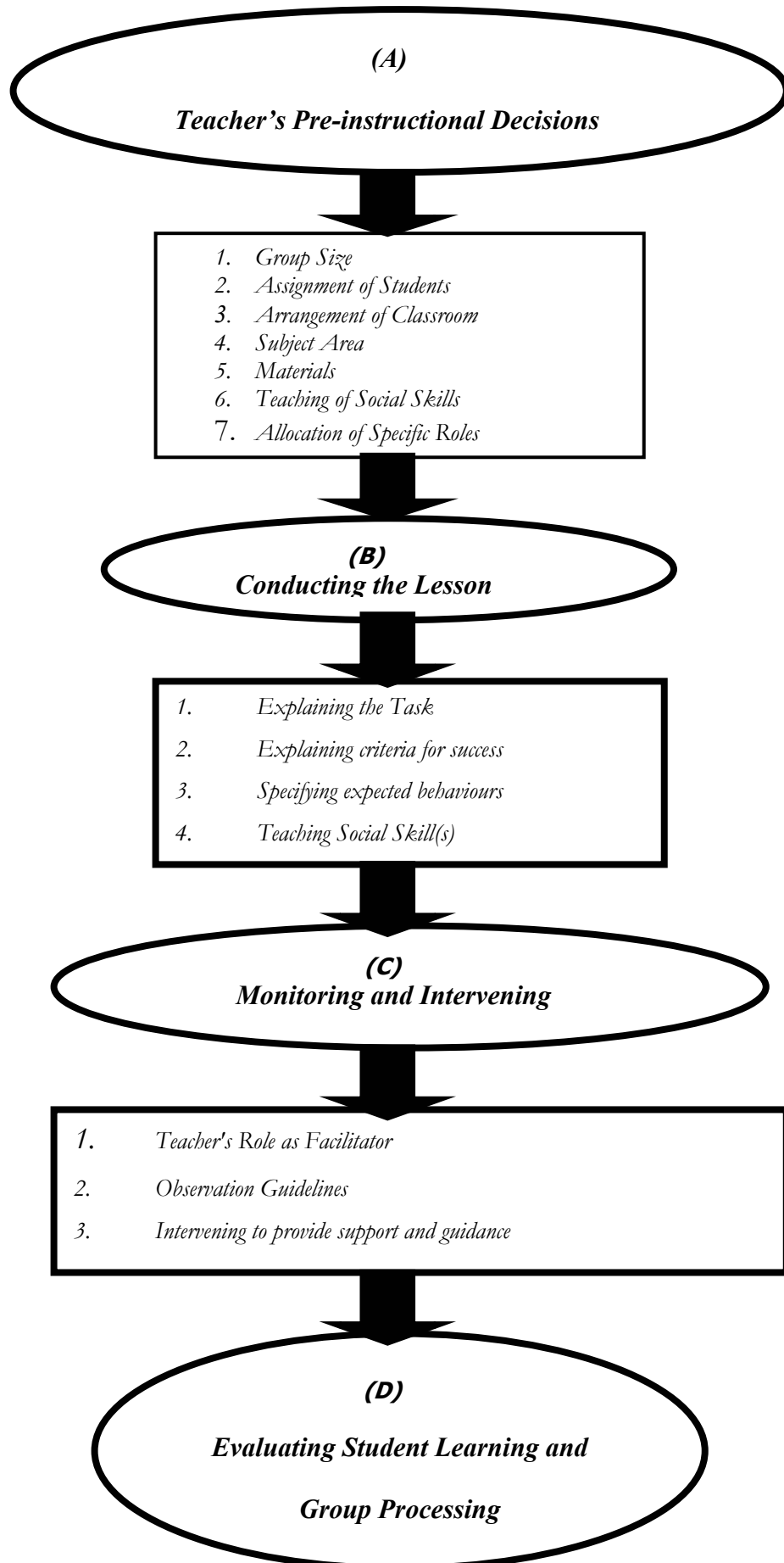
Group processing therefore provides a support structure to nurture social skill development and lays a foundation for group decision-making in the future.

### **THE TEACHER'S ROLE**

Good teaching is an art that blends skill and technique with creativity and inventiveness (Putnam, 1997). The teacher is not only the academic expert and classroom manager, but also the most powerful model in the classroom. As the teacher, one is the creator and curator of the classroom environment (Shaw, 1992). The key to success in co-operative learning is to identify clearly the learning objectives to be promoted using the co-operative technique and to carefully plan and sequence the co-operative learning activity in order to ensure success (Cooper, J. *et al*, 1990). In a co-operative learning environment the teacher acts as a facilitator or “guide on the side” rather than being a “sage on the stage”. Facilitation implies involving students in their own learning. There is a transfer of responsibility from the teacher to the students.

The teacher's role in a co-operative classroom includes the following pre-instructional decisions and stages (Johnson and Johnson, 1994) as displayed in Table 1. These stages are discussed in some detail in the following paragraphs. The readers' attention is drawn to Appendix B, which includes two sample lesson plans for illustration purposes. Appendix C provides answers to frequently asked questions in relation to the implementation of co-operative learning.

**Table 1** *The Teacher's Role (Adapted from Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1994)*

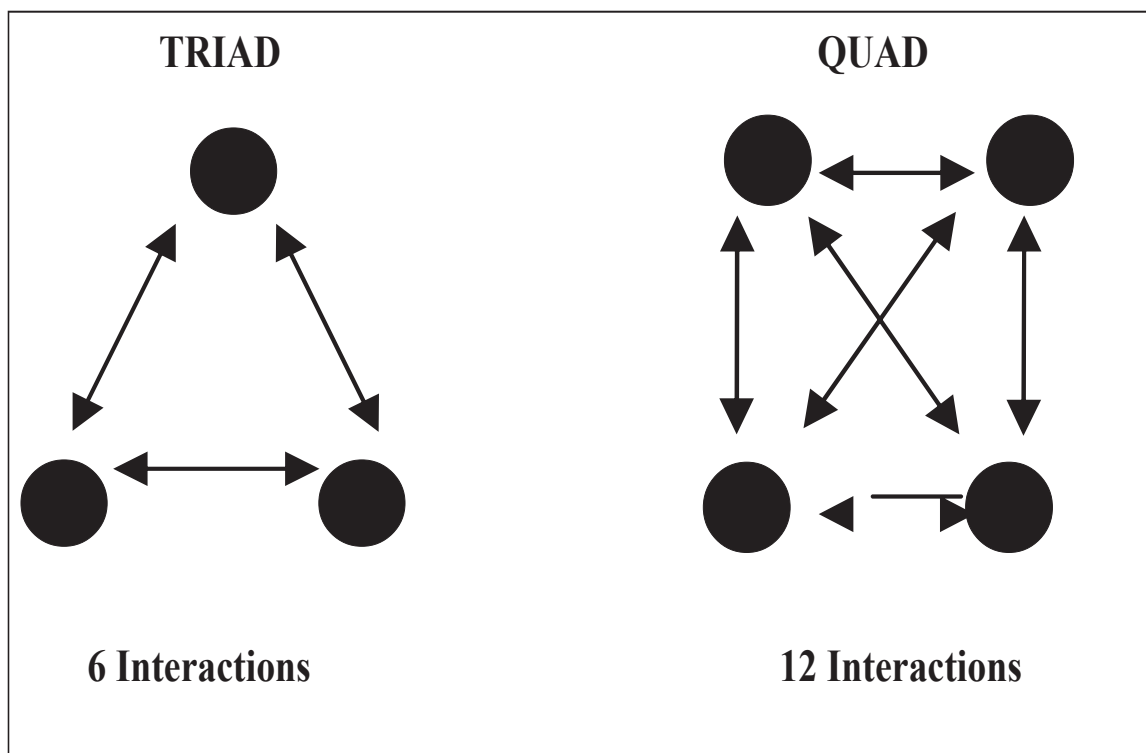


### A. Teacher's pre-instructional decisions

#### Group Size

A smaller group size is beneficial to group success (Dishon and O' Leary, 1994). The student's age and experience in working in teams, the nature of the co-operative activity, the time limits imposed on the lesson, the curriculum materials and the equipment available all affect the determination of group size. Smaller groups are more effective as they take less time to get organised, they operate faster and there is more face-to-face interaction and intimacy among team members (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1993, 1994). The smaller the size of the group, in addition, the greater the individual accountability (Messick and Brewer, 1983). Students should work in pairs until sufficiently skilled to progress to groups of three, as it is difficult to get left out of a pair (Kohn, 1987). As children gain experience in group practices they should be able to work effectively in larger groups (*Primary School Curriculum*, 1999). As the size of the group increases, the interpersonal and small group skills required to manage the interactions among group members become far more complex and sophisticated (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1993). Within each group of three there are six interactions to manage. Within a group of four, students are required to manage twelve interactions as illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2** Possible Interactions within a Group (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1994)



### *Assignment of students*

What determines a group's productivity is not who its members are but rather the members' teamwork skills. It is the differences between group members (e.g. a mix of ability levels, gender differences, different backgrounds and cultures) that make co-operative learning effective. Research highlights that heterogeneous groups work best (Sapon-Shevin, 1994; Slavin, 1985). One of the factors that differentiates co-operative learning from traditional group work is the way the groups are organised. A number of methods exist for assigning students to groups including teacher assignment, random assignment and student self-selection. Teacher-selected groups provide the opportunity to ensure that groups are equally balanced academically and socially and facilitates the placement of socially isolated students, students with special educational needs and/or disruptive students in supportive co-operative groups. Information from a sociometric survey by requesting children to indicate their main friendship choices may be used to determine suitable partners. Such a survey is useful in identifying students who may have low sociometric status in a classroom.

### *Arrangement of classroom*

In order to facilitate rather than inhibit learning, the classroom may need to be arranged so that the students within the co-operative learning groups are in close contact, facing each other and sitting on the same eye-to-eye level in assigned areas of the classroom. Good spatial design and circulation patterns influence the pattern of student and teacher participation in instructional activities and the patterns of communication among students and between students and teachers. They also prevent some types of discipline problems (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1994).

### *Materials*

The task and the particular subject area determine the choice of materials for a co-operative learning activity. In mature groups where group members display a high level of interpersonal and social skills, materials may not need to be arranged in any specific way. However, for a less experienced group it may be necessary to plan the distribution of materials carefully in order to highlight that the assignment needs to be a joint effort. Distributing one set of materials to each group strengthens positive interdependence. Westwood (2003) cautions that group work often becomes disorganised if the group tasks are poorly defined or too complex, if the students lack group-working skills or if the room is not set up to facilitate easy access of resources.

### *Teaching of social skills*

As previously highlighted in the section describing the "Learning Together" model of co-operative learning, subsection (iv) Teaching Students Social Skills, many students need to be directly taught the teamwork/social skills necessary in order to gain the optimum benefits while working in co-operative groups.

### *Allocation of specific roles*

In order to create a situation in which students are dependent on each other, students are assigned specific roles to ensure members work together smoothly and productively. Roles prescribe what other group members expect from each student. Assigning roles to group members is an effective way of teaching students social skills and fostering interdependence (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1993). Assigning group roles to students' current skill levels also differentiates social learning. Roles provide a support structure that ensures participation of all group members. Standard roles include reader, listener, recorder, timekeeper, explainer of ideas, materials manager, checker of understanding, encourager of participation, facilitator and reporter.

### ***B. Conducting the lesson***

Having specified the instructional objectives and made all the pre-instructional decisions and preparations, it is then necessary to clearly define and explain the academic task. Students must have a clear idea of the criteria for success, of the specific expected behaviours and of how they are individually accountable. Members have two responsibilities, to study the assigned material and to ensure that all members of their group understand the assigned material. As positive interdependence is the heart of co-operative learning, it must be structured in a variety of ways to ensure that the students are fully aware of their mutual responsibilities to help each other learn. The teamwork skills required for the co-operative task should be defined as verbal and nonverbal behaviours so that the students know specifically how to perform the appropriate social skills during interaction. The relevant social skills need to be discussed, explained using a T-chart and demonstrated and rehearsed through role-play. It is essential that particular care is taken in planning and structuring the co-operative learning activity by ensuring that the child with learning difficulty experiences success, while at the same time the activity should be sufficiently challenging for the high achiever. The need for careful planning in order to achieve the desired educational and social outcomes is highlighted by Westwood (2003) and is emphasised in *Primary School Curriculum* (1999).

### ***C. Monitoring and intervening***

The quality and extent of monitoring determines the success of co-operative learning (Edwards and Stout, 1989-1990). The teacher, as facilitator of learning, circulates around the room monitoring and scanning in a systematic manner. Students' academic progress and the appropriate use of social skills are observed. In order to ascertain whether a co-operative group is operating effectively Holubec *et al.* (1997, p.7) point out that "you can hear and see the students actually learning .... as students figure things out, help each other learn, and reach into unexpected depths of thinking and understanding". The classroom observation checklist displayed in Appendix D provides some key indicators of effective co-operative learning groups. It may be necessary to teach individual students the skills needed to work effectively in a group. In this way potential problems are detected, student behaviour is redirected and minor difficulties are solved before they become major. The frequency of a specific set of positive behaviours / social skills and the frequency of difficulties a specific group may experience may be recorded using a structured observation form as displayed below in Table 3.

**Table 3** *An Example of a Weekly Social Skills Observation Form*

| <i>Long-Term Group Progress: Weekly Report Form</i> |                   |                          |                            |                       |          |
|---|-------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|----------|
| <b>Group Name:</b> _____                            |                   |                          |                            |                       |          |
| <b>Group Members:</b> _____                         |                   |                          |                            |                       |          |
| <b>Class:</b> _____                                 |                   |                          | <b>Subject Area:</b> _____ |                       |          |
| Date  | Explains Concepts | Encourages Participation | Checks for Understanding   | Completes Assignments | Comments |
|   |                   |                          |                            |                       |          |
|   |                   |                          |                            |                       |          |
|   |                   |                          |                            |                       |          |
|   |                   |                          |                            |                       |          |
| <b>Totals:</b>                                      |                   |                          |                            |                       |          |
| <b>Comments:</b> _____                              |                   |                          |                            |                       |          |
| <b>Difficulties Experienced:</b> _____              |                   |                          |                            |                       |          |
| <b>Other Helpful Behaviours Noticed:</b> _____      |                   |                          |                            |                       |          |

***D. Evaluating student learning and group processing***

The focus during co-operative learning sessions is not only on assessing outcomes but also on improving processes of learning. The teacher and students in the co-operative learning groups check individual student’s understanding of the subject matter, while work is in progress. Following an evaluation and review of the skills observed during co-operative group work, the teacher and individual co-operative learning members provide feedback to team members at the end of each co-operative group session. The administration of tests to each student based on the academic material studied, further establishes learning outcomes.

In order to improve continuously the quality of the group’s task work and teamwork, a conscious effort should be made to allocate a set time for the active involvement of students in group processing each day. It involves analysing how well the students use collaborative skills and emphasises the setting of goals for improvement. During group processing students rate their own performance, discuss their teamwork skills, any helpful or unhelpful behaviours used in the group and decide what behaviours need improvement or change. It is necessary for the teacher to provide students with descriptive and specific feedback regularly in order to ensure commitment and progress. In a comparative study Johnson, Johnson, Stanne and Garibaldi (1990) found that the involvement of the teacher and students in group processing resulted in greater problem solving success than did other co-operative conditions. The majority of students perceived the concept of discussing and evaluating their work during co-operative learning as beneficial (Kirk, 1997).



## RESEARCH STUDY IN IRELAND

As class teacher, the author conducted an experimental action research study to examine the effects of co-operative learning on the development of social skills, self-esteem, academic self-image, friendship patterns, helpful working relationships, academic achievement and student attitudes (Kirk, 1997). This action research was conducted with two different groups of sixth class female students in an urban school with disadvantaged status. The intervention strategy included co-operative learning techniques based mainly on the principles of the Johnson and Johnson (1994) "Learning Together" model. These techniques highlight the importance of directly teaching social skills and emphasise the need for regular group processing.

The Johnson and Johnson model was modified using a reward structure based on Slavin's (1991) work. Slavin believes that group rewards for individual learning are essential to the effectiveness of co-operative learning methods in the improvement of achievement outcomes. Unlike Slavin (1991b) who used rewards for co-operative groups on the basis of achievement only, the author issued certificates to the co-operative groups for improvement in social skills only. The students surveyed were very positive in their views on the use of reward certificates and commented that the rewards received encouraged them to work harder, made them proud of their achievements and helped them feel better about themselves. In order to prevent any feelings of bias towards the co-operative groups, certificates were awarded to the control group on the basis of academic achievement. The author was aware of the "John Henry Effect" in which a control group performs above its usual average when placed in competition with an experimental group using a new method of procedure that threatened to replace the control procedure (Borg and Gall, 1983).

A pre-test post-test control group design was utilised in the action research experimental study. In year one, the research involved a six week action research experiment in the author's classroom of thirty two female students in the subject areas of mathematics (3 weeks) and spelling (3 weeks). Participants were divided into two groups of sixteen students on the basis of achievement using the combined scores of the Micra-T and Sigma-T standardised tests. Care was taken to ensure that there was no significant difference in achievement levels between the two groups. For the first three weeks of the experiment 16 students worked in co-operative groups of three to four members for mathematics during fifty-minute daily class periods, while the remainder of the class were taught mathematics in the traditional whole-class, didactic manner, working alone and independently.

In the mathematics co-operative learning groups, the daily academic objective was to give students practice in exploring the concepts of area and perimeter of regular and irregular shapes and solids. Each co-operative group was given one set of problems to solve on area and perimeter. Students were individually tested at the end of each week. At the start of each lesson the importance of valuing the development of social skills as much as academic achievement was highlighted. Group members were reminded of:

- (a) their two academic responsibilities; to each explain how to solve the assigned problems and to ensure that all other group members could do likewise
- (b) their social skills task to stick to their assigned roles, explain clearly in turns, check for accuracy and encourage other team members

Following the advice of Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1994) the classroom was arranged so that the students within the co-operative learning groups were in close

contact and facing each other and sitting on the same eye-to-eye level. The teacher adopted the role of facilitator of learning. This complex role as a guide who interprets students' learning needs and responds to them is also promoted in the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999).

Care was taken to ensure that there was a student with high, middle and low ability in each co-operative learning team. The same professional acted as independent observer in the triangulation process during the entire study in order to monitor the social skill development of each co-operative group. The independent observer's role involved tallying and recording the frequencies of specific social skills practised by the students while working co-operatively. Structured observation forms were used for this purpose. A reversal of the classroom arrangement was undertaken in English spelling classes over the remaining three weeks of the experiment.

In year two a "literal replication" (Lykken, 1968) was undertaken. A new group of twenty-eight female sixth class students was divided in a similar manner into two main groups, the control group (fifteen students) and five co-operative learning teams of three members each. As in year one, there was no significant difference between the ability levels of the co-operative groups and control groups in year two. The pre-test/post-test control group design was again used.

In order to assess the longer-term effects of co-operative learning on students' attitudes and views, follow-up interviews were conducted twelve months later by an independent educationalist. All students who participated in the year one study were interviewed individually using a structured questionnaire. These students were attending a range of second-level schools at this stage of the study.

### ***Research Methodology and Instrumentation***

The study incorporated both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The following range of data collection instruments was used:

- An Academic Self-Image Scale developed by Joan Barker-Lunn (1970)
- A Self-Esteem Inventory developed by Coopersmith (1967)
- Sociograms to evaluate friendship and helpful working relationship patterns
- Teacher-Designed Mathematics Achievement Tests
- Parallel Spelling Achievement Test developed by D. Young (1983)
- Attitudinal Questionnaires
- A variety of Group Processing Checklists and Group Performance Charts
- Structured Observation Forms
- Structured Interview Questionnaire

### ***Results***

Seven research questions were addressed during the study and the following results were obtained:

- 1) There was a considerable increase in achievement levels of all participants in mathematics within the co-operative learning groups in comparison to the control group. These results are consistent with the findings of Johnson and Johnson (1989), Slavin (1992) and Slavin and Karweit (1984). Students with high, middle and low ability levels working in co-operative groups showed considerable gains in mathematical achievement in both year one and in the replication study.

- 2) The outcome of the research in spelling contrasted with that in mathematics and showed a reversal of results, as the control group in year one showed greater gains than the co-operative group participants. This outcome did not support the findings of Van Oudenhoven *et al* (1987) that co-operative learning methods had positive effects on spelling achievement. This might be explained by an effect of interference between the mathematics and spelling experiments, as the control group in spelling, having just completed three weeks working co-operatively, remained highly motivated.
- 3) An analysis of the pre-test post-test scores displayed an increase in the academic self-image scores of all ability levels in each co-operative learning group in the study.
- 4) An increase in self-esteem levels was evident each year for all students who worked in co-operative groups, particularly among middle and low achievers.
- 5) There were greater changes in the helpful working relationship patterns than in the friendship choices within the co-operative learning groups. This finding was more apparent in year one than in year two. In order to assess any changes in friendship patterns and helpful working relationships from pre-test to post-test, students were requested to choose confidentially, in order of preference, three students whom they would like to have for a friend and three students whom they found especially helpful.
- 6) Triangulation, teacher observation, student questionnaires, parental and teachers' informal comments were used in assessing the gains achieved in the social skills of the co-operative learning groups. All of the evidence collected from these sources indicated that there was a major improvement in the co-operative group members' awareness of social skills. This awareness resulted in a greater frequency in the use of social behaviours such as actively listening to others, appropriate reactions to other's comments, appropriate body language, more responsible behaviour and more positive attitudes displayed towards work and others. The social skill of encouraging was nominated most frequently by the students as the skill most helped by co-operative learning in the follow-up interviews. Other social skills, which had benefited from co-operative learning, according to the students, were eye contact, listening, helping and explaining skills.
- 7) There was almost total unanimity among students of all ability levels in the experimental groups in their preference for working co-operatively rather than individually or competitively.
- 8) Many positive longer-term effects of co-operative learning were evidenced in the interviews undertaken in year two. The entire class of participants of year one, who had experienced co-operative learning in the curricular areas of mathematics or spelling were interviewed. The majority of interviewees believed that they had an improved attitude to school, to various subject areas and to peers as a result of their experiences in co-operative learning groups. Students of all ability levels emphasised the value of rewards and group processing during co-operative learning. The students involved in the research made many positive comments, some of which are included in Table 4.

