IRISH INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

Joanna Augustyniak
Politechnika Koszalińska
Instytut Technologii i Edukacji
Ul. Śniadeckich 2
75-444 Koszalin
e-mail: orlosia@op.pl

Abstract: Irish schools experienced a rapid increase in the inflow of immigrant students only in the last couple of years. Currently about 10% of students in primary schools and about 8% of students in post-primary schools have immigrant backgrounds. They are also a very heterogeneous group. Unlike most other OECD countries, first-generation immigrant students in Ireland, on average, achieve education outcomes similar to their Irish-born peers, possibly because the socio-economic backgrounds of these students are similar to or higher than those of their Irish-born peers. However many of them do not speak English at all. To address the issues that have arisen as a result of the sudden inflow of immigrants, the government has responded quickly with a strong political commitment and policy initiatives, tools, and materials to provide language support and intercultural education. This paper presents intercultural education strategies and practices in Irish schools.

Key words: Ireland, Intercultural education, Irish education, immigrants in Ireland, intercultural strategy.

Introduction

In recent years Ireland has gained attention due to the sudden economic growth called Celtic Tiger. With its beginnings in 1990s, it has led to the impressive growth in Irish economy, the increasing number of employees and thus the lower unemployment rate. There have been new jobs tempting foreigners from all over the world [1]. The 2011 Irish census showed that of the 4,525,281 people usually resident in Ireland, 598138 (15%) were classified as non- Irish nationals, representing some 200 nationalities [2]. 9% of all schoolchildren in Irish schools are migrants. They are also a very heterogeneous group. They have different cultures, languages, and life experiences. They have arrived to Ireland at different times, for different lengths of stay. Whilst some are struggling to adapt to life there, others are very well integrated and settled into Irish society. Ireland has become a multinational country as all the countries on the British Isles, especially England. However, it has to be pointed out that ethnic, cultural, linguistic as well as religious diversity in

Ireland has been noticed for a very long time. One of the examples is the fact that Ireland is a bilingual country with Irish as the official language and English as the common language used every day in both writing and speaking. What is more, less than 3% of population are proficient in the Irish language. However 41,9 % of the population have some words of Irish, as it is a compulsory school subject [2]. Apart from this, all the country is inhabited by the community called Irish Travellers representing more than 7% of the population [2]. It is a nomadic community which has been part of Irish society for centuries. They have their own culture and customs. They often travel and change their place of residence settling for a short period of time in camps created by their community. Most often they travel and live in caravans [4]. Even though Ireland has been ethnically and linguistically diverse for many generations, due to the expansion of the European Union the diversity has significantly increased recently. In connection with the escalation of diversity people have started to look at it more carefully,

the result of which is fighting discrimination enshrined in law and education policy in Ireland. In a very short time, schools have experienced a sudden influx of students from different countries from all over the world including Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Nigeria or Philippines. Therefore, intercultural education in Irish schools has been examined because classes should reflect the society's diversity and prepare children for active participation in social life [3]. The answer for these changes is **intercultural education** which is a synthesis of multicultural and anti-racist schooling commonly used internationally from 1960s till 1990s. According to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment it *is education which respects, celebrates and recognizes the normality of diversity in all areas of human life. It sensitizes the learner to the idea that humans have naturally developed a range of different ways of life, customs and worldviews, and that this breadth of human life enriches all of us. It is also an education, which promotes equality and human rights, challenges unfair discrimination, and promotes the values upon which equality is built* [5]. According to the INTO (Irish National Teachers' Organization), intercultural education is also about, *...respecting cultural difference and promoting anti-racism, it is not simply the knowledge of a variety of cultures. It aims to counter misconceptions and negative stereotyping of different cultures, religions and nationalities and seeks to develop an appreciation of other cultures in the context of a critical appreciation of local/Irish cultures. Intercultural education celebrates the positive aspects to cultural diversity as well as drawing attention to the power differences between groups and societies* [14].

The legal basis for intercultural education

The functioning of intercultural education is given in **international and Irish conventions and agreements** starting with **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations (UN), 1948)** and ending with **Immigration Bill from 2010.** Article 26 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights notes that education should be directed towards *the full development of the human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship* [6]. Article 2 of **European Convention on Human Rights (Council of Europe, 1950)** respects the rights of parents for determining that children receive an education *"and teaching in conformity with their own religions and philosophical convictions"* [7]. Article 5 of **International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (UN, 1966)** declares that all state parties shall *"undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination (...) and to guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour or national or ethnic origin (...) to education and training"* [8]. Article 29 of **Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989)** declares that states should ensure that *all segments of society (...) have access to education (Art. 24e)"* and the education of the child shall be directed to *the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own (Art. 29c)* [9]. Moreover Article 6 (1) of **Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (EU, 1995)** declares that states shall *encourage a spirit of tolerance and intercultural dialogue and take effective measures to promote mutual respect and understanding and co-operation among all persons living on their territory* [10]. The Irish legislation like **Constitution of Ireland (1937)** provides that *The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children* [11]. In the **Education Act** from 1998 we can read that the educational system should be *accountable to students, their parents and the State for the education provided, respect the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society*, and engage in a *partnership between schools, patrons, students, parents, teachers and other school staff, the community served by the school and the State* (preface) [12]. **Equal Status Acts, 2000-2004** prohibit discrimination in the provision of, *inter alia*, services and access to education on any of nine specified grounds, including race and membership of the Traveller community. With

certain exemptions, educational institutions should not discriminate in four respects: admission, access, terms or conditions and expulsion. Discrimination regarding admission is allowed, once it is to ensure the maintenance of the religious ethos of the school, and such discrimination is publicized in the school's admissions policy. It should be noted that such provisions do not extend to all educational settings, such as the youth sector [13]. And finally the latest **Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill** from 2010 which provides free access to education for immigrants on equal terms with the Irish. Moreover, children of residents from foreign countries have the right to enroll on primary and secondary schools regardless of the legal status [15].

Irish intercultural education

Provisions relating to multi- and intercultural education, anti-racist strategy and tolerance of people from other countries or ethnic groups have been recorded in Irish law for a long time. Since 1980s the number of non-Irish children has begun to grow due to Traveller communities and refugees from Vietnam or Bosnia who came to Ireland at the beginning of 1990s. The Department of Education and Science has given guidelines concerning education of foreigners. Thus, the segregation policy has been officially condemned and diversity at school has become a reality. The Government has confirmed that in The White Paper on Education (1995). Changes have been introduced in school curricula and teachers have been educated. However, the real wave of immigrants arrived at the beginning of 2004 due to the accession of countries such as Poland, Lithuania, Latvia or Slovakia to the European Union. Therefore, Irish National Teachers' Organization and National Council for Curriculum and Assessment have released Intercultural Guidelines for Schools in order to support teachers' activities relating to counteract misunderstandings and negative stereotypes of different cultures, religions and nationalities and striving for development and tolerance of other cultures. Words such as multiculturalism and interculturalism have been used to describe changes that have been taking place in Irish society. Both of these terms describe a situation in which there is more than one culture in a country. Even though the term multiculturalism is sometimes used to describe

a society in which different cultures live side by side but without much interaction, this term expresses the belief that all the people living in Ireland gain and develop their own personalities through the contact with other cultures because we learn from each other. It is education