**Table 4** *Comments of Participants in Co-operative Learning Experimental Study (Kirk, 1997)*

*"I liked encouraging other people and I liked being encouraged"*  
*"I find it easier to mix ideas with people and three heads are better than one"*  
*"It was nice being treated equal"*  
*"It was nice to see someone smile after you encouraged"*  
*"It's easier to learn, you find more friends and I liked the atmosphere"*  
*"I liked being able to talk and help other people understand. You can ask each other questions and encourage each other"*  
*"It is easier to learn in a group as you know others have the same problems as you and it is easier to talk to people of your own age"*  
*"You can remember things better because they keep asking you and checking"*  
*"I used not have much patience. Now I am more understanding of those who don't understand. Before I thought what I could do was what everyone could do"*  
*"I am able to accept criticism much more now. I learnt not to take correction as an insult"*  
*"Our qualities and faults became clear to us through explaining, requesting and sharing our thoughts"*  
*"Not all the pressure was on me"*  
*"I was always included and never left out"*  
*"I behave better towards teachers. Co-operative learning would help you to like the teacher and get on with them and then we wouldn't be messing"*

The results of this research show that there are many positive benefits related to behaviours, attitudes and abilities, arising from co-operative learning, provided it is carefully planned.

## CONCLUSION

There is a growing acknowledgement that combined with whole class teaching and individual work, co-operative learning should be a regular part of daily classroom instruction as students instinctively want to question, discuss, argue and share. It allows teachers to make classrooms more responsive to the full range of learners.

The purpose of co-operative learning is to facilitate students in working together to accomplish goals, to solve problems or complete tasks and ultimately to perform on their own. Because students support each other in the learning environment, some of the stress on the teacher in maintaining order and in keeping the students on task is alleviated (Hannigan, 1989/1990).

The teacher's role as a facilitator and guide is vital in encouraging student discussion and exchange of ideas and thinking so that their communication is on-task and productive. Trust, rapport and mutual respect are some of the benefits accruing to teachers who take the time to establish and maintain a co-operative classroom. For teachers who structure co-operative tasks so that the skills and talents of all students are used and valued, the rewards soon become apparent for students. Students are empowered by the decision-making process and are encouraged to take responsibility for themselves and each other. Peers are in a powerful position to act as models and to challenge each other's thinking. By experiencing effective heterogeneous co-operative groups, students learn to value and respect diversity and the intelligences, perspectives and strengths of others (Schniedewind and Davidson, 2000).

Becoming an expert in co-operative learning is a career-long goal. It takes time for new methods to evolve and it is very difficult to do it alone. Bringing about the active participation and meaningful involvement of all children in co-operative learning groups is challenging. The support and help of fellow teachers and colleagues is needed. For co-operative learning to be truly successful, a whole-school approach is essential where individual teachers' and indeed students' efforts and successes are encouraged. It is important to view the co-operative learning approach not as a wholesale replacement of the traditional direct instruction approach, but instead as a variation or adaptation of this methodology. As Hargreaves (1994) states: "Because active group work is uncommon in most classrooms, co-operative learning undoubtedly offers valuable additions to teacher's repertoires of classroom strategies, especially when they are applied with flexibility and discretion" (pp. 79-80).

#### **FOOTNOTES**

1. <http://www.aect.org/Intranet/Publications/edtech/35/35-04.html>, The Association for Educational Communications and Technology (2001, August 3), *The Handbook of Research for Educational Communications and Technology*.

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## APPENDIX A

### Jigsaw

The 'jigsaw' strategy, developed by Aronson (1978), was one of the first co-operative learning methods developed. *Draft Guidelines for Teachers of Students with Mild General Learning Disabilities* (2002) supports the use of co-operative learning using 'jigsaw' in differentiating the needs of individual students to specific components of an activity. In the jigsaw method, students work in co-operative groups of three or four members and explore a variety of materials relating to a component of the larger topic being studied by the class. Each piece of the jigsaw is independent and all pieces are needed to satisfactorily complete the whole activity. The teacher divides the main task given to each group (e.g. Life in Spain) into sub-tasks (e.g. Education and School Life; Features; Homes and Buildings; Transport and Communication). Each co-operative group member is assigned a letter, which represents either subtopic A, B, C or D. The students responsible for subtopic A all leave their small groups and form a separate group and are responsible for learning about sub-topic A from the text, computer, teacher, peers and other sources. The other students are organised similarly and each group works on sub-topics B, C and D. During this process the teacher facilitates the work of each group, monitors progress and provides additional support to individual students and/or groups in difficulty. After a period of time, all individuals return to their original co-operative group and teach each other the sub-topic studied. Students are then either individually tested or quizzed by the teacher and each student may receive as a grade the average performance of his/her group. In this way there is a greater motivation for all to do well and students simultaneously develop social interaction skills. It may be necessary to continue this process over a number of class periods.

### Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD)

This co-operative learning strategy was developed by Slavin (1995) and is organised on the basis of four phases, teach, team study in mixed ability teams, test for understanding and team recognition. Students take an individual weekly quiz and team scores are computed using an improvement score system based on the amount the student's individual quiz score exceeds his/her past average. Students earn bonus points for team effort. Recognition is given to the teams with the most improved team score. Teams are recognised through the use of a weekly newsletter, certificates or a bulletin board recognising teams with high improvement scores.

## Complex Instruction (C.I.)

In the late seventies Professor Cohen and her associates (1994) developed a co-operative learning structure called Complex Instruction (C.I.) at Stanford University in California. This co-operative learning approach is not only aimed at the optimal participation of all students, but also deals specifically with status treatment and multiple ability treatment in groups of five or six students. Cohen's (1994) research highlights the fact that co-operative groups tend to develop hierarchies, where some members are more active and influential than others. She labels this as status ordering and strongly recommends two strategies which will have some impact on the problem:

- (1) Establishing co-operative norms such as "Everyone participates and helps"
- (2) Giving every student a part or role to play on a well-designed task with the purpose of improving the expectations for competence in groups.

Teachers are responsible for organising, developing or sharing curriculum materials (C.I. Units) in this approach. Such activities are aimed at the acquisition and application of knowledge, the development of skills (e.g. writing, reading, artistic, dramatic, linguistic, social, problem-solving, study skills) and also the nurturing of positive attitudes and mutual respect. A typical C.I. Unit (Van Hoof and Batelaan, 1997) is developed around a central idea or theme in the core curriculum (e.g. *People on the Move*) and consists of five or six different assignments and activity cards with many open-ended questions (e.g. *Why do people move? What are the advantages and disadvantages of moving? Are there differences between countries? Convince others of the advantages of living in your country; If and when I move, what will I need?*) Each assignment is related to the core idea and embraces a variety of skills and different intelligences (e.g. *Writing and performing a play or documentary, designing a poster or informational brochure, composing a song or rap*). In each lesson the different groups are working on different assignments at different work stations. Each student is assigned a specific role in order to encourage optimum participation. If time allows, each C.I. group may also rotate assignments.

## APPENDIX B

### Sample lesson plan (1)

**Subject area:** *Geography*

**Grade level:** *5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> Classes*

**Topic:** *Co-ordinates and Grid References – Introduction to Ordnance Survey*

**Social Skills Practised:** *Explaining, encouraging skills, checking for understanding, taking turns.*

**Lesson Summary:** *Working in trios, the students are asked to complete worksheets, on which they identify items for which grid references are provided, while simultaneously practising social skills*

**Group size:** *Three*

**Assignment to groups:** *Random selection of co-operative groups*

**Materials:** *One pen/pencil, one worksheet, role card.*

**Roles:** *Explainer/Checker for Understanding (combined role); Reader/Recorder (combined role) and Encourager of Participation*

**Time required:** *30 minutes*

**Academic and Social Skills Task:** *Following instruction by the teacher on the benefits of grid references, the students are divided into their co-operative groups to complete the activity. Prior to commencing the activity, the social skills necessary for successful group work and the criteria for success are discussed. Reference is made to the relevant social skills T-Charts. Students are reminded of their respective roles, which may be rotated during the exercise.*

**Criteria for Success:**

***Academic:*** *That each member of the co-operative group is able to explain and plot co-ordinates on an ordnance survey map and contribute to the completion of the assignment.*

***Expected Behaviours:*** *That each student actively participates in the task, performs his/her assigned role carefully and remembers to use positive encouraging words and appropriate body language.*

**Positive Interdependence:** Group members share activity sheet and pen/pencil (Materials Interdependence); each group is responsible for plotting co-ordinates and identifying items located on the map using grid references (Goal Interdependence)

**Individual Accountability:** While monitoring, the teacher selects a number of students at random to plot particular co-ordinates or explain the task.

**Group Processing:** Guide and help students reflect on the use of social skills. Allow a few minutes to discuss some or all of the following statements before choosing groups at random to give a report to the whole class followed by teacher feedback.

- ❖ *We disagreed in a respectful way.*
- ❖ *I used first names when talking to my team members.*
- ❖ *I felt encouraged in my group today.*
- ❖ *As a group we accomplished our goal.*
- ❖ *I really felt good when others in my group .....*

## Sample lesson plan (2)

**Subject area:** *Science*

**Grade level:** *3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Classes*

**Topic:** *Electricity – Lighting a Bulb*

**Social Skills Practised:** *Explaining, encouraging, one person talking at a time (listening), checking for agreement, sharing ideas.*

**Lesson Summary:** *Working in trios, the students are requested to light bulbs by completing a circuit, while simultaneously practising specific social skills.*

**Group size:** *Three/Four*

**Assignment to groups:** *Long-term co-operative groups or randomly selected co-operative groups.*

**Materials:** *Role Cards, a battery, a bicycle bulb and two strands of wire.*

**Roles:** *Explainer (Direction Giver); Checker for Understanding; Recorder; Encourager (all students).*

**Time required:** *30 minutes*

**Academic and Social Skills Task:** *Teacher introduces the concept of a circuit by requesting each co-operative group to hold hands and form a circle in their respective groups. They then discuss the possible outcomes if one group member was a battery transmitting power. Students are then requested to discover ways of getting a bulb to light. Remind students of the need for effective social skills during the science experiment. Give students an opportunity to clarify why they are practising the specific social skill(s). Elicit from students what the skill(s) look(s) like and sound(s) like.*

**Criteria for Success:**

***Academic:*** *That children are able to light the bulb in a number of ways and can orally give an account of how a circuit is formed and describe the function of a switch.*

***Expected Behaviours:*** *That each student stays with their co-operative group, actively participates and practises the skills of explaining clearly and listening to team members without interrupting.*

**Positive Interdependence:** *One set of materials per group (Materials Interdependence), which are located on one table (Environmental Interdependence); Each group will light a bulb (Goal Interdependence); Each group member has a specific task (Role Interdependence); There is also a division of labour (Task Interdependence)*

**Individual Accountability:** Each group member is responsible for explaining the experiment to group members. The teacher also intervenes and checks for understanding while monitoring and facilitating the group work.

**Group Processing (Option A):** Allow 4-6 minutes for group processing. Guide and help students reflect on the use of social skills during the lesson. Students respond with a word or phrase to the following blank spaces.

|  |
|--|
| <p>“We did well on _____ (social skill) and<br/>         _____ by _____,<br/>         _____ and _____<br/>         (3 group behaviours)”</p> |
|--|

**Group Processing (Option B):** Before completing the group processing checklist it is important to stress that all responses are acceptable. Allow 4-6 minutes for students to complete and tick the following statements

|  |          |      |       |
|--|----------|------|-------|
| ❖ We helped each other                               | A little | Some | A lot |
| ❖ We shared ideas                                    | A little | Some | A lot |
| ❖ We smiled at each other                            | A little | Some | A lot |
| ❖ We worked together<br>until the task was completed | A little | Some | A lot |

## APPENDIX C

### Frequently asked questions

- Do I have to change my style of teaching completely in order to implement co-operative learning?

*It is important to remember that co-operative learning is only one instructional method that may be used in the classroom. There is a growing acknowledgement that combined with whole group instruction and individual work, co-operative learning should be a regular part of daily classroom instruction. It may imply a change of role for the teacher from being 'in authority' to being 'an authority' (Popp, 1987).*

- How often should you use co-operative groups?

*Generally speaking, it is recommended that approximately a quarter to one-third of class time be used for co-operative learning strategies in any given school day. Co-operative learning groups should be balanced with other types of instruction including those that are both individualised and competitive in nature (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1994). It is of paramount importance to cater for the multiple abilities and different learning styles of all students. In order to implement co-operative learning successfully, it is important to maintain a co-operative, inclusive atmosphere in the classroom focusing on the promotion of positive behaviour. Stevens and Slavin (1995) cited in Slavin (2003) refer to a study, which found that students in schools that used a variety of co-operative learning methods in almost all subjects for a two-year period achieved significantly better than did students in traditionally organised schools. These effects were particularly positive for the highest achievers and for the students with special educational needs.*

- How long should a formal co-operative learning group remain together?

*In general, group members should stay together long enough to be successful. Students will then have the opportunity to work with different class members and this in turn will help accustom students to the types of transitions that they will encounter in the future, to a new school and to the world of work. To continuously change teams will allow students avoid dealing with any interaction difficulties that may arise. Reassigning group members that are having difficulty working together may be counterproductive; the students then do not get the opportunity to learn the skills they need to resolve conflict while collaborating with each other.*

- Where does co-operative learning fit into current teaching methods?

*Co-operative learning should not replace skill-based and direct teaching methods and approaches, rather it provides an added dimension to lessons, which lend themselves to a group co-operative effort. The Department of Education and Science publication, ‘Fifty School Reports: What Inspectors Say’ (2002) highlights the importance of developing whole school policies on teaching methodologies and the need to use more group work, differentiated activities and activity-based learning in classrooms.*

- Can co-operative learning be used in a multigrade classroom?

*The author has witnessed students working effectively in co-operative learning groups in multigrade situations. Initially, additional preparation is required in order to ensure that the necessary materials are organised and the tasks appropriately differentiated in order to avoid disruption. Some of the class may work co-operatively while a direct teaching approach may be adopted with the remainder of the students. Alternatively, all students may undertake co-operative work simultaneously. Within a co-operative learning group tasks may be differentiated by complexity or quantity. In this instance, while learning is differentiated, support and accountability are co-operative. Co-operative groups may also be used to provide feedback and support to individual students on written or oral problems. Co-operative groups can enhance students’ individualised work during project work, where students check in with their group every few days to receive feedback on their progress. This scaffolded support may be same-age peer tutoring or cross-age peer tutoring. Both approaches work equally well provided all the necessary group-work elements are in place.*

- How and when do you reward co-operative learning groups?

*Positive reinforcement is critical to the success of a co-operative classroom and to motivate students to exert their best efforts. Co-operative group members should be praised and given positive feedback whenever they follow appropriate norms of behaviour and show improvement. It may be necessary to use a variety of extrinsic incentives to encourage students to actively participate during group work. Ryan and Deci (2000) advise that teachers should not refrain from using extrinsic rewards when they are needed. Stipek (1993) emphasises that rewards may be phased out as students begin to enjoy the activity and succeed at it. Suggestions may be elicited from the students for teacher recognition of group success. Slavin (2003) suggests that strategic use of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators is likely to be necessary in ensuring that all students learn.*

- What do you do if one student is doing all the work?

*It may be necessary to increase the positive interdependence by using some team-building strategies. There may also be a need to ensure that the academic task is not only achievable but also sufficiently challenging for each co-operative group member. Students may need several reminders that each member has a role/responsibility and must do his/her own specific job in order to make the group succeed.*



*It is also necessary to randomly question individual students or groups to explain the material or demonstrate the experiment. Students may need to be reminded that they will each receive a weekly individual test or quiz based on their co-operative group work.*

- What do you do if a student is ‘coasting’ on the work of others?

*It may be necessary to ask yourself if it is a lack of skill or a lack of will i.e. does the student have the ability to accomplish the task? Does the student understand the task? There may be a need to provide additional task assistance or modify the task to suit the student’s ability level. The following suggestions may also be explored:*

- *review the co-operative task and ensure the work is relevant, imaginative, sufficiently challenging and enjoyable*
- *increase the level of motivation by highlighting the importance of the task and of undertaking the assignment*
- *use positive body language and voice tone and promote a co-operative atmosphere in the classroom*
- *provide the team with extra team-building activities*
- *provide students with opportunities for success*
- *give students constructive and positive feedback.*

- If students get accustomed to talking during group work, will there be more talking during individual assignments?

*This is a common side effect of co-operative learning. It is the author’s experience that it is essential at the outset to make a clear distinction between co-operative group work and individual assignments. It is also necessary to emphasise to the students that each method of learning/study is important in its own right.*

- Will co-operative learning take a lot of the teacher’s time?

*The initial planning and preparation for co-operative learning can be time-consuming. After a short period, the benefits accruing from co-operative learning will far outweigh the input of time at the earlier stages. As the students’ social skills develop and a co-operative atmosphere is fostered, the teacher will find a reduction in the time spent on organisation, with many students willingly co-operating by providing additional help to their co-operative group team members. This in turn results in a reduction in time management difficulties related to individual student’s disruptive behaviour.*

- Should parents be informed about co-operative learning?

*It is important to inform parents of the rationale for using co-operative learning and the academic and social benefits associated with it prior to and during its implementation in the classroom.*

- Does co-operative learning hinder gifted students?

*Schniedewind and Davidson (2000) point out that those who argue that “gifted” students are not challenged in co-operative groups define learning in academic terms only. Co-operative learning on the other hand seeks both cognitive and affective outcomes. There is considerable evidence to suggest that gifted students seem to benefit by participating in heterogeneous co-operative groups, as they provide elaborate explanations to their classmates (Johnson and Johnson, 1992). Teaching others helps students understand, memorise and retain their own knowledge better. High achievers profit in the development of their leadership skills, self-esteem, social skills, conflict resolution skills and higher-order thinking skills. The challenge lies in ensuring that the co-operative task is differentiated and is not only achievable for the low achiever, but also sufficiently challenging for the high achiever.*

- Can co-operative learning be used as an instructional method to support children with learning difficulties and/or special educational needs?

*Co-operative learning has been advocated as one way to achieve large-scale mainstreaming of students with disabilities and to facilitate an inclusive environment (Conway and Gow, 1988; Fuchs and Fuchs, 1994 cited in Pomplun, 1996). Crawford (1983) highlights that the classroom management and instructional approaches that are effective with students with special educational needs tend to be the same ones that are effective with all students. Generally students with special educational needs not only need direct instruction in social behaviour and regular planned opportunities for social interaction but also need recognition of social improvement through positive reinforcers (Lerner, 2003).*

*Carefully structured co-operative learning groups offer a support structure for students with learning difficulties. It provides the opportunity for students to work together in a unified effort to experience academic and social success, either in the learning-support/resource room and/ or in the mainstream classroom. A large body of data shows that students with learning difficulties working in co-operative groups feel better about themselves and their classmates, and their learning does not suffer, in comparison to students working in individualised or competitive settings (Bryan, 1991). Kamps et al., (1994) cited in Gillies and Ashman (2000) claim that co-operative learning enhances small group interactions and instruction for students with autism and developmental disabilities.*

*Studies of co-operative learning show that in addition to boosting achievement and self-esteem, co-operative learning methods have had positive effects on intragroup relations (Slavin, 1995), attitudes towards school and acceptance of children with special educational needs (Schmuck and Schmuck, 1997; Slavin, 1995, Johnson and Johnson, 1986; Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1993).*

*While acknowledging the need for direct instruction, Gettinger and Stoiber (1999), argue that peer-tutoring activities assist students with special educational needs in modifying and generalising their thinking. It is essential that sufficient teambuilding and class-building activities are used before placing students in groups. It is important to keep the groups small, the co-operative lessons short and each student's role clearly defined. It may be necessary for the support teacher to spend additional time in the explicit teaching of social skills through role-play and discussion. Group processing is an extremely important aspect of the special education co-operative classroom (Breedon and Mosley, 1991).*

*The "Success for All" early intervention programme developed by Slavin (1996), which makes extensive use of co-operative learning, has proven to be consistently successful in providing for children with low achievement and/or learning difficulties in reading (Slavin et al., 1996). The Learning-Support Guidelines (2000) also advocate the use of co-operative learning using mixed ability groups for literacy and numeracy tasks.*

*King (1993) and Mulryan (1995) caution that some children may monopolise group tasks and Good et al., (1992) contend that if small group tasks are poorly designed, students may spend more time attending to superficial procedures rather than thinking about the meaning of the task. Cohen (1994a) argues that the type of task required of the group might explain any inconsistent participation by group members. Tasks with obvious answers and routine solutions minimise participation by all group members (Noddings, 1989). Cohen (1994a) recommends group tasks with open-ended and non-routine solutions, so that group members can exchange ideas and information to successfully complete the task. Vygotsky (1978) suggests that tasks need to be pitched within a child's zone of proximal development, at a level above his/her present level. Lerner (2003) refers to this as the 'Goldilocks' level as it is pitched at a level that is neither too easy nor too difficult. A child may not be able to complete a group task alone but may be capable of learning with the assistance of more competent peers.*

*The advice for teachers identified in "Draft Guidelines for Teachers of Students with Mild General Learning Disabilities" (2002, p. 22) is worthy of note in terms of group effectiveness:*

- *match the size of group with the activity and the particular students involved.*
- *ensure that the task and/or common goal is clear to all and carefully structured.*
- *carefully select group members taking account of individual needs, strengths, personality and attention spans of students.*

*Students may engage in a task with different levels of complexity and learn different amounts of material, while contributing to a common goal. For example, a jigsaw activity may be designed for students studying the life of a musical composer or historical figure. The child with special educational needs could work on a short passage with the support teacher prior to working in his/her co-operative group. It is important that each individual is appropriately challenged.*

*Students summarise their reading, report to one another, discuss their findings and demonstrate their knowledge through the completion of a group project, quiz, drama, visual art construction or oral presentation.*

*Co-operative learning may also be used to enhance individualised work during the process writing tasks. In co-operative learning, although students work on a common project, they may be assessed according to different criteria. Alternatively, the project may be assessed as a whole taking into account each person's contribution or improvement score.*

*According to Slavin (1992) co-operative learning methods have been successful in removing the barrier between students with special educational needs and mainstream students. If students with special educational needs are to be socially integrated, then group work situations and co-operative learning should be used frequently in pre-school, primary and secondary settings (Slavin, 1991; Honing and Wittmer, 1996; Lowenthal, 1996). Further research is needed in Ireland to verify the consequences for students with special educational needs who participate in co-operative learning groups in mainstream classrooms. The implications are that if a teacher rarely, if ever, uses co-operative grouping as an organisational option, it is unlikely that much will be achieved in terms of social inclusion of students with special educational needs (Salisbury et. al., 1995). Villa and Thousand (2003) refer to a study conducted by the National Centre on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (1995), in which the majority of the districts implementing inclusive education reported co-operative learning as the most important instructional strategy supporting children with special educational needs.*

## APPENDIX D

### Co-operative Learning - Observation Checklist

Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Curriculum Area: \_\_\_\_\_

Learning Objective: \_\_\_\_\_

Social Skill Objective: \_\_\_\_\_

| Essential Elements                        | Should be several per element  | Tick as observed   |
|---|--|--|
| <i>Positive Goal Interdependence</i>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ A product all members helped with and can explain</li> </ul>  | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| <i>Group Reward Interdependence</i>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ All members show mastery (now or later)</li> <li>◆ All members show improvement</li> <li>◆ Add individual scores to get a group score</li> </ul>  | <input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/>   |
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Celebration of joint success</li> <li>◆ Bonus points or non-academic reward (e.g. sticker)</li> <li>◆ Single group grade</li> </ul>   | <input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/>   |
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Each member assigned a task or skill role</li> </ul>  | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Limited resources (one set of materials)</li> <li>◆ Jigsaw materials</li> <li>◆ Separate contributions</li> </ul>   | <input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/>   |
| <i>Identity Interdependence</i>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Mutual identity (group name, flag, logo, symbol)</li> </ul>   | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| <i>Environmental Interdependence</i>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Group has regular designated meeting place</li> </ul>   | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| <i>Outside enemy Interdependence</i>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Intergroup competition</li> </ul>   | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| <i>Individual Accountability</i>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Each student is evaluated (oral/written tests, teacher-designed tasks)</li> <li>◆ Students have assigned roles</li> <li>◆ Teacher randomly checks students (orally explain/draw diagram)</li> <li>◆ Students check each other (rehearsal)</li> <li>◆ Students sign that they agree, have contributed and/or can explain</li> <li>◆ Students bring individual work to the group</li> <li>◆ Teacher observes for all participating</li> </ul> | <input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Face-to-Face Promotive Interaction</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Group size is small</li> <li>◆ Group members seated in close proximity</li> <li>◆ Group members supporting each other's attempts to learn</li> <li>◆ Students orally participate and talk through learning</li> </ul>   | <input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/>   |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Teaching Social Skills</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ ‘Expected Behaviour’ chart posted and referred to</li> <li>◆ T-chart for social skills posted and referred to</li> <li>◆ Teacher encourages students to practice targeted skill(s)</li> <li>◆ Teacher monitors for the skill</li> <li>◆ Students are encouraged to check each other for the skill</li> </ul>  | <input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/>   |
| <b>Monitoring</b><br><br><b>Intervening</b><br><br><b>Processing</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Teacher monitors by circulating and listening</li> <li>◆ Teacher gives immediate direct feedback and re-teaching</li> <li>◆ Teacher observes informally or formally</li> <li>◆ Teacher intervenes, guides and provides prompts when necessary</li> <li>◆ Groups discuss what helped them learn</li> <li>◆ Groups discuss how well they functioned as a group</li> <li>◆ Groups set goals for improvement</li> <li>◆ Members give each other positive feedback</li> <li>◆ Individuals reflect on how well they functioned in group</li> <li>◆ Teacher leads class discussion on group functioning</li> <li>◆ Groups celebrate efforts and successes</li> </ul> | <input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>General Climate</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Positive</li> <li>◆ Productive</li> <li>◆ Active</li> </ul>   | <input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="checkbox"/>   |

*Adapted from Holubec, Johnson and Johnson (1997)*

*Oideas 51*

Brian Mac Giolla Phádraig

## **PARENTS' ASSOCIATIONS: CO-OPERATIVES OR CLIQUES? AN INVESTIGATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH PARENTS' ASSOCIATIONS EXIST AND TO WHICH PARENTS JOIN THEM**

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*ABSTRACT: This paper begins by looking at the historical context which led to the establishment of parents' associations at local and national level. It also examines the current emphasis placed on Parents' Associations in official government initiatives in primary education. The extent to which schools currently have Parents' Associations and the extent to which parents are active members of the Parents' Associations is then examined. The paper concludes by identifying particular school types least likely to have Parents' Associations and particular cohorts of parents least likely to be active in Parents' Associations.*

### **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Despite positive rhetoric from both church and state regarding the role of parents and their rights and responsibilities in education, parents were effectively excluded from any meaningful role in the primary education system until the early 1970s. However the 1970s marked a period of significant growth in the area of involvement in education, which was influenced by the prevailing culture of that decade.

Socially Cluskey (1996) detects a climate of optimism and expectation from the 1970's as individuals began to expect and demand an opportunity to participate in decision-making. Civil rights became a focus for political activity, not only internationally, but nationally as well. Coupled with the growth of the Civil Rights movement was the Women's Rights Movement, both of which challenged the traditional power bases in western democracies in an unprecedented way. The view of Ireland as a homogenous and harmonious society was being challenged daily.

The international political scene at the time was also conducive to increasing parental involvement in aspects of education. Beattie (1985, p. 3) has pointed out that this period was marked by a radical change in the position of parents as governments began to implement various schemes for increased citizen participation in decision making. Parent participation in this sense was only one sub set of much wider changes, affecting government and places of work as well as schools. These changes centred on the idea that democracy should be extended, and were characterised by the transfer of various aspects of the decision making structures to involve interested partners. This factor combined with the ever increasing politicisation of education, (Bastini, 1988, p. 1), whereby parents were seen as a crucial constituency, and thereby items of concern to parents were quickly seized on and used as a source of electoral support. Thus a political rationale for the increased involvement of parents in the system was also readily available. This rationale served as a basis from which parents began to develop as participants in the system.

Educationally also this period marked a significant growth in the area of involvement in the system, and the trends that were beginning to effect education since independence seemed to come together and make a noticeable impression on the education system from 1970, effecting far reaching changes in the system. The whole consciousness that parents have a role to play in education was underpinned by a number of seminal works in the 1970's that gave an empirical basis to many of the arguments previously made on philosophical or moral grounds (Wolfendale, 1991, p. 7).

Foremost among these was the research available from the American Head Start Programme. This was a government sponsored early intervention programme directed at young, socially disadvantaged children and their families. In many of these programmes parental involvement in a variety of forms was paramount, and the very method and practice of involving parents in a programme designed to increase educational achievement was very influential. Through such processes of involvement researchers discovered the effectiveness of parents as educators and thus the philosophy and rationale of parental involvement in education was underpinned.

This period was also characterised by an increasing public awareness about education matters in general, according to Walshe (1996, p. 33). The advent of television in 1961 introduced the general public to a range of alternative lifestyles, and radio discussion programmes promoted different points of view and actively encouraged debate. Both radio and television undoubtedly broadened the focus of the education world, and aside from television there is evidence that the 1970's was marked by a dramatic increase in public awareness of educational matters. Ó Buachalla (1988, p. 385) in a survey of articles on Educational matters in The Irish Times noticed an increase from 333 articles in 1963 to 805 articles in 1971.



He also states that prior to 1962 there was not one book published in Ireland which dealt with wider issues of education. It was not until education became a subject of serious public and political discussion, that concern for involvement and influence in the system grew, and it was not until the 1970's that education truly entered the public forum.

Thus a combination of shifting social and mores, empirical research, political developments and increasing public awareness, had an effect which neither church nor state could ignore. Consequently the head of the development unit of the Department of Education, Sean O'Connor, indicated that the recommendations of the previously commissioned OECD report (1965) could not be ignored by government. This report emphasised the central role that the community in general and parents in particular played in education, and added that successful change in education could not be achieved without the active support of parents and the community (Coolahan, 1981, p.138).

Similarly the churches began to facilitate parental involvement in education as part of an overall scheme of lay involvement in all aspects of religious life occasioned by Vatican Two, and also because the church could no longer be immune from the political and social developments which were affecting Ireland at the time.

It is against this context that the establishment of both parents' associations and the National Parents' Council - Primary must be viewed. By the beginning of the 1970's there were a number of parent associations in individual schools around the country and several national parents' associations were established, including the "National Association for Parents' Associations", "The Association for Democracy in Education" and "Na Teaghlaigh Ghaelacha". Parent - teacher associations of schools under Protestant control established the Federation of Parents' Associations. This group campaigned for the establishment of Protestant comprehensive schools and also called for greater involvement by parents in the management of national schools Cluskey (1996, p. 44.) The most notable, and successful, of these was the "Parent School Movement" which attempted to create a number of debates on education and the role of parents during the early 1970's and had limited success.

However the real impetus to establish the National Parents' Council came with the formation of Boards of Management. Once this occurred parent leaders were in effect elected at the level of each school, and it soon became apparent that these parents could gain much from sharing of their common concerns. The coming together of these parent groups led to the formation of the Council for Parents Elected Representatives, which was the NPC's immediate predecessor (Walshe, 1996, p. 81).

This factor combined with the political climate of the time, which saw Gemma Hussey as Education minister and one of her stated political objectives was the "widening of involvement in the formation of education policy making" (cited in Walsh, 1996, p. 81). She saw the establishment of National Council for Parents as a logical step in the fulfilment of this agenda. Consequently the Fine Gael, Labour Programme for Government (November 1982) contained the following commitment: "A National Parents' Council through which parents' views on policy matters can be expressed, will be established."

On assuming office Hussey instructed her departmental officials, specifically the schools' inspectorate, to become actively involved in the development of a representative body for parents in schools. The inspectorate was instructed to visit schools to promote this concept and a "seeding grant" of £50,000 was provided to assist in the establishment of the National Parents Council under the Programme for Economic and Social Progress (Cluskey, 1996, pp. 48 - 49). The organisation founded as a result of this impetus in reality operates as two organisations, the National Parents' Council - Primary, and the National Parents' Council - Post Primary.

Thus the combination of the growth of experience at management level of parents and the political climate of the time led to the establishment of the NPC. A move which, according to the INTO (1997, p. 6), was widely welcomed by public opinion of the time and firmly established parents as formal participants in the Irish Education system at national level.

The importance of NPC. cannot be underestimated. The OECD. cited by Walshe (1999, p. 97) noted that it was only after the council was established in 1985 that people began to speak of the need for local parents' associations as well, and that, in general, the idea began to be entertained that parents should be actually, and not merely constitutionally, partners in the education process. The NPC. – Primary has had much practical influence in the education system at national level. From its foundation it has been recognised as a full partner in education at national level and it has been consulted by the Department, on matters relevant to educational development. It provides for an increasing representation for parents on a wide range of Ministerial appointed bodies (CEB 1984), (PERB 1987) (NCCA). It operates a parent resource centre and help line, it runs programmes such as "The Parents Programme 1996", to increase parental involvement in schools. It provides training and back up for parent representatives on Boards of Management, and represents the interests of parents on a wide variety of health and social affairs bodies. (National Parents' Council - Primary 1995)

In short with the NPC, parents have formal institutionalised structures which they can use to gain information and which is dedicated to representing their views. It is also significant to note that by 1990 the NPC. was confident enough of its own position to issue a reservation to the Report on the Primary Curriculum Review Body on a number of issues directly affecting not only the role of parents within the system, but dealing with broader educational matters such as assessment and evaluation, the introduction of modern languages, the allocation of time within the curriculum and parental involvement in curriculum implementation. (INTO, 1997, p. 7)

## **THE PRESENT POSITION**

Current government policy emphasises the role of the Parents' Associations as a means of promoting partnerships between home and school, and the role of the National Parents' Council as a major partner at national level.

Circular 24 / 91 from the Department of Education and Science was titled "Parents as Partners in Education" (Department of Education, 1991) and it advised principals and

chairpersons of the Department's policy in relation to parental involvement in primary education.

It states that "partnership for parents in education is a policy aim of the government" and sees the promotion of parental involvement in the education of their children as an "essential strategy of educational policy and practice." In order to achieve this policy aim the Department of Education requires school authorities to establish an active Parents' Association following procedures outlined by the National Parents' Council - Primary in their publication "Parents' Associations - Making Them Work." They further advise Parents' Associations to consider strongly affiliating to the National Parents' Council, Primary Tier in order to "afford parents the opportunity and the mechanism for having a voice in decision-making on primary educational issues at a national level."

More recently the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) devotes a specific section (Section 26) to Parents' Associations and affords all parents the right to establish a Parents' Association in their children's school. It outlines the functions of a Parents' Association as promoting the interests of the students in the school, advising the principal or the Board of issues relating to the school and adopting a programme of activities to promote the involvement of parents in the school.

Thus in an environment where Parents' Associations are seen as central to the government's approach to promote parental involvement it is of interest to establish the extent to which primary schools have followed the guidelines of circular 24 / 91 and established a Parents' Association in their school. It is also of relevance to investigate how many parents actually participate in the activities of Parents' Associations where they exist. In order to deal with these issues a representative national sample of teachers were asked to indicate whether or not their school had a Parents' Association and a representative national sample of parents was asked to indicate whether or not they are or were active members of their school's Parents' Association.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In selecting the sample of parents and teachers a process of stratified sampling was used. Stratified sampling involves dividing the population into homogenous groups, with each group containing subjects with similar characteristics. (Cohen and Mannion, 1980, p. 99) In this case the total population is the total number of primary schools on the Department of Education and Science database for 1999 / 2000. (N = 3172) The total population was divided into nine cells as follows: small disadvantaged, small non-disadvantaged, small gaelscoileanna, medium disadvantaged, medium non-disadvantaged, medium gaelscoileanna, large disadvantaged, large non-disadvantaged and large gaelscoileanna.

Small schools were defined as those with between 1 and 3 mainstream class teachers, medium schools as schools with between 4 and 6 mainstream class teachers and large schools as those with 7+ mainstream class teachers. Disadvantaged schools were defined as all schools that are recognised as disadvantaged status schools by the Department of Education and Science and Gaelscoileanna were defined as all schools recognised as Gaelscoileanna by the Department of Education and Science.

In selecting the final sample, schools in the master data file were sorted according to the nine cells, small disadvantaged, small non-disadvantaged, small gaelscoileanna etc. Schools were then selected using a random, fixed interval selection procedure. The schools chosen in each cell in the teachers' sample were selected in order that the percentage of schools from that cell in the sample would be in some way proportionate to the percentage of schools from that cell in the total population. The schools chosen in each cell in the parents' sample were selected in order that the percentage of parents from that cell in the sample would be in some way proportionate to the percentage of pupils from that cell in the total population.

However some modifications were made to the numbers selected in certain cells, gaelscoileanna and small disadvantage schools in particular, in order that a sufficient number of returns would be received to facilitate analysis. The effect of increasing the number of schools in certain cells in the sample was counterbalanced by a process of weighting the returns received. Weighting the returns is carried out to ensure that the results received reflect the population from which the sample was drawn. The process of selecting schools was conducted twice, once for the sample of parents and once for the sample of teachers.

The sample structure is as follows:

**Table 1**      *Sample*

| CELL               | TOTAL POPULATION |                | SAMPLE                |            |                            |
|--------------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------------|------------|----------------------------|
|                    | SCHOOLS          | PUPILS         | TEACHERS <sup>1</sup> | PARENTS    | SCHOOLS IN PARENTS' SAMPLE |
| <b>Small:</b>      |                  |                |                       |            |                            |
| • Disadvantage     | 72               | 5,756          | 21                    | 53         | 4                          |
| • Non Disadvantage | 1816             | 108,074        | 81                    | 104        | 12                         |
| • Gaelscoileanna   | 33               | 1,933          | 15                    | 51         | 4                          |
| <b>Medium:</b>     |                  |                |                       |            |                            |
| • Disadvantage     | 67               | 10,072         | 12                    | 88         | 4                          |
| • Non Disadvantage | 373              | 52,820         | 21                    | 89         | 6                          |
| • Gaelscoileanna   | 14               | 1,698          | 12                    | 81         | 4                          |
| <b>Large:</b>      |                  |                |                       |            |                            |
| • Disadvantage     | 171              | 48,547         | 15                    | 91         | 4                          |
| • Non Disadvantage | 563              | 183,741        | 27                    | 118        | 4                          |
| • Gaelscoileanna   | 63               | 15,691         | 21                    | 59         | 2                          |
| <b>Totals</b>      | <b>3172</b>      | <b>428,332</b> | <b>225</b>            | <b>734</b> | <b>44</b>                  |

<sup>1</sup> The numbers of schools in each cell in the teachers' sample is the same as the number of teachers in each cell in the teachers' sample as only one teacher per school was surveyed

In the teachers' sample, questionnaires were sent to senior infant teachers, fifth class teachers and principals respectively in one-third of the schools in each cell. In the parents' sample, parents of children in senior infants and fifth class in alternate schools in each cell were sampled.

**Results:**

**Table 2** *Teachers' responses to the question, "Does your school have a Parents' Association?"*

| <b>YES</b> | <b>NO</b>  |
|------------|------------|
| 97 (70.3%) | 41 (29.7%) |

**Table 3** *Percentages of schools that don't have a Parents' Association analysed according to school type, school size and disadvantage status*

| <b>SCHOOL TYPE</b> |           | <b>SCHOOL SIZE</b> |        |        | <b>DISADVANTAGED STATUS</b> |         |
|--------------------|-----------|--------------------|--------|--------|-----------------------------|---------|
| Mainstream         | Gaelscoil | Small              | Medium | Large  | Yes                         | No      |
| N = 111            | N = 27    | N = 45             | N = 48 | N = 45 | N = 37                      | N = 101 |
| 34.2               | 11.1      | 51.1               | 29.2   | 8.9    | 37.8                        | 26.7    |

**Table 4** Percentages of parents in age, relationship to the child, school type and size cohorts involved in their school's parents' association and the results of chi-square tests

| STRATUM                           | N   | %    | CHI-SQUARE VALUE |
|-----------------------------------|-----|------|------------------|
| <b>Age:</b>                       |     |      |                  |
| • <30                             | 33  | 15.2 | 6.143*           |
| • 31 – 40                         | 191 | 36.7 |                  |
| • 41+                             | 97  | 37.1 |                  |
| <b>Relationship to the Child:</b> |     |      | 11.562***        |
| • With partner                    | 278 | 38.1 |                  |
| • Lone parent                     | 43  | 11.6 |                  |
| <b>School Type:</b>               |     |      | 6.158*           |
| • Mainstream Primary              | 222 | 30.2 |                  |
| • Gaelscoil                       | 99  | 44.4 |                  |
| <b>School Size:</b>               |     |      | 16.395***        |
| • Small                           | 82  | 45.1 |                  |
| • Medium                          | 97  | 43.3 |                  |
| • Large                           | 142 | 22.5 |                  |

( $p < .05^*$ ,  $p < .01^{**}$ ,  $p < .001^*$ )

## DISCUSSION

The numbers of teachers that indicated that their school did not have a Parents' Association (Table 2) suggests that almost 30% of schools operate without Parents' Associations. This in effect means that parents in nearly three-tenths of schools do not have a formal body which can foster relationships between parents and their children's schools, or which can provide parents with a formal structure to articulate their concerns or coordinate their initiatives. This finding must be placed in the context of the formal requirement of the Department of Education and Science that all schools "establish an active Parents' Association." (Department of Education IRL 1991) While this requirement was made in 1991 the evidence here suggests that ten years later nearly 30% of schools have ignored it.

When those schools that do not have a Parents' Association were analysed according to type, size and disadvantage status (Table 3) it was apparent that certain categories of schools were less likely to have Parents' Associations than other categories.

In regard to school type over one-third of teachers in mainstream schools indicated that their school did not have a Parents' Association while slightly over one-tenth of gaelscoileanna indicated that they did not have a Parents' Association, the indication here is that gaelscoileanna are more likely to have Parents' Associations.

This may be related to the prominent role that parents play in the establishment of gael scoileanna, thus many of these schools effectively have a parents' committee before they formally open. In the case of mainstream primary schools however it is unlikely that Parents' Associations played any role in their establishment, thus in all cases proactive measures by parents or school authorities, within an existing school environment, were necessary in order to establish Parents' Associations. For this reason Parents' Associations may be more prevalent in gael scoileanna than in mainstream primary schools

When teachers were analysed according to school size, over half of the teachers in small schools indicated that their school did not have a Parents' Association, while less than one-tenth of teachers in large schools said that their school did not have one. The clear indication here is that Parents' Associations are far less prevalent in small schools than in large schools. This may be connected to the more intimate community associated with smaller schools, which because of its smaller nature may not require formal structures such as Parents' Associations to foster parent-school relationships or to structure parental involvement in the schools to the same extent as large schools do.

When schools were analysed according to disadvantage status a higher percentage of teachers who teach in disadvantage status schools indicated that their schools did not have Parents' Associations than teachers in non-disadvantage status schools. While the differences were not as pronounced as between the other cohorts in table 3, nevertheless the indication is that Parents' Associations are less prevalent in disadvantage status schools than in non-disadvantage status schools. There may be an indication here that the formal structure of bodies such as Parents' Associations are less attractive to particular cohorts, specifically those in areas of economic disadvantage, than to others which calls for structures of parents' associations to vary according to the needs of the parent population of the school.

This finding in relation to disadvantage status schools is of particular interest when considered in the context of the Home-School-Community Liaison scheme which all disadvantage status schools have access to. While this scheme is built on the 'theory and practice' of partnership' (Conaty, 2000) in the detail operation of the scheme no mention is made of utilising a Parents' Association as a means to effecting a partnership between home and school (Conaty, 2000; Department of Education and Science, 1999). Thus it would appear that while both the Home-School-Community Liaison scheme and Parents' Associations are viewed as a means towards effecting a partnership between home and school, there is no official encouragement given to Home-School-Community Co-ordinators to utilise the Parents' Association as a means towards this partnership. The lack of such encouragement may render Parents' Associations as marginal in some disadvantage status schools.

When parents who indicated that they are or have been involved in the parents' association were analysed according to the stratifying variables used in this study it becomes apparent that particular categories of parent were more likely to become involved in the parents' association than other categories of parent (Table 4).

A substantially lower proportion of parents in the <30 category indicated that they are or have been involved in the parents' association than parents in either the 31 – 40 or 41+ categories and the difference between these categories was statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).

The indication here is that the youngest cohort of parents is least involved in parents' associations. The comparatively low percentage of parents in the <30 cohort who participated in Parents' Associations may be due to the fact that younger parents are probably less familiar with the primary school structure than older parents. Specifically they may be unaware of the function and scope of the parents' association, as they may have limited experience of its operations. Hence younger parents may be slightly less willing to participate in the parents' association. It may also be the case that as a result of differing family demographics and differing career structures younger parents enjoy least flexibility to participate in what is essentially a voluntary activity – the parents' association.

Lack of flexibility may be the main contributing factor to the significant difference established between lone parents who are or have been members of the parents' association and non-lone parents ( $p < .001$ ). Just over 10% of lone parents record that they participate or have participated in the parents' association while nearly 40% of non-lone parents are or have been members of this body. This difference may reflect the real constraints that exist on lone parents in terms of participating in support activities in schools. Factors such as arrangements for child-minding while the parent attends meetings and the necessity for one parent, as opposed to two, to bear the burden of the extra work involved may restrict the involvement of lone parents in parents' associations.

These findings in relation to the age and relationship with the child profile of parents who are involved in parents' associations raise questions as to the degree to which parents' associations are representative of parents within the school. They also highlight particular cohorts for whom traditional representative bodies are not as suitable for as they are for other parents.

When parents were analysed according to school type a higher percentage of parents of gaelscoileanna indicated that they are or have been involved in the parents' association than parents in mainstream primary schools and the difference was statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). This difference may be due to the stronger tradition of parental involvement in gaelscoileanna as opposed to mainstream primary schools. (Ni Chuinneagain, 1992) Thus parents who elect to send their children to a different school type may feel a stronger sense of obligation to become involved in bodies such as the parents' association. It may also be the case that some parents of children in gaelscoileanna were involved in the establishment of their child's schools. It is more likely that these parents will feel a greater commitment to supporting the work of the parents' association than other parents.

Parents of children attending large schools recorded a significantly lower participation rate in the parents' association than parents in small or medium schools, the difference here was statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). While just over 40% of parents in small and medium schools reported that they are or have been involved in the parents' association, the percentage for large schools was just above 20%.



However this finding is in some contrast with the fact that teachers reported that a higher percentage of large schools have a Parents' Associations than small schools (Table 3). Thus while Parents' Associations may not be as common in small schools the evidence suggests that when they exist a relatively high percentage of parents become involved in them.

## CONCLUSIONS

The evidence garnered here suggests that while the majority of schools do have a Parents' Association, there is a sizeable proportion of schools that operate without these associations. In order to realise the objective of establishing a Parents' Association in each school there is an indication that it would be most beneficial to target small schools, disadvantage status schools and mainstream primary schools as a higher percentage of these school appear to operate without a Parents' Association.

However it is not sufficient merely to ensure that Parents' Associations exist. Once established Parents' Associations needs to attract membership from across the whole spectrum of the parent body and not just be representative of particular cohorts of parents. In order to achieve this it would appear from the data presented here that specific measures need to be taken in order to attract younger parents and lone parents in particular. These measures may necessitate flexibility in structures of the Associations, in timings of meetings and in the way in which their business is traditionally conducted.

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Ronan Ward

## **INTRODUCING TEACHER APPRAISAL: CRITICAL ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

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*ABSTRACT: This paper argues that if teachers are adequately prepared and knowledgeable about the process, teacher appraisal can be a means of improving the professionalism of teachers, providing them with a continuing professional development process, ensuring that there is an ongoing, school-focussed, in-service training in place in our schools. Teacher appraisal has the potential of allowing teachers to take more responsibility for their own growth, minimising the isolation felt by many within their classrooms, while simultaneously advancing their professional status. The paper focuses specifically on three core areas regarding the introduction of appraisal. Following a brief overview of what is involved in the process of teacher appraisal, it examines the culture of schools, exploring difficulties that can arise when change is introduced into the system. Suggestions are forwarded on how best to alleviate these difficulties. The importance of confidentiality throughout the whole process is discussed, exploring issues concerning the matching of individuals for appraisal, in particular. Finally, it investigates the introduction of teacher appraisal in England and Wales. This investigation demonstrates how teacher appraisal can become a political tool, causing it to become a process for the accountability of teachers, rather than a professional developmental process.*

### **CONTEXT**

One of the key elements that constitute the concept of 'profession' is an implication that ongoing professional development occurs, both at a practical and theoretical level. At present, the professional development of teachers in this country is being met by in-service courses, which, while excellent in themselves, arise sporadically, as in the provision of summer courses, or in-service days relating to the implementation of the revised curriculum. Like the students in his/her care, a teacher needs continuous support and 'feedback' on how he/she is developing professionally. A teacher is a "student of teaching" (Dewey, 1904:15), who sets out on a developmental journey that continues right throughout a teaching career.

For most teachers, this journey is haphazard in its early stages, learning through trial and error, until one reaches one's own 'modus operandi'. Apart from the odd 'Tuirisc scoile'<sup>2</sup>, there is no mechanism whereby teachers can review or assess their own development as professionals. This paper argues that if teachers are adequately prepared and knowledgeable about the process, teacher appraisal can be a means of improving the professionalism of teachers, and can provide them with a continuing professional development process, thereby ensuring there is an ongoing, school-focussed, in-service training in place in our schools.

As teacher appraisal is a comprehensive system impacting on a wide range of activities, the paper focuses specifically on three core areas regarding the introduction of appraisal. Following a brief overview of what is involved in the process of teacher appraisal, it examines the culture of schools, exploring difficulties that can arise when change is introduced into the system. Suggestions are put forward on how best to alleviate these difficulties. The importance of confidentiality throughout the whole process is discussed, exploring issues concerning the matching of individuals for appraisal, in particular. Finally, it investigates the introduction of teacher appraisal in England and Wales. This investigation demonstrates how teacher appraisal can become a political tool, causing it to become a process for the accountability of teachers, rather than a professional developmental process.

## **TEACHER APPRAISAL: WHAT IS INVOLVED**

Within an educational context, teacher appraisal is best understood as:

...a continuous and systematic process intended to help individual teachers with their professional development and career planning, and to help ensure that the in-service training and deployment of teachers matches the contemporary needs of individual teachers and the schools

(Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, 1986, p.2).

The aspiration is that if appraisal is viewed as developmental rather than accountable, then professional development, not only for the teacher, but also for the school as a whole, will follow. Bodam (1982:215-229) cites Anita Higham, who has written persuasively of the relationship between appraisal, staff development, and in-service training, linking them in a creative and positive way. Montgomery (1985) argues that "The essence of appraisal should be positive, providing a means of determining, prizing and valuing the good features of teachers' performance" (p.16). Teacher appraisal is concerned with school improvement and professional development and as such should not be linked to salary scales (Marland, 1986:185). Neither should teacher appraisal be seen as a way of dealing with unsatisfactory teacher performance (James and Newman, 1985:26).

Put simply, appraisal allows a teacher to focus on an area of his/her teaching from a different viewpoint. Furlong (1998) states that appraisal "seeks to involve participants at all stages of the process, clarifying personal needs and linking those needs to a staff development programme and in-service training" (p.33).

<sup>2</sup> A report furnished by the Dept. of Education and Science, following a whole school evaluation



There are three types of appraisal: self-appraisal, line management appraisal and peer appraisal. Self-appraisal involves monitoring and evaluating one's own work and is often a preface to line management or peer appraisal. Line management appraisal entails being appraised by someone with management responsibilities for the individual being appraised. Peer appraisal can be reciprocal, whereby Teacher A appraises Teacher B and Teacher B appraises Teacher A. The process can also be sequential, whereby teachers can choose their appraiser, with the proviso that they may not choose an appraiser whom they have chosen to appraise. Teacher A appraises Teacher B but Teacher B cannot appraise Teacher A.

The usual format for appraisal follows a structure involving seven stages. An initial meeting between the appraisee and his/her chosen appraiser clarifies an understanding of appraisal, what will happen and when, and the procedures and focus of the classroom observations. A process of self-appraisal allows the appraisee to gather information and to reflect on his or her own work, thus allowing the appraisee to prepare for the various discussions in the formal appraisal process. Both negotiate the venue and time for the observation sessions and for the appraisal interview. Both attend a training course in appraisal, prior to beginning the procedure. Following from the initial meeting, both are clear on the specific focus chosen for appraisal, the timetable involved and ground rules that are set e.g. whether the appraiser will be non-participant i.e. passively observing, or whether he/she will be a participant observer, involving the observer in the teaching during the sessions. The next stage is the actual classroom observation, which entails a minimum of two visits by the appraiser to the appraisee's classroom. These observation sessions have a specific focus with an outlined observation schedule agreed upon at the initial meeting. Methods of observation can vary and can include checklists and tallying. Directly following the observation, a brief feedback is given to the teacher on what was observed. Bollington *et al.* (1990) refer to the appraisal interview as the "hub" (p.41) of the process. This is a sensitive stage requiring trust and confidence on the part of both involved. The appraisee's work is reviewed, successes agreed, and achievable practical and work-related targets for the appraisee are identified. The stage is specific and focused. Resources, materials and in-service training that are deemed necessary are included in the target setting. Finally, an appraisal statement is produced, signed by both, and retained by both in confidence. Hopkins *et al* (1991:23) stress the importance of setting realistic targets with appropriate resources and support, and monitoring progress towards them. Follow-up meetings should be held within a year to see how progress has been made towards meeting targets and to revise targets where necessary.

Identified benefits within such a process are psychological effects such as increased job satisfaction, increased confidence, improved classroom practice, better focus on different abilities in class and reduction in teacher isolation, to name but a few. In order for teachers to embark on an appraisal programme, resources and time (outside of teaching time) need to be set aside to discuss, plan, train and observe. The process of laying the groundwork for a change effort is a complicated, time-consuming, and sometimes frustrating one and it is to this issue that attention is now drawn.

## CHANGE AND CULTURE

Sarason (1990) states that change cannot be brought about in a school from within only:

No complicated, traditional social institution can be changed from within. There has to be some support for change from within, but there also has to be strong external, powerful pressures for change, powerful in terms of number, influence and legislative legal policymaking responsibilities (p.338).

The reason for this, he argues, is that teachers spend most of their working time separately from their colleagues. The context in which each teacher operates is different, and there is no forum or tradition that brings teachers together on a scheduled basis seriously. He describes the culture of schools as a culture of individuals, not a group culture concerned with pedagogical theory, research and practice. He believes that teachers have a responsibility as a group to develop a forum specifically devoted to their growth and development. As the subsequent section on the introduction of teacher appraisal in England and Wales will show, the decision to make a change did not take into account the ideas, opinions and feelings of those who would be impacted by the change. Sarason (1990) describes this “taking into account” as “sustained discussion of what would be required of participants in terms of time, energy, commitment and motivation” (p.333).

As the main purpose of change is for all involved to exchange realities and to continue to develop ideas, there can be different versions of what the change should be. Schools need to have a clear vision of the shared values and beliefs of their staff. A first step towards change is to help teachers to articulate and question their own values and beliefs and then to consider how these might relate to those of others. Change is a personal experience and it is necessary to recognise and to attend to individuals’ concerns. Stress and anxiety are common early emotions. Conflict and disagreement are inevitable and fundamental. According to Huberman and Miles (1984:273), if everything is going smoothly, it is likely that not much is happening! As no two schools are the same, there may be no single best way to approach school improvement. Each school’s context is unique and as such they will address processes in different ways. Fullan (1991, p.47) comments:

“We do know more about the processes of change as a result of the research of the 1970’s and 1980’s, only to discover that there are no hard and fast rules, rather a set of suggestions or implications given the contingencies specific to local situations”.

Stoll and Fink (1996) report that a high proportion of school effectiveness efforts, worldwide, have collapsed because of resistance to the imposition of change. Addressing the problem of resistance, Sarason (1990) argues that little consideration is given to creating incentives for change. A mix of pressure and support is needed: “Outside assistance has been shown to have the greatest influence on implementation when it is integrated with local support efforts” (Stoll and Fink, p.53). Schools need to be flexible to accommodate external ideas within their own context and needs. In the case of appraisal, “schools have a greater chance of success if teachers see the process as developmental rather than accountable” (Hopkins *et al.*, 1991:42). The introduction of appraisal has a greater chance of success if a school review or school-evaluation precedes it. This fulfils three purposes. Individual teachers feel less threatened if the whole school is appraised first. Communication is improved between teachers, and linking school review to teacher appraisal results in a much more powerful strategy for school improvement.

Underlying climate issues in a school may help or hinder ability to focus on improvement. Stoll and Fink report that “More successful schools denote considerable time to establish trust and openness between staff, pupils and the community before they embark on substantive changes” (p.50). Internal conditions that maintain and support improvement need to be addressed. These conditions include recognition of teachers and celebration of their successes. Humour is encouraged. Neglect of interpersonal and psychological processes may lead teachers to behave defensively to protect themselves from innovations that might expose their inadequacies. Careful planning, management and continuity are very important. Fullan (1991) argues that: “successful school improvement...depends on an understanding of the problems of change at the level of practice and the development of corresponding strategies for bringing about beneficial reforms” (p.27). Stoll and Fink (p.53) state that creative schools have an ownership mentality and cite Miles’ (1986) five specific strategies for involvement:

- Power-sharing
- Rewards for staff
- Openness and inclusiveness
- Expanding leadership roles
- Patience

Any attempt to change a feature of a school culture immediately brings to the fore the power basis of relationships. Schools are like political institutions because their structures and decision-making processes are shaped by the fact that power is unequally distributed. The individual school is hierarchically organised, which has obvious implications for the exercise of power. The principal of a school plays a pivotal role in the adoption of new strategies for change: “Effective principals build opportunities for others to assume leadership roles through involvement and empowerment” (Stoll and Fink, 1996, p.52). There can be a danger that principals, because of the power they hold, can attain the compliance of a staff rather than agreement. As sustained commitment requires ongoing co-ordination, problem solving, negotiation, support, communication and sharing of new knowledge, strong leadership is essential. Principals must be willing to delegate, and Sarason (1990) argues that educational reforms continuously fail because attention is not paid to the alteration of power relationships. Some principals have difficulty finding a balance between maintaining control while trying to generate enthusiasm and commitment, and involving teachers in decision-making (Ball, 1987). Natriello and Dornbusch (1981:1-4), in a study on the evaluation of teachers by principals, found teacher satisfaction strongly related to (a) perceptions that all appraisers and appraisees share the same criteria for evaluation; (b) frequent sampling of teacher performance; (c) more frequent communication and feedback and (d) the teacher’s ability to help define the criteria for appraisal.

People need to have an awareness of potential difficulties that may arise during the process and be able to come up with creative solutions. Once the change system is under way, users need large scale, change-bearing innovations e.g. money, time, space, equipment and personnel. Periods of consolidation need to follow periods of change. In a study conducted by Louis and Miles (1990), they found that the ability to deal with problems actively, promptly and in some depth was the single biggest determinant of the success of school improvement programmes. One of the problems created by change is that it rarely involves single innovations.

Sarason (1990) describes a rippling effect: “what you seek to change is so embedded in a system of interacting parts that if it is changed, then changes elsewhere are likely to occur” (p.16). It takes time, and precise plans should not be laid down. Detailed plans can be constructed for one year, while long-term priorities are sketched to allow for changes that arise during the initial period. Schools facing difficulties generally require more external support than those starting from a solid base.

Change involves three broad phases- *initiation*, *implementation* and *institutionalisation*. The *initiation phase* depends on what Fullan (1991, p.44) refers to as the three R’s:

- Relevance of the improvement innovation in terms of need, quality, practicality, clarity and complexity
- Readiness of the staff to become involved
- Resources and support available, including time

The second phase, *implementation*, consists of early experiences of putting reforms into practice. Miles (1986) highlights the importance of:

- Clear responsibility for orchestration
- Shared control over implementation
- A blend of pressure and support
- Sustained staff development
- Early rewards for teachers

The third phase, *institutionalisation*, describes whether or not innovations are built into ongoing practices. Fullan (1991) summarises these, as achieved through:

- Mobilisation of broad support
- Principal commitment
- Embedding into classroom practice through structural changes and incorporation into policy
- Skill and commitment of a critical mass of staff
- Procedures for ongoing assistance, especially for newcomers
- Removal of competing priorities
- Inbuilt evaluation
- Assistance, networking and peer support

This discussion concerning the implementation of change in schools emphasises the importance of consultation and involvement in decision-making, which leads to a greater commitment to change. Teachers must possess the will to make school improvement succeed and this will is generated by increased empowerment, leading to teacher ownership. However, commitment, will and empowerment are all dependent on people trusting the process being established. It is clear that preparatory action needs to be taken prior to implementation of change within schools. In the case of teacher appraisal, this preparatory action includes the sensitive issues of establishing trust and confidence, and it is to these matters that concentration is now focused.

## CONFIDENTIALITY AND TRUST

Bennet (1992:93) argues that confidentiality must be the keystone of any appraisal scheme. Real problems and issues will not be dealt with if there is a suspicion that information might in the future become public. Appraiser and appraisee must consider what needs to become public. He states that, as a professional process, appraisal should not become the source of rumour or the cause of disclosed confidences.

Highlighting how fragile the issue of confidentiality is, he asserts: "Yet experience now indicates that confidentiality can be so quickly and inadvertently broken by a chance remark or a moment's forgetfulness" (p.112).

Matching individuals within a teacher appraisal process is a delicate issue and the ideal is to match carefully the individuals who will form as compatible a partnership as possible in the process. Bennet (1992) reported that senior school managers experienced problems when they had to communicate to certain staff that colleagues had no wish to be appraised by them. Pilot authorities experimented with positive and negative preferences. Positive preferences allowed potential appraisees the opportunity of indicating a number of people with whom they would like to work. Negative preferences allowed them to indicate with whom they did not wish to be paired. An alternative method was to post potential appraisers' names and to allow people to sign up under their preferred appraiser's name. As this, in turn, led to an appraisal of certain staff, it was not recommended. It was preferable to work with someone with the necessary skills, even where they did not have a direct line-management function, rather than work with a person in whom they had no confidence.

The initial meeting is indispensable as it affords significant opportunities for the appraisee to assume some control over the entire process. The effectiveness of this initial meeting is determined by the degree of trust, respect and confidence generated between the individuals, and by the extent to which the school has prepared the ground in terms of how the appraisals fit into the school development plan. Part of this preparation involves reflection and information gathering, through the process of self-appraisal. The process demands honesty and trust, especially trust in the appraiser, that information will not be misused. Bollington *et al.* (1990) state that many teachers, who participated in the School Teacher Appraisal Pilot Study (STAPS) of 1987-9, felt that self-appraisal was the most significant part of the whole appraisal process. They report that the appraisal interview and target setting were directly influenced by a teacher's self-appraisal:

This particularly occurred where questions about future needs and directions were seriously addressed by the appraisee and discussed sympathetically with the appraiser. In these cases, well-structured self-appraisal informed the production of the agreed statements and the identification of targets (p.30).

There can be variations in the sequencing of self-appraisal in the cycle. It can take place before the initial interview, after the initial interview and in parallel with classroom observations, or after classroom observations. Self-appraisal can be informal or structured within a formal document. A school needs to be clear about what it is trying to achieve prior to the individual appraisals, so that appraisers can effectively bring to the appraisal dialogue organisational issues on which they require the assistance and co-operation of individual appraisees.

The issue of confidentiality was a major concern for teachers embarking on appraisal processes in the UK. The guidelines (DES, 1991b, paragraph 55) clearly stated that all those with access to appraisal statements should treat them as confidential and that statements should not be disclosed to any person or body without the consent of the appraisee. Wragg *et al.* (1996) carried out a questionnaire survey of 1137 teachers and

appraisers in primary and secondary schools in sixty-four local authorities in the UK. Questions were asked about targets, and even though they were completed anonymously, some appraisers and appraisees refused to answer the questions on grounds of confidentiality. Teachers were concerned about the issue of comparison of teachers, and in schools where teachers had to be made redundant, there was concern that appraisal could influence the choice of whom stayed and of whom went. On the other hand, Horne and Pierce (1996:55) report that the confidentiality of the appraisal statement was seen by many to be a disadvantage. Teachers felt that if targets were not passed on to the staff development officer, then it was doubtful whether or not individual targets would be met. Some teachers reported a direct link between the appraisal process and promotion, citing individual cases in different schools. In Cumbria, most staff development officers demonstrated their frustration at the confidentiality of statements because they felt that this acted as a deterrent in allowing overall school development planning to emerge. While whole appraisal discussions should be confidential to appraisee and appraiser, targets need to be shared with those who need to know, in order that they may act (Horne and Pierce, 1996:88). In some Local Education Authorities (LEA's) the appraisal statement is in two pages. The first page is a summary of the discussions at the appraisal interview. The second page deals with targets. The targets are handed to an appraisal co-ordinator to ensure that resources are provided. By following this procedure, the confidentiality of the discussions leading to target setting is never breached. Appraisal targets are a key mechanism in identifying staff needs. Targets can provide an important agenda for action if the best and most equitable use is to be made of resources.

Attention is now drawn to how the process of teacher appraisal can become embroiled politically within pay-related performance, diluting its effectiveness as a means of teacher development.

## **INTRODUCTION OF TEACHER APPRAISAL IN ENGLAND AND WALES**

For many, teacher appraisal conjures up images of evaluation, inspection, judgement, assessment and testing. Many of these pre-conceptions have arisen from examining the teacher appraisal system that operates in England and Wales, where appraisal has become linked to accountability. The introduction of teacher appraisal in England and Wales has been characterised by persistent efforts by governments, both Conservative and Labour, to increase control over teacher management. It can be seen as part of the continuing struggle and tension between the development of teaching as a profession and the growth of managerial control. According to Bartlett (1998), the economic crisis of 1973-75 had led to calls for increased scrutiny of public education: "Progressive education, mixed with permissiveness and socialism, was seen to have led to sloppy-mindedness, which undermined the economic life of the country" (p.26). Appraisal was envisaged as a management tool, which could identify those whose performance was below par. The first stage in the development of teacher appraisal can be traced back to Callaghan's Rushkin College speech in 1976, with its call for accountability of teachers concerning the curriculum (Poster and Poster, 1993; Goddard and Emerson, 1992 and Evans and Tomlinson, 1989). However, some schools and LEA's were developing their own appraisal schemes at this time, in response to a growing awareness of the need for whole school approaches to professional development.

Teacher associations generally welcomed appraisal as a means of professional development, while insisting it should not be concerned with measuring teacher performance. The Secretary of State, Sir Keith Joseph, in January 1984, asserted that appraisal was the means to “remove unsatisfactory teachers from a profession where they can do much harm” (Joseph, 1985, p.4). Tension was increased when he stated, “I believe that a solution is most likely to be found by way of reforms which link higher pay to high quality performance” (Joseph, 1985, p.4). He withdrew this link later in the year, saying: “I have come to realise, under the influence of my advisers and other bodies, such as the NUT (National Union of Teachers), that the value of appraisal is far more in relation to career development, in-service training and promotion and is only indirectly linked with pay” (*The Times Educational Supplement*, 26 July 1985). Nevertheless, effectiveness and accountability were to be the hallmarks of future governments, in relation to the introduction of appraisal. Goddard and Emerson (1992) indicated an irreconcilable tension between an appraisal scheme based on accountability and also on professional development, which, in their view, teachers would never trust.

The Education Act (no.2), 1986, gave the Secretary of State the authority to impose the introduction of an appraisal process for teachers. In June 1986, an Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) working group produced an initial appraisal report. The report (ACAS, 1986) described appraisal as a “process intended to help teachers with their professional development and career planning” (p.27). Pilot projects were set up in six LEA’s under a National Steering Group (NSG). The report of the NSG (DES, 1989) favoured a professional development approach, and although the NSG gave an estimate for the cost of introducing appraisal, the government only provided half of that cost. It was not until July 1991 that Kenneth Clarke, as Secretary of State, took the Teacher Appraisal Regulations through Parliament, making participation in appraisal a legal requirement. LEA’s and governing bodies of grant-maintained schools were required to arrange for all teachers to complete the first year of the appraisal cycle during the school year 1994/95. Circular 12/91 attempted to allay fears and scepticism regarding the statutory order, by emphasising the developmental purposes of the process. Despite the confidentiality clause within appraisal statements and personal targets, teachers were aware that the open-ended nature of the 1986 Education Act allowed the Secretary of State to alter regulations on performance appraisal of teachers. Echoes of Sir Keith Joseph’s words in 1985 were enshrined in paragraphs 68-70 of the circular:

Relevant information from appraisal records may be taken into account by head teachers, CEO’s, or designated officers, in advising those responsible for taking decisions on the promotion, dismissal or discipline of teachers, or on the use of any discretion in relation to pay.

The circular also stated that there was no direct or automatic link between appraisal and pay. According to Bartlett (1998), it was the issue of confidentiality, a concession by the government to the teaching unions, which made the process of little use to management in terms of monitoring or whole school planning. Because appraisal had not become integrated into the whole school planning process, there was general concern regarding the quality and effectiveness of appraisals. Barber *et al.* (1995) stated that appraisal was suffering from what they described as an implementation dip, as other pressures and initiations, such as implementing a new curriculum, took priority. Wragg *et al.* (1996) reported that there was a moderate success of appraisal,

While the overwhelming majority of teachers opposed linking appraisal with pay and promotion, they viewed the process primarily as one of professional development. In 1996 both the Secretary of State, Gillian Shephard and the Chief Inspector of Schools, Chris Woodhead, expressed dissatisfaction with the appraisal scheme. Woodhead put the number of inadequate teachers at 15,000. A joint review of teacher appraisal was released in June 1996. One of the key weaknesses that it identified was that appraisal did not integrate with the other management processes and information systems directed at school improvement. Appraisal had been of little use in monitoring or controlling the work of teachers. With a general election looming, the government, not wishing to become embroiled in confrontation with unions, made no changes. When the Labour government was elected in 1997, Blair spoke of “significant extra resources in return for significant improvements in standards” (DfEE, 1997, p.4). In October 1999, the Green Paper (DfEE, 1999) proposed improving teachers’ salaries by introducing a threshold scheme, on a voluntary basis, which was subsequently implemented. At present, in order to break through the pay ceiling for classroom teachers, staffs have to pass a threshold assessment. Teachers are assessed in four key areas:

- A good understanding of their pupils
- Well-planned and disciplined classes
- Pupil performance
- Teachers’ own professional development

An appraiser<sup>3</sup> effects the assessment and head teachers make recommendations concerning promotion. External assessors verify head teachers’ recommendations. Successful teachers receive a £2000 pay rise and move on to a new pay scale with opportunities for further increases, through a fast track scheme. Advanced Skills Teachers (ASTs) help spread best practice. Teachers have to pass a national assessment process in order to be appointed as AST’s. However, it is not a requirement that candidates for these posts have first passed the performance threshold. Bonuses are available to staff in particularly successful schools. This, in effect, abandoned the notion of confidentiality and introduced performance-related pay. In September 2000, revised performance management arrangements came into effect. The legislative basis for the new arrangements is the Education (School Teacher Appraisal) Regulations, 2000/1, which replaces the Education (School Teacher Appraisal) Regulations, 1991. All schools are required to develop and implement a performance management policy and the performance of all teachers will be reviewed annually. Governing bodies have to agree a performance management policy, which incorporates annual appraisal and links to pay, in line with the changes that emerged in the Green Paper (1999).

In summary, the Labour Government, under the mantle of transparency and partnership, has managed to put in place Sir Keith Joseph’s vision of linking higher pay with high quality performance. Whether the tension between the need for accountability and the need for professional development is reconcilable remains to be seen.

<sup>3</sup> The governing body of a school shall appoint two or three governors to be appraisers for the head teacher. The head teacher shall appoint a school teacher at the school as an appraiser for every other school teacher. The appraiser may be the head teacher (The Education School Teacher Appraisal Regulations 2001).



## CONCLUSION

This paper has examined critical issues involved in introducing a teacher appraisal system. While not underestimating the challenges involved in its implementation, it does advocate the system as a means of involving teachers in continuous professional development. Burke (1992) argues that the professional prospects of teaching rest largely in the hands of teachers themselves: "Reform has to take place from within, for excellence cannot be parachuted either into schools or into teacher education" (p.218). Teacher appraisal has the potential of allowing teachers to take more responsibility for their own growth, minimising the isolation felt by many within their classrooms, while simultaneously advancing their professional status. However, the author warns of the danger of appraisal being used by Government to increase control over teacher accountability. In the Republic of Ireland, the White Paper on Education (1995) proposed setting up an appraisal system, but, as yet, it has not been adopted as government policy. The danger of an appraisal system, linked to accountability, being imposed on teachers here in Ireland would seem to have been minimised by the passing of the Teaching Council Act, 2001. The passing of this landmark legislation means that, for the first time, the responsibility for the promotion of further in-career development for teachers will now lie largely with the teaching profession itself, working through the Teaching Council. However, the creation of ongoing professional development structures will be dependent on agreement being reached between teacher unions, parents' groups and the DES concerning how and when in-career development can take place. Parents' groups at primary level are concerned with what they perceive as the erosion of the school year by six days annually, due to ongoing training necessitated by the implementation of the revised curriculum. Teacher unions in Ireland have agreed, within the context of benchmarking discussions, to explore ways of minimising disruption to the integrity of the school year. Agreement has been reached on the standardisation of the school year and on parent teacher meetings being partly held after school hours. However, the issue of professional development has yet to be addressed. If teachers are asked to do in-service training outside of school hours, unions will expect their members to receive extra payment for this. Now would seem an opportune time to widen the debate on professional development by considering teacher appraisal. Teachers here will be in a strong position to ensure that, if they so wish, a teacher appraisal system can be introduced that not only creates a forum devoted to growth and development, but also becomes part of a structure that enhances teaching as a profession.

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Catherine Mulryan Kyne

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING IN MULTIGRADE CLASSROOMS: MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Whereas single-grade teaching has traditionally been the most favoured option in primary education systems throughout the world, a significant number of pupils and teachers work in classes with two or more grade levels. These multigrade classes differ from single-grade classes on a number of important dimensions. A further distinction can be made between multigrade classes in large, predominantly single-grade, schools and multigrade classes in small schools in which multigrade teaching is the norm. International research on multigrade teaching has shown no significant differences between the cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes of pupils in single-grade and multigrade classes. However, this research also shows that multigrade teachers tend not to maximise on the potential of the multigrade teaching and learning setting. Instead, they use teaching approaches similar to those used by teachers in the single-grade setting. Teaching grade levels separately appears to be widespread. Recent research findings in the Irish context do not support previous findings in relation to the instructional practices of multigrade teachers. A study by Mulryan Kyne found that multigrade teachers in two-teacher multigrade schools in Ireland, unlike multigrade teachers involved in studies in other countries, use a wide range of teaching approaches within and across subject areas. Further research in this area is needed, especially research in a variety of contexts that relates the instructional practices of teachers to pupil learning outcomes.*

### **MULTIGRADE TEACHING AND SINGLE-GRADE TEACHING**

There are many possibilities when it comes assigning children to classes within primary schools. Pupil numbers and pupil age distribution usually influence decision making in this area. Traditionally, the most favoured option in educational systems throughout the world has been the single-grade or mono-grade class structure where children are grouped in classes according to a narrow age band. In many primary

schools, single-grade structuring of classes is not an option. For example, in many rural areas, low pupil numbers make single-grade teaching unfeasible. Fluctuating pupil numbers in large schools may also result in the need to consider options other than the single-grade one. The option usually considered in each of the above cases is the combination of two or more grade levels in one classroom with one teacher. Classes formed in this way are commonly referred to as “multigrade” classes. Children in multigrade classes usually retain their grade designation and their grade-specific textbooks and curricula. As Hargreaves (2001) points out, it is the adherence to gradedness that makes multigrade classes “multigrade” and not “multilevel”, “multiskill” or “multipersonality.”

Multigrade teaching differs from single-grade teaching on a number of dimensions. For example, the multigrade teacher has to cater for the needs of children of differing ages and grade levels throughout the school year. The single-grade teacher has responsibility for one grade level only and a relatively narrow age band. The multigrade teacher usually has full responsibility for the teaching of the curriculum content of two or more grade levels in the same time given to single-grade teachers to teach only one grade level. Pupils in multigrade classes usually stay with the same teacher for two or more years. In the case of one-teacher schools, a child may be with the same teacher for his entire primary education. Pupils in single-grade classes may have a different teacher for each grade level. These differences suggest that the school experience and the teaching and learning environment for pupils and teachers in multigrade and single-grade classes are quite different. These differences are often not recognised by administrators, teacher educators, and textbook publishers. The single-grade mindset appears to dominate (Little, 2001).

## **MULTIGRADE CLASSES IN SMALL SCHOOLS AND TWO-GRADE CLASSES IN MEDIUM/LARGE SCHOOLS**

A distinction is sometimes made between two-grade multigrade classes and multigrade classes with three or more grade levels. In the Republic of Ireland two-grade multigrade classes are known as “consecutive” grade classes (DES, 2004). Two-grade multigrade classes are frequently found in large, predominantly single-grade, primary schools. These multigrade classes differ in many significant ways from multigrade classes with three or more grade levels and two-grade multigrade classes in small schools. Indeed the teaching and learning context in these classrooms appears to be different enough to justify the use of different terminology to describe them. Some of these differences are indicated in Figure 1 below.

Classes with three or more grade levels are likely to be located in areas of low population density, usually in rural areas. Although some two-grade multigrade classes can be found in these areas also, a high proportion of two-grade multigrade classes are found in medium or large urban/suburban schools in which single-grade teaching is the norm. Two-grade multigrade classes in medium/large schools are usually formed as a result of fluctuating numbers. In small multigrade schools, teacher numbers tend to be small, corresponding to the number of multigrade classes within the school. In most cases, the school principal will have primary responsibility for a class. Given that small multigrade schools come into existence because of low pupil

numbers, both overall class size and grade size within classes is likely to be smaller than in two-grade multigrade classes in larger schools.

**Figure 1** Comparisons between multigrade classes in small schools and two-grade multigrade classes in medium/large schools

|                                       | <b>Multigrade classes in small schools (two or more grade levels)</b>   | <b>Multigrade classes (two grade levels) in medium/large schools</b>  |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <i>Setting/location</i>               | <i>Usually found in areas of low population density, especially in rural settings.</i>  | <i>Usually found in an urban/suburban setting</i>   |
| <i>Number of teachers</i>             | <i>Small teaching staff (usually less than 5 class teachers in the school)</i>  | <i>Larger number of class teachers (frequently more than one teacher per grade level)</i>   |
| <i>Role of Principal</i>              | <i>School principal likely to be class teacher also</i>   | <i>School principal less likely to have responsibility for a class</i>  |
| <i>Class size</i>                     | <i>Classes are usually smaller than in medium/large schools</i>   | <i>Classes can be relatively large (often similar class sizes to single-grade classes)</i>  |
| <i>Grade sizes</i>                    | <i>Small number of pupils at each grade level within classes</i>  | <i>Relatively large number of pupils at each grade level within classes</i>   |
| <i>Continuity/discontinuity</i>       | <i>Likely to represent the whole of the pupil's primary school experience.<br/>May have the same teacher for three or more years.</i> | <i>May represent only a part of the child's school experience.<br/>Less likely to have the same teacher for more than one year.</i> |
| <i>Learning setting within school</i> | <i>All the children in the school likely to be in a similar teaching and learning setting</i>   | <i>Other children in the school likely to be in a different teaching and learning setting (usually single-grade).</i>               |
| <i>Family/community connections</i>   | <i>Family members more likely to be in the same class.<br/>Can be closely allied to the local community</i>                           | <i>Family members are unlikely to be in the same class.<br/>School usually less closely linked with the local community</i>         |

In small multigrade schools, multigrade teaching is the norm and pupils will find themselves in a multigrade class right through primary school. They are also likely to have the same class teacher for a number of years, thus contributing to continuity of school experience. Such continuity is less likely to exist in the case of two-grade multigrade classes in medium and large schools. In these schools, pupils in two-grade multigrade classes may have been in a single-grade setting for most of their primary school life and may return to a single-grade setting if conditions in relation to pupil intake change. The social context of the small multigrade school is likely to be quite different to that in the larger school in which two-grade multigrade classes may be located. Children in small multigrade schools may share their class with siblings and/or other relations for at least some portion of their primary school years and they will experience working in a mixed age environment. This is less likely to be the case in larger schools. Small rural schools are usually more closely integrated with the local community than are larger urban/suburban schools, a factor which has often been highlighted in the course of attempts by governments to close or amalgamate these schools (e.g., Bell and Sigworth, 1987; Galton and Patrick, 1990).

The teaching-learning implications of the differences between the two settings, identified in Figure 1, are far from clear. The fact that distinctions are not drawn between them either in the available research literature on multigrade teaching or in reviews of this research does not help here. However, the differences do suggest a very different teaching learning context in the two settings so that a blanket use of the term “multigrade” to include both types of classes is unlikely to be helpful in contributing to the knowledge base in this area.

## **THE INCIDENCE OF MULTIGRADE TEACHING**

Multigrade teaching is prevalent in most educational systems throughout the world. Data on its exact incidence is difficult to come by. Information on the number of pupils and teachers in multigrade learning and teaching setting is not routinely collected by educational administrators within most countries or by international agencies such as UNESCO (Little, 2001). What is even more difficult to come by are data on the specific characteristics of multigrade teaching in the contexts in which it occurs and data on the way in which teaching and learning occurs in multigrade classrooms. Multigrade classes can be found in most countries in Europe, and in many parts of Canada, Australia, South America, Asia, and Africa. In the school year 2001/2002, 42% of primary school classes in Ireland were multigrade (DES, 2004). Of these, 27% were composed of two consecutive grades and 15% were composed of three or more grades. There is a relatively low incidence of multigrade teaching in the USA. In their study of twelve states, Mason & Stimson (1996) found that multigrade classes represented about 5 percent of primary school classes, and 95% percent of multigrade classes consisted of two grades.

It is likely, given the range of contexts in which multigrade teaching occurs, that multigrade organisation and teaching practices will vary from one country to another and even within countries. Given the lack of information that is available in this area generally and the apparent “invisibility” of this organisational format in many countries at administrative level, comparisons in this area across contexts is difficult. What we do know is that a very large proportion of the primary teaching profession across the world is involved in teaching several grade levels together in the one classroom throughout the school year.

## **RESEARCH ON MULTIGRADE TEACHING**

The literature on multigrade teaching is relatively impoverished (Mason, Burns, Colwell, & Armesto, 1993). Definitional confusion makes the accurate interpretation of some of the extant literature quite difficult and it is often difficult to determine the specific characteristics of the multigrade classes in which the research has been carried out. What the literature in this area lacks in particular, is a focus on classroom process in the multigrade setting; the strategies that teachers use and way that teachers cope on a day-to-day basis with the complexities and challenges of this teaching and learning setting (Russell, Rowe, and Hill, 1998). Research findings are available on the cognitive and non-cognitive effects of multigrade classes when compared with their single-grade counterparts. A small amount of information is also available on teaching approaches in multigrade classrooms.



### **Cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes in the multigrade setting**

Mason & Burns (1997a) and Veenman (1995) conducted exhaustive reviews of the research on multigrade teaching from a wide range of countries throughout the world. From his review and his later meta-analysis, Veenman (1995; 1996) reported no differences in cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes between the single-grade and multigrade settings:

On the basis of a best-evidence synthesis (1995) and meta-analysis (1996) of the results of combination/multigrade studies, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in either cognitive or non-cognitive learning outcomes for combination versus single-grade classes (Veenman, 1997, p.269)<sup>1</sup>.

Mason & Burns (1997a) concur with Veenman (1995) in concluding that comparisons between multigrade classes and single-grade classes consistently show no differences in cognitive or affective outcomes between the two types of classes. However, in spite of this, they do go on to argue strongly that there is at least a small negative effect for multigrade classes as compared with single-grade classes. They suggest that, when possible, principals select more able pupils and, often, more able teachers for multigrade classes. This, they suggest, offsets some of the inherent negative effects of multigrade teaching. If the best teachers and pupils were to be deliberately selected for multigrade classes, then a finding of no difference would indicate that the multigrade setting worked against the academic advancement of pupils. One would expect that pupils who have been specially selected for multigrade classes, and given the "best teachers", would do better than pupils in single-grade classes for which no selection has taken place. However, there is practically no evidence that pupils are purposefully assigned to multigrade classes (Veenman, 1997). Deliberate selection of pupils and teachers for multigrade classes would only be possible in larger schools that have both multigrade and single grade classes. Purposeful selection would not be possible in small rural schools, with a relatively small number of pupils at each grade level. Veenman (1995) found no significant difference in effect size between the findings of studies of schools in urban and rural areas.

Veenman (1995) explains his finding of "no-difference" in the cognitive and non-cognitive effects of multigrade versus single-grade teaching settings by arguing that teachers of multigrade classes tend to be poorly prepared to teach two or more grades at the one time, that they tend to use teaching approaches more suited to the single-grade context, and that teaching resources suited to multigrade teaching are not made available to them. He also notes the fact that multigrade classes place a greater workload on teachers, more preparation time is necessary, and better classroom management skills are required. He suggests that outcomes of the multigrade setting would, most likely, be more positive than those in the single-grade setting if these matters were addressed.

In Veenman's view, the multigrade setting can potentially provide a richer learning environment for children than the single-grade setting. In Mason and Burn's view, the multigrade setting is inherently inferior to the single-grade setting and, unless

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<sup>1</sup> Veenman used the term "combination" here to include both two-grade (consecutive grade) and multiple multigrade classes.

interventions are made, pupil will do less well in this setting. Mason & Burns (1997b) consider multigrade classes to be an undesirable option to be avoided where possible in the interest quality education and equity.

### **Teaching approaches in multigrade classes**

On the basis of the research that he reviewed, Veenman (1995) has been able to provide some insights into aspects of classroom process in the multigrade setting, particularly in the areas of basic skills of reading, mathematics and language. According to Veenman (1995), the school experience for pupils in multigrade classes is little different from that of pupils in single grade settings except that they have to share their teacher with one or more other grade levels. Multigrade teachers appear to teach each grade in their class separately; one group being instructed while the other group/groups work(s) on individual seatwork\* tasks. Collaborative work is not feature of these classrooms; pupils in multigrade classes work alone in the group setting. In multigrade classes, according to Veenman (1995), children get less direct instruction from their teacher, time-on-task is lower, and peer tutoring or across-grade grouping by ability are not used to any significant degree. Multigrade teachers lack appropriate training for the multigrade setting, appropriate resources are lacking, and time for individualised work, including remediation, is severely limited. In their examination of the findings of nine naturalistic studies, Mason and Burns (1997a) found that teachers teaching in two-grade multigrade classes generally teach two separate curricula and, overall, maintain independent grade levels, especially in mathematics and reading. They teach a single curriculum in science and social studies. These findings raise important questions about the quality of teaching and learning in multigrade classes.

I recently conducted an exploratory study that examined the teaching approaches of teachers in multigrade classes in small two-teacher multigrade schools in the Republic of Ireland. The study sought to determine the teaching approaches used by these teachers, including the extent to which they taught each grade level separately. The study also investigated multigrade teachers' practices in relation to pupils' seatwork. Seventy-six two-teacher schools, comprising a 10% random sample of all two-teacher multigrade schools in the Republic of Ireland, constituted the study sample. Responses to a postal questionnaire were obtained from 56% of the surveyed schools. In the case of seven schools, only the school principal responded. Overall, 56% (41) of principals and 47% (34) of class teachers responded.

The findings of this study showed that teachers in two-teacher multigrade schools, with up to four grade-levels in each class, used a range of approaches within and across subject areas (Table 1). Most teachers used more than one approach to the teaching of each subject area. Teachers taught all grades together, two grades together, and/or each grade separately within and across subject areas.

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\* Term refers to that part of the lesson where pupils work on tasks or activities independently or with other pupils away from the direction attention of the teacher.

**Table 1**  
**Teaching approaches used by teachers in two-teacher multigrade classes<sup>2</sup>**

|                    | All-grades Teaching |              |              |              | Two-grades teaching |              |              |              | Separate-grades teaching |              |              |              | Across-grades teaching |              |              |    |    |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------------------|--------------|--------------|----|----|----|----|----|---|----|----|----|
|                    | All teachers        | Junior-level | Senior-level | All teachers | All teachers        | Junior-level | Senior-level | All teachers | All teachers             | Junior-level | Senior-level | All teachers | All teachers           | Junior-level | Senior-level |    |    |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |
|                    | No.                 | %            | No.          | %            | No.                 | %            | No.          | %            | No.                      | %            | No.          | %            | No.                    | %            | No.          |    |    |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |
| <b>Gaeilge</b>     | 50                  | 67           | 20           | 57           | 30                  | 75           | 62           | 83           | 27                       | 77           | 35           | 88           | 40                     | 53           | 24           | 69 | 16 | 40 | 18 | 24 | 8 | 23 | 10 | 25 |
| <b>English</b>     | 45                  | 60           | 17           | 49           | 28                  | 70           | 55           | 73           | 22                       | 63           | 33           | 83           | 48                     | 64           | 31           | 89 | 17 | 43 | 27 | 36 | 9 | 26 | 18 | 45 |
| <b>Maths</b>       | 19                  | 25           | 6            | 17           | 13                  | 33           | 31           | 41           | 16                       | 46           | 15           | 38           | 70                     | 93           | 33           | 94 | 37 | 93 | 17 | 23 | 5 | 14 | 12 | 30 |
| <b>History</b>     | 17                  | 23           | 5            | 14           | 12                  | 30           | 38           | 51           | 6                        | 17           | 32           | 80           | 6                      | 8            | 2            | 6  | 4  | 10 | 4  | 5  | 2 | 6  | 2  | 5  |
| <b>Geography</b>   | 20                  | 27           | 6            | 17           | 14                  | 35           | 37           | 49           | 7                        | 20           | 30           | 75           | 9                      | 12           | 3            | 9  | 6  | 15 | 5  | 7  | 2 | 6  | 3  | 8  |
| <b>Science</b>     | 34                  | 45           | 10           | 29           | 24                  | 60           | 28           | 37           | 9                        | 26           | 19           | 48           | 8                      | 11           | 3            | 9  | 5  | 13 | 6  | 8  | 4 | 11 | 2  | 5  |
| <b>Visual Arts</b> | 67                  | 89           | 29           | 83           | 38                  | 95           | 25           | 33           | 15                       | 43           | 10           | 25           | 4                      | 5            | 2            | 6  | 2  | 5  | 3  | 4  | 0 | 0  | 3  | 8  |
| <b>Music</b>       | 70                  | 93           | 31           | 89           | 39                  | 98           | 22           | 29           | 14                       | 40           | 8            | 20           | 3                      | 4            | 2            | 6  | 1  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 0 | 0  | 4  | 10 |
| <b>Drama</b>       | 62                  | 83           | 28           | 80           | 34                  | 85           | 21           | 28           | 14                       | 40           | 7            | 18           | 2                      | 3            | 1            | 3  | 1  | 3  | 2  | 3  | 0 | 0  | 2  | 5  |
| <b>P.E.</b>        | 70                  | 93           | 32           | 91           | 38                  | 95           | 19           | 25           | 14                       | 40           | 5            | 13           | 2                      | 3            | 1            | 3  | 1  | 3  | 2  | 3  | 0 | 0  | 2  | 5  |
| <b>SPHE</b>        | 44                  | 59           | 19           | 54           | 25                  | 63           | 29           | 39           | 13                       | 37           | 16           | 40           | 9                      | 12           | 2            | 6  | 7  | 18 | 4  | 5  | 0 | 0  | 4  | 10 |

teaching was also used by some teachers, especially for the teaching of aspects of Gaeilge, English, and Mathematics. Differences emerged between teachers of junior and senior level grades in the approaches used in the different subject areas. Study findings showed that a high proportion of teachers taught all grades together for Visual Arts, Music, Drama, and Physical Education. A large proportion of teachers also used this approach for the teaching of aspects of Gaeilge, English, and SPHE. A relatively small proportion of teachers taught all grades together for Mathematics, History, or Geography. Most teachers taught two grades together for the teaching of aspects of Gaeilge and English and a significant number used this approach for the teaching of History and Geography. Some teachers reported using two-grade teaching for some topics in Mathematics, Science, and SPHE. A small number of teachers also taught two grade levels together for Visual Arts, Music, Drama, and Physical Education. Almost all teachers taught each grade level separately for mathematics, especially the number area. A large proportion of teachers used a separate grades approach for the teaching of some content in English and Gaeilge, especially reading. A significantly higher proportion of junior-level teachers than senior-levels teachers taught each grade separately for Gaeilge. A relatively small proportion of teachers used across-grade teaching. This approach was used the most extensively in English and to a lesser extent for Gaeilge and Mathematics. Peer tutoring and/or cross-age tutoring was used by a significant number of teachers. Seventy-one percent of teachers used cross-age tutoring and 53% of teachers used peer tutoring.

The findings of my study do not support the claims of Mason and Burns (1997a) and Veenman (1995) in relation to the teaching practices of teachers of multigrade classes. In general, teachers in my study sample did not use separate grades teaching exclusively for any subject area. Whereas separate-grades teaching was used, it was used in conjunction with a range of other teaching approaches.

Veenman (1995) suggests that the multigrade setting provides a unique opportunity for across-grade grouping, which has potential to improve the quality of teaching and learning. He argues that very little across-grade grouping takes place in multigrade classes. The findings of the present study show that across-grade teaching was used by a significant, though relatively small number, of teachers in several subjects of the curriculum. If, as Veenman (1995) points out, across-grade grouping has been found to consistently result in positive pupil achievement, this is an important finding.

My study does lend some support to Veenman's (1995) assertion that pupils in multigrade classes spend more time on independent seatwork than pupils in single-grade classes. For example, study findings showed that 76% pupils spent over 30% of their time on individual independent seatwork and 39% of pupils spent over 50% of their time on this type of work (Table 2). It is quite likely that these pupils did spend more time on independent seatwork than their single-grade counterparts, although information on seatwork practices in the single-grade setting is not available for comparison. It is notable that many pupils in multigrade classes also spent time on paired or group seatwork. This finding indicates that pupils spend even more time working without direct attention from their teacher than the findings relating to individual seatwork would suggest. However, it does not support Veenman's finding that pupils in multigrade classes do not engage to any large degree in collaborative or group work.

**Table 2** Amount of time spent by pupils in four-grade multigrade classes on independent and paired/group seatwork

| % of pupil time spent on seatwork | All teachers |              | Junior-level |              | Senior-level |              |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|                                   | Independent  | Paired/group | Independent. | Paired/group | Independent. | Paired/group |
| 1-10%                             | 1.3%         | 21.3%        | 2.9%         | 20.0%        | 0.0%         | 22.5%        |
| 11-20%                            | 2.6%         | 28.0%        | 2.9%         | 25.7%        | 2.5%         | 30.0%        |
| 21-30%                            | 20.0%        | 24.0%        | 8.6%         | 28.6%        | 30.0%        | 20.0%        |
| 31-40%                            | 18.7%        | 13.3%        | 22.8%        | 5.7%         | 15.0%        | 20.0%        |
| 41-50%                            | 18.7%        | 5.3%         | 22.8%        | 5.7%         | 15.0%        | 5.0%         |
| 51-55%                            | 12.0%        | 6.7%         | 20.0%        | 14.3%        | 5.0%         | 0.0%         |
| 56-60%                            | 10.7%        | 0.0%         | 0.0%         | 0.0%         | 20.0%        | 0.0%         |
| 61-65%                            | 12.0%        | 1.3%         | 17.1%        | 0.0%         | 7.5%         | 2.5%         |
| Other                             | 4.0%         | 0.0%         | 2.9%         | 0.0%         | 5.0%         | 0.0%         |

The findings of previous research as reviewed by Veenman (1995) and Mason & Burns (1997a) suggest a rather impoverished teaching and learning setting in multigrade classes, which can be offset only by the extra exertions of good teachers and possible interventions by administrators in determining class composition. The findings of my study highlight the complexity involved in trying to understand how multigrade classes function and how teaching and learning occurs in the multigrade setting. However, these findings do point to teachers using classroom time creatively and adapting to the teaching and learning contexts in which they find themselves.

There is little comparative data available on the cognitive or non-cognitive learning of multigrade versus single-grade teaching in the Republic of Ireland. Some evidence, is available from the 1999 National Assessment of Mathematics Achievement (Shiel & Kelly, 1999). This study, which focused on the mathematics achievement of fourth-class children in the Republic of Ireland, found no significant differences between the achievement of pupils in single-grade and multigrade or consecutive grade classes. More studies in this area are needed. More information is also needed on the range of approaches used by teachers in single-grade and consecutive-grade classes. These data could provide important evidence on the adaptations that multigrade teachers are making within and across subject areas, as they attempt to teach several grade levels, and the effects of these adaptations on pupil outcomes.

The findings of my study were based on the responses of a small number of teachers teaching in two-teacher multigrade schools in the Republic of Ireland. Clearly, these findings are not directly generalisable to other multigrade settings. Whereas the two-teacher multigrade schools investigated in this study have many contextual variables in common to other types of multigrade schools (e.g., one-, three-, and four-teacher schools) in the Republic of Ireland, we do not know the extent to which they are similar to multigrade contexts in other parts of the world. At present, so little is known about the nature of multigrade teaching and the contexts in which it occurs in most countries that an attempt to make useful comparisons between the context investigated in this study and these would be futile. However, future studies of

teaching approaches in multigrade settings in a range of contexts, and comparison of single-grade and multigrade cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes, would add considerably to knowledge in this area. Observational data, in particular, would add considerably to the knowledge base on multigrade teaching.

## CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly multigrade classes of any kind are more difficult to teach than single-grade classes. That is not to say that instruction and consequent learning outcomes must be necessarily inferior in this setting. Successful learning is likely to be more dependent on the quality of instructional practices than on organizational strategies. The education and support of competent professionals who can deliver a quality education to primary school pupils in the multigrade setting needs to be prioritised. If this is to happen, we need to know more about multigrade teaching and the variety of contexts in which it is practised. At present our knowledge is limited and the research findings and other information about teaching and learning in this context, which is available to us, often confuses more than it informs. This is due, among other things, to conceptual and definitional confusion and the apparent “invisibility” of multigrade teaching in administrative decision-making and in discussions about education. Further research is needed on multigrade classes of all types. One of the aims of this research would be to identify examples of best practice in multigrade teaching settings. In carrying out this research, a distinction needs to be made between consecutive or two-grade classes in large predominantly single-grade schools and multigrade classes in small schools. This is a particularly important issue for the Irish system. Multigrade classes and small schools are sufficiently different from single-grade classes and large/medium schools to warrant special attention from administrators, teacher educators, and textbook/teaching materials publishers.

Multigrade schools and classes are here to stay. Already a high proportion of children and teachers throughout the world are working in multigrade classes and it is reliably predicted that the incidence of multigrade teaching is on the increase. We cannot afford to ignore its existence. The single/mono-grade mindset that appears to be a characteristic of most educational systems throughout the world needs to be challenged and modified to accommodate what are the realities of educational need.

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Robert Fourie

## **LANGUAGE PLANNING ISSUES PERTINENT TO INTERVENTION WITH THE YOUNG DEAF CHILD**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Acquisition of language for the deaf child is complicated by a sensory deficit. Conflicting definitions of deafness, opposing philosophical stances, preconceptions regarding language in general and Sign Language in particular, along with certain practices in mainstreaming have combined to make acquisition of a primary language difficult for the deaf child. This paper explores these issues and describes an approach to implementing a Bilingual/Bicultural approach in a mainstream setting with Deaf children in which hearing peers are taught basic signing skills.*

### **DEFINITIONS OF DEAFNESS**

Arriving at a definition of deafness is surprisingly difficult and value laden. Adherents of the medical model define deafness as the inability to hear, with particular focus on the degree of hearing loss, aetiology and genetics. The Deaf community on the other hand, describe their deafness not as a deficiency, but as a *difference* with cultural and linguistic implications. Indeed, some deaf individuals believe the medical model of deafness tacitly undermines their participation in humanity (Lane, 1984).



Reductionist stances that define deafness as a set of symptoms have perpetuated what Erting describes as “the subjugation [of the Deaf] to the values and goals of the wider society” (Erting, 1978, p.140). Such strong opinions from the Deaf can only stem from a painful experiences at the hands of a hearing world and should not be ignored. Hence, I have chosen the less medically oriented definition of deaf persons as those who are unable to use hearing to process spoken language (Nowell, 1985).

## **THE STATUS OF SIGN LANGUAGE**

In the Republic of Ireland many deaf individuals feel similarly alienated, particularly with regard to the low status of Irish Sign Language (ISL). Despite being a native language of Ireland, ISL as yet does not have legal recognition, a fact that has not changed since Matthews reported it in the late 90’s (Matthew, 1996). Consequently, as part of their identification with Deaf culture, many deaf people have opted, rather radically, to embrace Sign Language with total rejection of oral speech and aural culture. Indeed, numerous deaf individuals appear to reject the emotions and customs of a hearing, speaking world and to believe that spoken words are used to "tame deaf hearts" (Woodford, 1988). Many of these strong feelings would appear to have their roots in methods of educating deaf people.

## **THE ORAL - MANUAL DEBATE**

The controversy surrounding methods of educating deaf children has probably existed since the advent of education for the deaf. It has, according to Lane (1984), added chaos to the confusion of the umbrella term ‘deafness’. While the composite factors of the debate are many and complex, it is possible to identify two main camps: Oralists and Manualists. Oralists are teachers of deaf children who advocate oral/aural methods; Manualists are teachers of deaf children who advocate the use of Sign Language or Sign Systems. Oral/aural theorists are committed to exploiting the residual hearing of all hearing-impaired children (Ross, 1992) by using intensive direct training and parent involvement. However, many oralists such as Lowe (1981), are convinced that such efforts are fruitful *only* in the absence of Sign Language. Such beliefs are fairly common among professionals involved in the aural habilitation of deaf children and are reminiscent of positions taken by the great inventor Alexander Graham Bell who argued for the education of deaf children in the absence of Sign Language. Bell, whose mother was deaf and whose father and grandfather were elocutionists, was influential in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Delore, Robier, Bremond, Beutter and Ployet (1999), Bell's views probably resulted in the Milan Conference of Teachers of the Deaf adopting the Oral method in 1880 as its official position. Enormous difficulties for deaf people ensued for many generations. These persistent strategies for educating deaf children have endured to this day within the dominant oral/aural education systems, in spite of the tragic failures of the deaf education system to achieve adequate English literacy for deaf students. For example, Powers, Gregory and Thoughtenhoofd (1998) report the underachievement of deaf pupils in the United Kingdom and state that there had been no improvement in the reading levels of Deaf British school leavers, at the time of their report in 1998, since a report published by Conrad (1979) revealing an average reading age of nine years for deaf school leavers.

Many professionals have advocated the use of both methods in combination. In an effort to reconcile the incommensurate oral vs. manual paradigms of intervention. Such efforts have resulted in hybrid means of communication with deaf children in the classroom. Pidgin Sign Language refers to a continuum of different amounts of Natural Sign Language and Spoken English contained in a pidgin system. It uses natural signs in English word order and can denote plurals, location of subject and in space and direction (Quigley and Paul, 1984). In contrast, manually coded systems such as Manually Coded English (MCE), attempt to provide a 1:1 simultaneous, manual mapping of the morphemes contained in the spoken message, including markers that signal English inflections (Jordan, Gustason and Rosen, 1976). These sign systems are ordinarily used simultaneous to spoken English so that signs provide a visual message corresponding to the aural one but lack Natural Sign Language inflections. Despite these hybrid forms of language apparently overcoming the tension between spoken and signed languages, Petitto (1993b) cites evidence that these forms of communication are not “real” or natural languages. Indeed, they are not used by any deaf community, are not passed on from generation to generation, do not undergo the natural changes that natural languages do, and are processed differently in the brain as compared to natural languages. Furthermore, an earlier study by Petitto suggested that only ten percent of the declarative sentences and questions signed in MCE by a teacher sample in their study were truly grammatically complete in the signed version (Marmor and Petitto, 1979). Although much of spoken language is grammatically incomplete in its natural form, the formal register of language used in the classroom should be grammatically complete. Nevertheless, when it comes to acquisition of language, it seems that deaf children are able to use poorly structured visual information and impose rules on it. This ability is documented by Goldin-Meadow (2002) who describes how deaf children deprived of Sign Language develop their own spontaneously rule-governed gesture systems based on their parents' natural gesture. While this is strong evidence for an innate propensity to develop a rule-governed communication system, Goldin-Meadow falls short of noting that such gesture systems are a meagre substitute for exposure to a community of language-users with a rich, fully developed language such as ISL.

## **BELIEFS ABOUT SIGN LANGUAGE**

Coexisting with the dominant oral/aural approach in the education of deaf children are a number of preconceptions regarding Natural Sign Languages. For example, Myklebust in 1964 stated the following regarding Sign Language:

“The manual sign language used by the deaf is an ideographic language. Essentially it is more pictorial, less symbolic, and as a system is one which falls mainly at the level of imagery. Ideographic language systems, in comparison with verbal symbol systems, lack precision, subtlety and flexibility. It is likely that Man cannot achieve his ultimate potential through an ideographic language, inasmuch as it is limited to the more concrete aspects of his experience.” Myklebust (1964, p. 241).

Two decades later, Markowicz (1980) described five major beliefs about Natural Sign Language that he regarded as myths. These myths were as follows:

- Sign Language is *universal*
- Signs are based on *words*
- Sign Language is not *grammatical*
- Signs are *iconic*, i.e. they are visually obvious
- Signs are *concrete*

Markowicz contests the belief that Sign Language is universal by citing the mutual unintelligibility of various Natural Sign Languages such as American Sign Language (ASL), British Sign Language (BSL) and others. Hearing people are often surprised to learn that deaf people from different countries have as much difficulty in understanding each other's signs as hearing people have in understanding other's foreign spoken languages. The mutual unintelligibility of BSL and ISL provide a local example of this phenomenon.

Markowicz observes that languages are concept-based and that signs directly represent concepts, not words. Indeed there are signs for which there are no single spoken words and spoken words for which there are no equivalent signs. In the first case, idiomatic phrases in the spoken language can often explain a single sign, and in the second case, deaf signers will fingerspell the word as a "borrowed" lexical item from the spoken language. (Irish bilinguals will attest to how similar processes occur when translating from Irish to English or from English to Irish). Signs are concept based and not visual or fingerspelled equivalents of spoken words. Moreover, Emmorey, Grabowski, McCullough, Damasio, Ponto, Hichwa and Bellugi (2003) point out that the fingerspelled alphabet is a set of manual symbols of the written forms of English and does not represent the sounds of English.

The belief that signs are ungrammatical, glorified gestures is contested by Markowicz's citation of Stokoe (1960), who was the first linguist to argue the separate syntax, phonology (cherology) and semantics of Natural Sign Language. Differences to English in the word order of Natural Sign Language are due to its inflected structure, its linguistic classifier system and different origination from spoken English. Similar to Latin, word order is less important in Sign Languages. Instead, the visuo-spatial aspects of location and directionality have been shown to indicate grammatical relations (Markowicz, 1980). Some of the most convincing evidence for Natural Sign Languages being true languages according to Gordon (In Press), comes from neurological studies. Neurological investigators (Poizner, Kaplan, Bellugi and Padden, 1984; Poizner, Bellugi and Iragui, 1984) have clearly isolated Broca's area in the left hemisphere (among other sites) as important for the production of Sign Language. Later researchers such as Emmorey, et al. (2003) and Horwitz, Amunts, Bhattacharyya, Patkin, Jeffries, Zilles and Braun (2003) have used Positron Emission Tomography (PET-scans) to determine if similar neuroanatomical areas are involved in lexical retrieval for both signs and words. Their findings indicate that they are. This evidence is remarkable in that it demonstrates that areas active for Sign Language are virtually the same areas in the brain responsible for spoken language with only minor differences.

Thus, deaf adults who suffer strokes in these areas of the brain develop acquired aphasia and produce Sign Language errors similar to those made by their hearing peers who have aphasia with similar brain lesions.

Arbitrariness is a defining property of human language (Crystal, 1992). In other words there is no relationship between the form of a language symbol and its meaning. Therefore, if Sign Languages were iconic, they would be classed as semiotic systems, but not as languages. Markowicz challenges the idea that Sign Language is iconic by pointing out that only a handful of signs are iconic in the same way that only a handful of spoken words are onomatopoeic in English. Thus hearing people are unable to follow signed conversation. If Sign Language were truly iconic, most signs would be recognisable.

Finally, Markowicz negates the belief that Sign language is concrete by listing examples of abstract ideas such as Love, Faith, Belief and Trust and the various subtle variations of these ideas that can be expressed in American Sign Language (Markowicz, 1980).

Another long-standing belief regarding Sign Language, which was not discussed by Markowicz, is the myth that Chimpanzees and other primates can be taught Sign Language. Wallman's (1992) book *Aping Language* contests the conclusions of Beatrice and Alan Gardner who claimed they had taught Washoe the chimp to use American Sign Language. Their attempts were based on a faulty understanding of the phonology, morphology and syntax of Sign Language. Although the chimps were able to use a few signs in a conditioned manner, their attempts could not be defined as language as the chimp's grammatical abilities were virtually non-existent. Their signs were not inflected for aspect, agreement and were uncoordinated into the defined contours of Natural Sign Language; and most of the "signs" used by the chimps were close to their natural repertoire of gestures used in the wild. With such prevalent negative beliefs about Sign Language, it is little wonder that Sign Language is often regarded as inferior and undesirable.

There is another preconception regarding the nature of language in general that may work against the cause of the Deaf community. This is the belief that children need to be *actively taught* a first language and that for deaf children this effort needs to be redoubled through the imperfect channel of hearing.

## LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Children are not taught a primary language. They acquire the ambient language, firstly because they are immersed in a social context rich in interactions and language and secondly because their brains are innately hardwired to make sense of these social interactions while actively acquiring language (Pinker, 1994). This implies that *children* do the work of language acquisition, *not* their parents; and that this process is an active process, not a passive one. Hence parents provide the context of language acquisition, not the cause of it.

However, some professionals involved in the education and development of children believe that if children were not actively taught a language they would not acquire it. Although bonding, interaction, turn-taking and vocal pitch behaviours, commonly referred to as Motherese, are important elements in facilitating directed attention to language, there are a number of language communities who do not use Motherese with their prelinguistic children (Pinker, 1994).

In many communities of the world, parents do not indulge their children in Motherese. In fact they do not speak to their prelinguistic children at all, except for occasional demands and rebukes. This is not unreasonable. After all, young children plainly can't understand a word you say. So why waste your breath in soliloquies?"

Pinker (1994, p. 30).

Parents may be burdened with the responsibility of "teaching" language to their "blank slate" child. Indeed, some professionals inadvertently give the tacit message to parents that their children's speech and language disorders are due to the parent's incorrect handling of communication. Pinker further cites Aunt Mae in the South Carolina Piedmont who explained her belief in the innate ability of children to develop language, to the anthropologist Shirley Brice Heath:

"Now just how crazy is dat? White folks uh hear dey kids say sump'n, dey say it back to 'em, dey aks 'em 'gain and 'gain 'bout things, like they 'posed to be born knowin'." (Heath, cited in Pinker (1994, p. 31).

Pinker makes the point that while parents can direct the child's attention more effectively to language by the use of Motherese, and provide structured opportunities for the child to experience the many grammatical forms of language, the greater part of the task rests with the child's innate language acquisition ability. Language will be automatically acquired by the simple fact of existing within a linguistic community. Ouellet and Cohen (1999) expand and refine this argument by pointing out that the acquisition of language may in fact rely on a combination of experience-independent (genetic) and experience-dependent (social) variables. It is clear however that the absence of either, for whatever reason, will result in varying degrees of language impairments.

## **LANGUAGE DEPRIVATION**

The case of children deprived of a language model despite an ability to acquire language provides an example of the experience-dependent variable being critically absent. If a child is not exposed to language, their Language Acquisition Device (LAD), a hypothesised experience-independent configuration first suggested by Chomsky (1986), will gradually diminish its effect until puberty when hormones and metabolic processes determine a cut-off point for language acquisition. This theory is referred to as the critical period hypothesis (Lenneberg, Chomsky and Marx, 1967; Chomsky, 1986). There are accounts of children shut up in cellars, whose parents have not allowed them out to see the light of day, nor have clothed or spoken to them.

An example of this was the child Genie whose psychotic father kept her locked up tied to a potty and who would bark and growl like a dog at her instead of talking to her (Bishop, 1993; Rymer, 1994). Children such as Genie, when finally rescued are able to acquire a language if their rescue comes *before* puberty. If it occurs after puberty, they never really get the “hang” of language (Grimshaw, Adelstein, Bryden and MacKinnon, 1998) and use it in a deviant manner – generally in a telegraphic style and often without regard to word order. In other words, like the spoken language of many Deaf people.

Ninety percent of Deaf children are born to hearing parents who cannot easily provide exposure to a Sign Language (Goldin-Meadow, 2002) and may inadvertently be deprived of an accessible language model. In such a scenario, the experience-independent language acquisition feature of the child's brain is activated by physiological processes, while the experience-dependent feature fails to detect visual or auditory experiences that convey linguistic information. Hearing aids and cochlear implants may assist in conveying auditory linguistic information, but it is the author's contention that even the most up-to-date digital hearing aids and implants provide a severely degraded form of sensory information which makes it extremely difficult for a deaf child to acquire language *naturally* via the modality of hearing. While it is highly desirable to aid a deaf child's hearing as soon as is possible, consistent exposure to Sign Language from early on, will assure the least encumbered route to language acquisition for the deaf child. This assured path to language acquisition in Sign Language is supported by several studies that have demonstrated that deaf babies learning a sign language achieve language milestones even earlier than hearing babies learning spoken language (Orlansky and Bonvillian, 1984; Petitto and Marentette, 1991; Bonvillian, Orlansky and Novack, 1993; Goodwyn and Acredolo, 1993). In comparison to cochlear implants, which involve major surgery, hospitalisation and consistent maintenance, Sign Language also represents the least invasive route to language acquisition for the deaf child as it occurs in an unimpaired modality, namely vision. Furthermore, Ouellet and Cohen (1999) have documented that some deaf children fitted with cochlear implants "remain language-delayed or develop a functional but imperfect command of language." (Ouellet and Cohen, 1999: p 271). Moreover, many members of the adult Deaf community are sceptical of cochlear implants as is evidenced by the following statement issued by the "Sourdes en Colère", a radical Deaf voice arising in France, who represent the beliefs of many Deaf individuals:

"The cochlear implant is experienced, within the Deaf community, as yet another attempt at socio-cultural genocide, of the same order as the banning of Sign Language at the Congress of Milan in 1880, bringing in its wake disastrous consequences for Deaf culture. But this time, the Deaf are not lowering their arms..." (Sourdes en Colère, cited in Blume, 1999, p.1264)

Unfortunately, advocates of the oral/aural approach in the absence of Sign Language have no means of reliably predicting which children will be successes and failures. Yet some advocates of this approach, effectively counsel parents of deaf children to gamble with their children's language acquisition in the early years by advising against the use of Sign Language or simply failing to mention it as an option.

Later on, when it becomes evident that certain children will not be able to acquire language orally, they are regularly passed onto “signing” institutions as failures, often very late in the child’s language acquisition years – sometimes too late. In Ireland, as many as 25% of congenitally deaf individuals learn Sign Language only *after* leaving school (Matthews, 1996).

## **THE BILINGUAL/BICULTURAL APPROACH**

The Bilingual/Bicultural approach appears to overcome many of the conflicts inherent in the above-mentioned approaches, while satisfying the main tenets of each. According to Cummins, a researcher in bilingualism, instruction through a minority home language (L1) will be just as, or more effective, in promoting literacy skills in the majority second language (L2) (Cummins, 1980). Furthermore, the need for the deaf child to cope with and function in both Hearing and Deaf Cultures would make a bicultural as well as a bilingual approach especially desirable (Reagan, 1985). Essentially, for a child to become bilingual, they need to be exposed to more than one language. In the case of the deaf child, this involves one language being a Natural Sign Language, such as ISL, and the other being the verbal and written forms of a Spoken Language such as English. With regard to choosing which language will be the primary language, it is very difficult to predict how well a child will acquire a spoken language. It is therefore this author’s experience that initially it is wise to provide deaf children with an assured path to natural language acquisition in the form of a Natural Sign Language and thereby avoid the risk of the child not fully acquiring a first language. Indeed it is of utmost importance that a child’s fundamental right to a primary language be protected (Duffin, 2001). A child who is exposed to Natural Sign Language through exposure to fluent adult signers, while learning a spoken language has not lost anything. Conversely, the child who attempts to learn a first language through the imperfect channels of a hearing aid or cochlear implant in the absence of a Natural Sign Language, could *fail* to fully acquire a first language (Ouellet and Cohen, 1999). The cognitive and educational implications in such a case would be disastrous.

## **LANGUAGE PROCESSING AND SENSE MODALITY**

There are special considerations regarding spoken language/Sign language bilingualism. Since signs are processed visually and words are processed auditorily, the mechanisms employed in language processing and memory are probably different for each (Duffin, 2001). The deaf child is therefore not an ordinary bilingual. For this reason, it seems that it may be important for spoken and signed languages to be kept *separate* as far as is possible, in other words *not* produced simultaneously, to avoid overloading the child’s language processing system.

More fundamentally, signs are not representations of words; they represent concepts directly. An analogue to signing and speaking simultaneously would be speaking to an English speaking child using English vocabulary in the word order of Irish in an attempt to teach Irish Grammar!

Combining words and signs may in many cases confuse matters for the deaf child, although surprisingly many deaf children are apparently able to overcome this against the odds (Goldin-Meadow, 2002).

## METALINGUISTICS AND BILINGUALISM

One advantage of providing deaf children with separate examples of spoken and Sign Language is that it positively influences their metalinguistic (thinking about language) abilities, thus enabling them to determine in what contexts the use of each language is appropriate. According to Bialystok (1991) bilingual children have better metalinguistic awareness. Such comparative skills are arguably highly desirable in deaf children who need to navigate the world of communication in two different modalities. Similarly, it allows them to make hypotheses regarding the efficacy of their communicative attempts both verbally and manually, and to develop strategies for repairing failed attempts. Increased metalinguistic awareness, due to bilingual exposure should enhance the awareness of language by providing opportunities to perform contrastive analysis of the first and second language, particularly when the communication occurs out of context (Francis, 2002). This insight, stands in opposition to the widespread belief that deaf children's exposure to Sign Language will somehow contaminate their speech abilities.

## MAINSTREAMING DEAF CHILDREN

Another problem for deaf individuals is the widespread practice of mainstreaming deaf children into hearing schools. While this practice may be excellent for the inclusion of deaf children into the general community, educationalists need to ensure that they do not achieve the very opposite. Lane (1984) criticises the mainstreaming of Deaf children as follows:

“Using the medical model, our society is irresponsibly tearing many deaf children from the social fabric of the signing community in which their lives are interwoven and casting them will-nilly into “mainstream” schools, as if pretending that they spoke would make it so. Some hearing educators reply that proximity is the first step in integration, and integration - *making others like ourselves* – is a self-evident good. When no provision is made in mainstreaming for the language barrier, however, this proximity proves, in the words of a deaf educator, as productive as that between a dog and its fleas.”  
Lane (1984, p. xiv).

Hence, for mainstreaming to succeed, educationalists need to provide deaf children with appropriate access to language models in the form of Sign Language Interpreters and Deaf Classroom assistants who are *native* users of a Sign language.



Furthermore, it is not always unreasonable to expect society to change and accommodate the deaf individual: providing entire schools with Sign Language classes will allow hearing children to communicate at least functionally with deaf individuals in and out of the school. This forward-thinking approach is currently in place at a Cork-based National School with Unit for Hearing Impaired Children. Each one of approximately 1000 hearing children in the school learns Sign Language as a cultural activity to facilitate inclusion of the school's 12 deaf children into playground and social events. In fact, hearing children can regularly be seen on the playground fingerspelling and using ISL signs, not only with their deaf peers, but also with each other. This approach successfully goes to the heart of the mainstreaming ethos of inclusion, integration and removing stigma, and sets the groundwork for deaf children to function and communicate meaningfully within their own communities in the future.

## CONCLUSION

Perhaps Lane's comments regarding our practice of trying to make others like ourselves lies at the very core of the many problems Deaf people face. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century, professionals involved in deafness have to guard against planning language futures in which people's sameness is honoured rather than celebrating the richness of their diversity.

*What matters deafness of the ear, when the mind hears? The one true deafness, the incurable deafness, is that of the mind.*

Victor Hugo to Ferdinand Berthier, November 25, 1845  
[cited in Lane (1984)]

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Mary McAuliffe Ryng

## **PETER GOODMAN: IRELAND'S FIRST MUSIC INSPECTOR**

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*ABSTRACT: The writer has conducted an extensive historical investigation into music in the Irish primary school system as part of a PhD study. One individual, Peter Goodman, Ireland's first music inspector, emerged as being a character central to the introduction of music to primary schools in 1900, and to the subsequent in-service education provided for teachers. This paper outlines Goodman's work in this area, and traces his promotion of the Curwen Tonic Solfa system. Goodman wrote prolifically describing his work, and his reports were included in the annual Reports of the Board of Commissioners of National Education. From these archival sources emerge a picture of an individual full of enthusiasm and zeal for his mission, and with some ideas and aspirations that are just as valid today as when he first conceived them, a century ago. In particular, his appeal for a music advisory service has been repeatedly made in the century that followed, and this may be an opportune time to seriously consider pursuit of such an option.*

### **THE CONTEXT**

In 1999, a revised *Primary School Curriculum* was launched in Ireland, and the monumental task of introducing and implementing this on a phased basis commenced. To date, teachers have undertaken introductory training in more than half of the curricular areas. In-service education in music is currently scheduled for the academic year 2004-2005, with implementation anticipated in the following year. It is just over a century since music first became a compulsory subject in the national school curriculum, and since teachers participated enthusiastically in the intensive in-service training provided by Peter Goodman (1849 – 1909), Ireland's first music inspector. This is a significant time to examine that initiative, and to reflect on Goodman's contribution to music in Irish education.

## FOUNDATION OF THE NATIONAL SCHOOL SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

The National School system was established in Ireland in 1831, under the state funded Board of Commissioners of National Education. The main aim of the initiative was to provide a basic education for the children of Ireland, and indeed the national school system was responsible for the virtual elimination of illiteracy. Regrettably, however, the national school system was also a major factor in the decline of the Irish language. Irish was not recognised as a national school subject, even in areas where it was the vernacular of the people. Indeed for much of the early years, the textbooks contained very little material relating to the Irish environment, and claims have been made that the texts were geared towards cultural assimilation of the native people by the English administration (Coolahan, 1981: p.21).

The Board of Commissioners of National Education published annual reports, commencing in 1834, and from these we get a detailed and comprehensive picture of the developing education system. These publications are widely regarded as a significant primary resource in the history of Irish education, and it is also possible to study the development of music in Irish education through the pages of these reports.

## THE INTRODUCTION OF MUSIC TO THE NATIONAL SCHOOL CURRICULUM

In the opening years of the National School System, music was not included in the curriculum. However, soon after its establishment, there were suggestions that music should be taught in the National Schools. As McCarthy (1999, p.51), points out '*Such discussion was not unique to Ireland. All nations developing educational systems faced a similar decision: would music be included, why, and in what form?*'. Early debate regarding music in education referred to its '*civilizing*' influence, and it was claimed that music would provide a source of innocent recreation for the people, and that it would elevate their life-style and social manners. Music was also viewed by many as an important part of the religious education in the schools (Select Committee, 1835, pp.257, 345, 377).

The Board of Commissioners examined reports regarding the position of music in European schools, and was in agreement that music would be a beneficial inclusion on the Irish curriculum. Music thus became an '*extra*' branch of instruction. By 1847, singing was part of the programme for the pupils of the Central Model School and for trainee teachers, who could obtain a certificate of competency on completion of their training.

The curricular status of music improved in 1883, when it was changed from being an '*extra*' subject to being an '*ordinary and optional subject*', thus elevating it to the status of a basic curricular area. At this time also, '*singing by ear*' was gaining acceptance in many European countries.

However, Irish national education was now dominated by the controversial ‘*payment by results*’ system, and ‘*singing by ear*’ was not accepted for examination purposes in Ireland, despite the fact that in Britain, from 1882 onward, singing by rote gained half the fee payable for singing by note.

## THE HULLAH SYSTEM VERSUS THE TONIC SOLFA SYSTEM

In the nineteenth century, school music was essentially based around choral singing, and there was heavy emphasis on the technical aspects of sight singing and vocal technique. When music was first introduced in Ireland, a system of sight singing was adopted from England, which was known as the Hullah system. This was named after John Pyke Hullah (1812-1884) who introduced it to England, and was responsible for its dissemination there. The system was based on the French system of the fixed doh. Some in-service training in this method of teaching vocal music was made available to national school teachers in Ireland (Board of Commissioners, 1849, Appendix, p.269).

However, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Tonic Solfa method as developed by John Curwen (1816-1880) gained popularity in Britain, and began to replace the earlier Hullah system as a method of teaching music (Rainbow 1967, p.139-155). Curwen’s method was a development of the earlier work of Sarah Glover (1786-1867) and was based on the principle of the moveable doh. Curwen was critical of the French system as introduced by Hullah, declaring that ‘*music was being made difficult to the people of England by the fixed doh*’ (Ibid, p. 146). He drew deliberate attention to the essential distinction between his method and Hullah’s, by naming his own *Tonic Solfa*.

From the 1840s, Curwen devoted almost thirty years to experimentation and development of the system (Rainbow 1967, p.146). The Tonic Solfa movement grew slowly but steadily. At the beginning, Curwen maintained that his system was to be regarded as an approach to the reading of staff notation. But as the use of Tonic Solfa became widespread, he became less insistent on this, until eventually Solfa was being exclusively taught by advocates of the Curwen system, and the progression to staff notation overlooked.

The Hullah system also became unpopular in Ireland. It was after all a French system, modified for English use. It contained nothing Irish, and ‘*was culturally discontinuous with the experience of the majority of young people it sought to educate*’ (McCarthy 1999, p. 55). Patrick Keenan, Head Inspector of the National School system, criticized the songs in Hullah’s manual because of their lack of Irish origin:

*I could not name one (school) in which I heard a melody of Irish song. The introduction of Hullah’s system into the country brought into use a series of melodies, constructed with no idea as to melodic excellence, but to illustrate the intervals, sharps, flats and marks of expression to be met with in the music.*

(Board of Commissioners of National Education, 1855, Appendix to 22<sup>nd</sup> Report, p.73).

## PETER GOODMAN AND THE PROMOTION OF TONIC SOLFA IN IRELAND

Peter Goodman was the major figure in the promotion of Tonic Solfa in Irish national school education. He was appointed teacher of vocal music in Marlborough Street Training College and St. Patrick's Catholic Training College in 1883. On his appointment, he immediately introduced the Solfa system into the training colleges. He advocated Curwen's *Teacher's Manual* as the handbook for every teacher. In 1889, Goodman was publicly congratulated on the large number of Tonic Solfa College certificates achieved by his pupils in the previous two years, 351 in total (Society of Saint Cecilia, February 1889).

In 1892, the Board of Commissioners of National Education appointed Goodman to the position of *Examiner in Music*. His duties now consisted of examining and reporting on music instruction in the Training Colleges and schools. This was the first appointment of its kind in Ireland. As a result of this appointment, Goodman's yearly report was included in the annual reports of the Board of Commissioners. He wrote profusely, if at times a little naively, on the state of music in education, and of his aspirations for its future development. He argued:

*Surely the schoolroom without the cheering influence of song in it is but a dull place. It is like a house into which the glad sunshine never enters. No other subject so brightens and enlivens the routine of school life as sweet pleasant music. It quickens all the faculties of the children in making them more impressionable, more gentle, more tractable, more happy*

(Board of Commissioners, 1898 p. 271)

Goodman convinced the Board of the importance of the Tonic Solfa system, and he also advocated that vocal music should be introduced in infant classes, rather than in senior classes, as was previously the norm. He maintained that '*with the Tonic Solfa, very young children can be got to sing, even from notes, almost as soon as they know their letters*' (Board of Commissioners, 1900, p. 193).

Goodman thoroughly disapproved of the '*singing by ear*' movement, a factor that may have contributed to its lack of support in the Irish system. Retrospectively viewed, this was regrettable, because it meant that the schools were not encouraged to teach music by ear to children whose native music depended heavily on the aural tradition.

Goodman was highly critical of the Hullah system of teaching music, contending that '*for fifty years it was the sole method used in Irish National schools, and it is hardly too much to say that it left them very little better than it found them*' (Board of Commissioners, 1900, p. 193).



He was also critical of the song repertoire available in the Hullah system, which was designed to teach technical intervals, rather than to provide a suitable repertoire for the children, and which did not take any account of the Irish heritage. To counter this, Goodman published two books himself, *The School and Home Song Book*, (c.1886), and *The Catholic Hymn Book* (c.1886), in which all the songs were presented in Tonic Solfa. As a church organist, Goodman staunchly supported the inclusion of church music in education. His books were approved by the Board, and became a significant resource for teachers and children. Indeed, many Irish people today are still familiar with the hymns and songs published by Goodman, as they remained part of the national school repertoire for decades. Goodman continued his publishing work into the next century with the publication of *The Irish Minstrel* in 1907. This publication featured a solely Irish repertoire, including several songs in the Irish language, all presented in Tonic Solfa.

## THE ANNUAL SINGING COMPETITIONS

Goodman was also responsible, acting on the suggestion of Sir Patrick Keenan, the Head Inspector, for the organisation of the Singing Competitions that commenced in Dublin in 1893, and these did much to promote choral singing and the Tonic Solfa method of instruction (Board of Commissioners 1893, p. 331). They also succeeded in confirming the superiority of the Tonic Solfa method over the Hullah method, which was still in use in some schools. Goodman himself wrote that his competitions gave rise to another competition ‘*viz. a competition of methods – Tonic Solfa versus Hullah.*’ (Board of Commissioners 1893, p.332). The competitions had the approval and sponsorship of the Catholic Church. Winning choirs were invited to combine, and participate in liturgical celebrations in Dublin. In an address after High Mass, the Archbishop of Dublin praised the pupils and ‘*enlightened teachers*’ who introduced into their schools ‘*that one truly scientific system of musical instruction.....the Tonic Solfa system.*’ (Board of Commissioners 1893, p. 335). In 1897, the competition was in danger of cessation, as many teachers were discouraged by annual defeat. To counter this, Goodman changed the format of the event to a Public Examination in Class Singing (Board of Commissioners, 1898, pp.275-276). The revised structure was designed to give adequate recognition and reward to as many schools as possible. The actual marks attained were not announced publicly, but all schools obtaining 75% or over got a First Class Prize of £10, plus a Certificate and book prize for each child, while schools gaining 50% to 75% were awarded a Second Class Prize of £5 plus the individual prizes. This re-organisation encouraged schools to participate, and thus promoted the teaching of vocal music through the Tonic Solfa method. Goodman wrote:

*The result of the system of examination tried on this occasion must be pronounced on the whole as satisfactory. No doubt there was wanting the keenness and excitement of former competitions. But a good standard of performance was maintained throughout, and it was clearly shown that prizes were not to be had for nothing; if schools wanted them, they must first earn and deserve them.*

(Ibid. p.276).

## TOWARDS CURRICULAR REVISION

During the closing years of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, a number of educational developments were taking place in several countries in Western Europe. There was a call for a more child-centred approach to education, and for the inclusion of manual and practical instruction in general education. In Ireland too, attention had been drawn to the need for curricular reform at national school level on a number of occasions during the final years of the century (Hyland 1987, p.19). The Board of Commissioners of National Education became convinced that a radical change in the national school curriculum was necessary. They were concerned that the curriculum was too narrow and book centred, a tendency promulgated by the system of payment by results (Coolahan, 1981, p.33). To address this, the *Royal Commission on Practical and Manual Instruction*, more commonly known as the *Belmore Commission*, was set up in 1897, to enquire into contemporary educational trends in Britain, Europe and America. The Commission invited the views of individuals and organisations both in Ireland and overseas. It also sent delegates to view schools in Europe, to seek information concerning the manual and practical instruction provided there. Music was seen to be obligatory in all the schools they visited. The Final Report of the Commission was published in 1898, and recommended radical reform of Irish education. As a result, a major revision of the national school curriculum took place and the new curriculum, known as the *Revised Programme of Primary Instruction* came into effect in all national schools in September 1900.

## REVISED PROGRAMME OF 1900

The Revised Programme was fundamentally different from the programme which it replaced, in that it was a '*child-centred curriculum, and it encouraged learning based on activity and observation*' (Hyland 1987, p.20). Payment by results was abolished. The *Programme* advocated that subjects were not to be compartmentalized, but to be taught in an integrated manner where appropriate. New curricular areas such as science, manual instruction, drawing, cookery and kindergarten education were introduced. For the first time the status of music was raised to a compulsory subject in all schools where there were teachers qualified to teach it, and it was considered that the teaching of vocal music should form part of the normal functions of the primary school teacher. Music was allocated three classes per week for boys, each of twenty five minutes duration, and two classes per week for girls, each of thirty minutes duration; the difference being due to the cookery and needlework which was also on the girls' curriculum.

The syllabus introduced was based on singing. A choice of methods was offered – Tonic Solfa or Staff Notation, but Tonic Solfa was advised as being the preferred approach. Music was also included for junior classes, but the emphasis here was on singing by ear. Goodman was evidently delighted, as he wrote '*The past year will long be memorable in Irish education as that in which...the primary schools of Ireland saw the light*' (Board of Commissioners of National Education, 1899, p.258).

## IN-SERVICE EDUCATION FOR THE REVISED PROGRAMME

This curricular reform was accompanied by an earnest attempt to provide in-service education for the national school teachers of Ireland. Over twenty full time organising inspectors and assistants were recruited on a five-year contract basis to give courses in the 'new' subjects. Goodman was put in charge of vocal music, and a concerted effort was made to train the teachers of the country in the skill of teaching singing.

Goodman was now promoted to the rank of '*Organising Inspector of Musical Instruction*' rather than '*Examiner in Music*' and his role was now to oversee and encourage the development of music education, rather than act merely as a judge of music activities. He had thus become Ireland's very first music inspector.

With the help of a team of five 'organizers' (this later grew to six) Goodman set about providing music training for the national school teachers of Ireland. The task was immense – approximately 75% of the country's 12,000 teachers lacked basic competence in music. The records make no mention of the qualifications or prior career experience of the organisers, though Kelly (1978) suggests they may have been teachers who had become prominent with their school choirs during the Public Singing Competitions in Dublin. The music organizers were Miss Appleyard, Miss Byrne, Miss Colclough, Mr Davidson, Mr Robinson, and Mr McGuire, the last to join the team.

Commencing in 1900, the organisers held evening classes for teachers at various centres all over Ireland, and visited schools in the locality to give model lessons to the pupils. The participants were of very mixed musical ability, and Goodman lamented that '*to make singers and teachers of singing out of people that attended, was beyond the power of mortal man*' (Board of Commissioners, 1902, p.89). The organizers modified their aims somewhat, and attempted '*To get a little song singing and a little note singing as quickly as possible into as many schools as possible. To have the children sing the songs of their country sweetly and tunefully*' (Ibid. p. 89). Goodman appealed to the inspectors to be lenient in the examination for music and to give it every encouragement for the first few years.

Reporting in 1901, as Organising Inspector for Music, Goodman wrote:

*The novel and interesting experiment of seeking to quickly develop the school music of a nation begun by the organisation in the previous year, has been rigorously continued through the year. In constant operation every week evening from 6-8 p.m., classes meet at 5 different centres. To each class are summoned all the teachers living within a radius of about 7 miles (this later grew to 8 miles.) For 5 or 6 weeks each organiser remains in the one locality in the daytime working in the school, in the evening teaching teachers. Then the Organiser moves on.*

(Board of Commissioners, 1901, p.147)

Each centre received sixty hours instruction, spread out over a period of five or six weeks. Classes met from 6 – 8 p.m. five evenings per week, and at an earlier time on Saturdays. The content of the course comprised of a complete elementary course of Tonic Solfa, a little staff notation, and a *'considerable number of school songs'* (Ibid.,p.147). At the conclusion of each course, Goodman, assisted by the local inspector, examined the teachers. Those who passed were henceforth obliged to teach music, while those who failed were exempted (Board of Commissioners, 1901, Appendix pp. 82-85).

The in-service initiative was totally dependant on the goodwill of the teachers. They attended in their own time. There was no reward for participation, though a portion of travelling expenses was allowed for those who travelled certain distances. There was no incentive to pass the examination, unless teachers wished to apply for positions in different schools, when their musical qualification would be well received. The participants had already obtained their teaching appointments, and were in fact taking on an extra obligatory subject through passing the examination.

Nevertheless, teachers responded enthusiastically. The first centres chosen included towns all over Ireland – Ballinrobe, Armagh, Donegal, Newry, Clonmel, Tipperary, Cahir, Wexford, and two centres in Dublin. Over 400 teachers attended in the first year, and Goodman noted their enthusiasm. He wrote that *'from the first the teachers have flocked to our classes with the utmost enthusiasm. Night after night they have come, often long weary journeys, with unflagging zeal and unfailing regularity. The attention and earnestness with which they have devoted themselves to study of our classes call for the highest praise'* (Board of Commissioners, 1900, p. 81). The music classes had the enthusiastic support of managers and inspectors, who put premises at their disposal free of charge. Goodman noted that *'from all quarters we have met with nothing but friendly encouragement. Music clearly has no enemies'* (Ibid p.81). Inspectors generally were directed to give increased attention to music. This may have been a factor contributing to the positive attendance records. From 1900 – 1905, 168 music courses were held at centres all over the country, and 6,397 teachers attended – over half the teaching population (Board of Commissioners 1905, Appendix, pp. 131-132).

The records show that, of those examined, approximately 25% were rated 'good', 25% were rated 'fair', and 50% were rated 'weak' (Board of Commissioners 1905, Appendices, pp.192-193).

There was a marked enthusiasm for music among the teaching profession, and there were significant increases in the number of schools teaching it. In 1899 vocal music was taught in 1,475 national schools. This rose dramatically to 3,963 schools in 1900, and to 6,032 in 1901, showing the dramatic improvement brought about by the in-service initiative. By 1908, the pupils in 7,065 national schools were receiving instruction in vocal music (Board of Commissioners 1909 pp. 80-81). Curwen's music education charts were supplied to schools, and the formal aspects of sight-reading were given priority.

The opening years of the twentieth century were a most significant period for the growth of music education in Ireland. Goodman's commitment and enthusiasm, and the response that he and his team of organisers evoked among the teachers that participated in the music courses, is widely commented by various inspectors on in the annual Reports.

By 1905, the numbers attending the classes began to dwindle. As over half of the country's teachers had by now participated, it is probable that those who wished to attend had done so. It is also clear from a consideration of inspectors' annual reports that they considered that vocal music had reached a high standard in a short time. Other newly introduced subjects such as science did not fare as well, and needed more input. The music organisers were not re-appointed, despite the fact that other curricular subjects still had the services of a significant quota of organisers. There was now only one inspector - Goodman – for over 8,000 schools. He was bitterly disappointed, and set about visiting national schools all over the country, to report on the standard of music. He visited over 800 schools between 1906 and 1908, and wrote prolifically on his observations in the Annual Reports of the Board of Commissioners of National Education.

Goodman died on June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1909 (The Musical Times, 1909), and in the next annual report, the head inspectors paid him this tribute:

*'His death will be a great loss to the cause he had so much at heart. His whole-hearted devotion to that cause, and his untiring efforts to promote it, led in some degree to the breakdown of his health. Even to the last, his thoughts were busy with schemes connected with what had always been to him a labour of love.'*

(Board of Commissioners of National Education, 1910)

Reporting from Cork in 1910, Inspector Gloster reported that music was well established there, and he wrote that *'The wonderful revival of singing throughout the country forms a monument perennius aere to the memory of the late Mr. Goodman, whose talent and enthusiasm did so much to bring it about'* (Board of Commissioners of National Education, 1910, p.147).

## AFTER GOODMAN

After Goodman's death, the initial official commitment to music was not maintained. Other problems in education were assuming priority. Teachers were beginning to feel the impact of the newly introduced subjects, and the curriculum was considered overloaded. In 1916, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) demanded a *'return to the basic subjects in primary education'*, claiming that the programme was overloaded with *'worthless'* subjects, and that the *'three R's should form the groundwork of all education'* (INTO Congress, Presidential Address 1916). There was also an increasing cultural nationalist movement throughout the country, and nationalists sought the inclusion of Irish language and culture in the curriculum. McCarthy (1990) points out that in the opening years of the twentieth century, music had *'ridden on the crest of a wave of enthusiasm, support, goodwill and coordinated efforts'* (p.204).

From 1916 – 1921, however, ‘shattered idealism had harnessed the development of music education to the more practical and more realistic demands of the system’ (Ibid. p.204).

## DISCUSSION

There are many analogies between the *Revised Programme* of 1900, and the *Primary School Curriculum* of 1999. The publication of the *Revised Programme* was hailed as the advent of a new era in education. Goodman himself wrote that ‘*something like an educational revolution has occurred in our midst*’ (Board of Commissioners, 1900, p. 81). Similar claims are being made today about the *Primary School Curriculum*, 1999. The *Revised Programme* of 1900 introduced music as a compulsory curricular subject, a status it has enjoyed since, unlike Science, which was also introduced in that year. However, we cannot claim that music education has progressed at the pace Goodman would have approved, or indeed expected.

Goodman recognised that if music in our schools were to flourish, then the system must begin with the teachers. Writing in 1900, he states:

*If the work of the new organisation is to be fruitful and lasting, we organisers must seek to especially reach the teachers. If we could make them efficient, our work is as good as done. To aim at the children only without having first secured the teachers would seem to me to attempt to nurse and cultivate the plant at the leaf and flower, instead of at the root. Our first and chief attention must therefore be given to the teacher.*

Board of Commissioners of National Education, 1900, p.81.

Goodman and his team deliberately attempted to reach teachers in remote, rural districts, where music was practically non-existent. He stated:

*It is in such schools – small school with one teacher only, in out-of-the-way places – that the brightening, gladdening influence of music is most needed. And as such schools form the majority of the schools in Ireland, I feel that we could not give them too much attention.*

(Board of Commissioners of National Education, 1905, p.4)

Goodman was very conscious that music was being introduced to an educational system where teachers did not generally have adequate pre-service experience in music. The system of in-service training he offered was intensive, both in terms of time and financial input. It is worth re-iterating that teachers attended for two hours each weekday for a five- or six-week period, a total of sixty hours in all. Even though participation was voluntary, over half of the country’s teachers attended these music courses.

The *Primary Curriculum: Music* 1999 is based on a philosophy of music which seeks to make music education available and relevant for all children, under the three domains of listening and responding, performing and composing. This contrasts with the *Revised Programme*, which concentrated on song singing, and on formal and mechanical aspects of ear training and sight singing. However, unlike the situation that prevails with curricular areas such as Irish, English, Maths, History and Geography, teachers still have very uneven prior expertise and confidence in music. This raises questions regarding the in-service education that will be provided to facilitate the implementation of the 1999 Curriculum. Will the current model, consisting of two days of in-service education plus one day of in-school planning, be sufficient in a subject where teachers' background skills and knowledge vary so considerably? It must be acknowledged that, unlike knowledge-based subjects such as English and History, teachers cannot develop and extend the in-service provision by personal reading. Music is a skill-based area – teachers need opportunity to experiment with the skills of creating and re-creating music in a supportive environment, prior to teaching these skills to their pupils.

To assist teachers to effectively implement the revised music programme, Goodman advocated the provision of musical advisors or specialists; such as he had seen in the larger English cities (Board of Commissioners 1898, p. 271). He argued that '*school teachers themselves in the first instance need assistance and guidance.*' (Ibid p. 271), and he believed that the best way to provide this assistance was through the appointment of a music advisory service. He was also concerned that when teachers were finished with the initial in-service education, they lost confidence without the ongoing support of the organisers. Writing in 1901, he laments '*But what happens when the organiser is gone? Does the interest of the teacher in the subject continue, or does it collapse? And even if it is not still maintained – are the teachers really able to teach it now they are left unaided?*' (Board of Commissioners, 1901, p. 149).

However, the advisory service as proposed by Goodman never materialised in Ireland.

This lack of an advisory service for music education has been repeatedly commented on throughout the twentieth century, and calls have been made for the provision of such a service to improve the teaching of music in schools (e.g. O'Braoin, 1952; Grocock, 1961; Fleischmann, 1971; Herron, 1985; Curriculum and Examinations Board, 1985; and Heneghan, 2001). The Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum (1990) unequivocally recommended that music advisors should be appointed (p. 63). The Joint Committee on Education and Science (2000) also suggested that specialist teachers of music should be appointed to help with the introduction of the 1999 Music Curriculum (pp. 3-4).

However, not alone has the plea for a music advisory service been ignored; the music inspectorate service has been terminated! Surely this is one of the more regressive steps in the development of music education in Ireland, and one that Goodman would have deplored. Goodman himself was succeeded by dedicated and committed music inspectors in the decades that followed, who worked diligently to promote the cause of music; among them Donnchadha O'Braoin, Pilib O'Laoghaire, Proinnsias Ó Suilleabháin, Proinnsias Ó Ceallaigh, Brian Ó Dubhail, and Seán Creamer. The contribution of these good men is not forgotten in Irish schools today, though they themselves may be deceased or retired.

All of the above held the rank of 'Organising Inspector for Music', the position which was first held by Peter Goodman. However, as such, they were on a lower salary scale than District Inspectors, and also they had a lower rate of expenses. In the 1960s, a sustained attempt was made to achieve parity of conditions, but the official decision was that the music inspectors had to also undertake duties other than music in order to attain this. This was not acceptable to them, as their preference was to work specifically in the area of music education. Finally, they did achieve parity of conditions, in return for undertaking some responsibilities for the second level music curriculum in addition to their national school duties. However, as these individuals retired, they were not replaced, and nowadays inspectors are not appointed specifically for music or indeed for any other curricular area. As the primary school curriculum is an integrated one, and is taught by a generalist primary teacher, the *'argument is that the expertise of the local District Inspector is sufficient'* (Herron, 1985, p.7). However, Herron goes on to point out that the inspector's attention to music on his/her visits to schools is expected to be in proportion to its importance in the curriculum and the time given to it, and that *'Inspectors seldom go beyond listening to a song nor do teachers generally wish them to'* (op. cit., p.7). In such a climate, it is not unsurprising that many teachers see music as a 'frill' rather than a core curricular area.

## CONCLUSION

Many of the aspirations of Goodman are as relevant today, a century later, as they were in his own day. However, his work and his contribution to the Irish educational system are not generally well known among the education community, and it is in attempt to remedy this situation that I have prepared this paper. As Gammon (2001, p.100) pithily argues *'If you do not investigate your own history then there is a tendency to invent it, or, worse still, other people may invent it for you!'*

Pitts (2000, p. 210) contends that *'Some of the practical concerns that will take music education into the next century are those that have occupied educators in the last hundred years.'* This is certainly the case in Ireland, where the lack of an advisory service for the national school generalist teacher has recurred on numerous occasions during the twentieth century. The White Paper in Education (1995, p.21) pledged support for the arts in education. The establishment of a music advisory service – even on a pilot basis – would seem to be a worthwhile initiative; certainly it is one that has been proposed and requested for a long time. This advisory service could to some extent replace the now defunct role of the music inspectorate, and could contribute in no small way to the successful implementation of *Primary Curriculum* (1999) for music.



It is appropriate to conclude this paper with the text of an appeal made by Peter Goodman in 1898. His words are still relevant today.

*In Ireland there is a dearth of competent teachers to teach music. Our great object must be therefore to hasten the day when this can be done. It is not creditable to us as a musical nation with a great musical past that vocal music should now be found in only one out of every seven national schools in the country. There is surely something amiss here. The subject evidently needs special encouragement, special nursing among us. School teachers themselves in the first instance need assistance and guidance. In London, Birmingham, Bradford, Leeds and other large sectors in England special professional superintendents are employed by the different school boards to go round the schools and help the teachers in their musical work..... In Ireland no such skilled aid is available for the teacher. He must struggle through his difficulties as best he can. There is no one to help, sustain and encourage him. As a consequence, music languishes in the schools .....In many places of the 'Land of Song' at the present moment, music would seem to be a lost art.*

(Board of Commissioners, 1898, p. 271)

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## REVIEWS

*The class size debate: is small better?* Peter Blatchford *et al*, 2003, Maidenhead and Philadelphia, Open University Press, ISBN 0 335 211623 (pb), 182pp.

Does the size of class in which pupils are taught affect their performance? The answer seems self evident - of course it does - yet one of the great surprises in educational research up to recent times has been its failure to provide hard and fast evidence that would verify this apparently common sense assumption. There is a vast research literature on the subject and unfortunately findings have been contradictory and inconclusive. On the one hand are the enthusiasts, and virtually all teachers, who are adamant that smaller classes lead automatically to higher quality and more effective learning. Quoting speakers at the primary teachers conference, 'The Irish Times' stated in an editorial last April that 'teacher after teacher told the INTO conference [that] smaller classes are the key to successful education'. But on the other hand there are the sceptics who argue that the efficacy of class size reductions is far from clear. To them, teaching methods and classroom organisation have a greater impact on learning than class size and, accordingly, they champion the fostering of more cost-effective strategies for raising standards of educational achievement. This was the position taken by OFSTED, for example, in its often debated, often-quoted study published in November 1995. Here they claimed there was no clear link between the size of a class and the quality of the teaching and learning in that classroom. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the debate has presented policy makers with an unenviable dilemma when it comes to seeking best ways to disburse limited funds.

But in a number of countries in recent times one can discern a trend in favour of promoting the establishment of small classes and several initiatives to lower class sizes have been launched. For example, this is seen in the USA where the US Department of Education has initiated a seven-year programme to reduce class size in the lower grades to an average of eighteen children. And similar initiatives have been undertaken in the Netherlands, and in Asia Pacific countries as diverse as New Zealand and China. But despite these developments there is still no clear consensus on the cost-effectiveness of reducing class size, or on the extent to which classes of different sizes promote children's learning. Some researchers suggest that academic gains from class size reductions are modest at best and hence limited finances would be more prudently spent on other educational initiatives such as higher quality teacher training that might lead to a more productive learning environment (e.g. one-to-one tutoring by 'floating' teachers, peer tutoring or cooperative group learning). They worry that although reduced class size could make teachers feel more comfortable and make their lives easier, this might not necessarily lead to an improvement in the quality of the teaching or of pupil learning. Given the levels of uncertainty, as the debate progresses it is hardly surprising that policy makers throughout the world are keen to obtain a dispassionate and authoritative interpretation of what is the best evidence.

In this regard, they can be confidently assured that any investment of time on a study of Blatchford's *The class size debate* will yield a rich return in terms of coming to grips with the complexity of the issue and in suggesting how best they might attempt to satisfy competing demands for limited funds. And one can be equally confident that their education partners will be similarly enlightened.

Peter Blatchford is Professor in Psychology and Education at the Institute of Education, University of London and Head of the School of Psychology and Human Development. He is a highly experienced researcher and a scholar of international repute. This study, in collaboration with Paul Bassett, Harvey Goldstein and Clare Martin and others, will add significantly to his reputation. In fact, it is likely to become a classic reference work for its magnitude and breadth and for its accessibility to practitioners and policy makers. Essentially, the strategy chosen by Blatchford and his team involved the adoption of a multi-method approach of data collection. In this they included time allocation estimates, systematic observation, teachers' end of year accounts and case studies, and they based their results on sophisticated quantitative and qualitative analyses. They chose a large sample - 7142 children in 330 classes in 199 schools - and they followed their progress from school entry at four through their first three years of school. They centred their focus on the academic outcomes of literacy and mathematics, not only because these are important indicators of class size effects, but also because they are more easily captured in tests of achievement than, say, the more creative and artistic areas. The reader will therefore fail to find economic analysis of class size reductions in this work. Further, and crucially, in recognising the limitations of experimental research with its emphasis on control of variables, the team opted for a more naturalistic design that had regard for the wider and more complex 'real world' of education. In this way they reduced the inevitable threats to validity inherent in all research, but particularly those that follow an experimental design (such as the celebrated Tennessee STAR project).

No doubt some readers will be interested in the sophisticated statistical modelling techniques used by Blatchford's team, but it is likely that the primary interest of most will centre on the conclusions. What then are the findings? In short, Blatchford establishes a clear case for reducing class size at Reception (i.e. four year olds, first year at school) and Key Stage 1 (five and six year olds); and he declares this is particularly true for Reception year. He adds that small classes (in his terms, those below twenty-five children) appear to work best in literacy for children who are most in need academically, that is, those with the lowest attainment scores on entry to school and who thus have most ground to make up. In contrast, the effect is less evident in the higher attainers.

As for mathematics in Reception year, there also was a clear relationship between class size and attainment: children's attainment decreased as class size increased. Interestingly, Reception year children made more progress in mathematics as class size decreased to about twenty-three, but thereafter there was no effect. This raises the question whether perhaps there is an optimum class size. In the USA, the STAR project and research reviews suggest that class size reductions below twenty are necessary before sizeable effects on pupil performance become evident. Blatchford deals with this issue with the detached and balanced approach of the scholar and professional researcher and does not venture a definite judgement on the issue.

Instead he chooses to remind us that attempting to make a judgement about optimal class size constitutes a rather complex undertaking and requires further exploration and testing. But, he is sufficiently confident to hold that, ‘our results suggest that overall decreases of any number (at least in the Reception year) are to be welcomed’.

In mathematics, Blatchford and his team found there were benefits resulting from decreases in class size across the full range of class sizes, and not just those below twenty. However, in the case of literacy the size of a class below which benefits are most marked varies according to the pupil’s level of attainment on entering school, as indicated above. For the lowest attainers, class size reductions tended to be most marked when they dropped to twenty-five and it appears that an important implication of the study is that twenty-five may be an important number in the context of the class size debate. To Blatchford, this is the number below which relationships with classroom processes, such as the number of within-class groups, become most evident.

One intriguing possibility suggested by the results of the study is that there exists a threshold below which the number of children in the room is too small. Although it may be true that increases in pupil numbers are likely to be associated with difficulties for teachers and negative effects on the learning, it may not be wise to regard all reductions in class size as something good. Interestingly, this suggestion came from teachers in the study who argued that below a certain size the dynamics of the class can change to the disadvantage of the learning. Within this scenario, certain children can become dominant and the quality of the learning is reduced.

Given the space allowed it is not possible to do more than highlight the Blatchford’s central finding that there are solid grounds for reducing class size for the first two years of schooling, and especially so for the first year. What then are the implications for policy makers insofar as we can learn from the Blatchford study? First, they should view a small class reduction initiative as a policy of prevention but not remediation. That is, they should take it that the evidence to hand supports the use of small classes immediately after entry to school, but they should keep in mind there is no evidence to support the notion that small classes introduced later in children’s school lives are as effective..

Second, that small classes (below twenty-five) work best in literacy for children who are most in need academically – those who have most ground to make up. Hence, limited resources might most gainfully be targeted at this group.

Third, they should bear in mind that size of class does not *necessarily* lead to the achievement of positive effects, simply because teachers do not always alter their teaching when faced with fewer pupils. In stark terms, small classes will not necessarily improve the performance of a weak teacher. Hence, unless teachers are led to change their style of teaching in response to class size reductions it is likely that little benefit will derive from creating small classes. To quote Haberman and Larson (1968): ‘If smaller classes are to make a difference in classroom behaviours of teachers, it may be that they need to be instructed on how to teach a small class in different ways’.

This means that teacher education programmes must seek to help teachers develop a flexibility of approach to enable them make the necessary adjustment that is in keeping with differing class sizes. And, as a final point, it is also worth recording that if at some future stage we in Ireland decide to add teaching assistants to the general classroom, Blatchford would counsel that we need to explore how these aides might best be utilised. Otherwise, as Blatchford's team found, these additional staff are likely to have little useful effect on children's progress in literacy and mathematics .

This book provides a stimulating and highly informative starting point for anyone who wishes to come to grips with a crucially important debate. It is particularly well balanced and findings are presented with due regard for objectivity. It deserves to be seen as the key text on the class size issue at this time. It should become a core text for lecturers in colleges of education, policy makers, inspectors and teachers. One can recommend it without reserve to everyone who is interested in promoting children's learning.

**Editor**



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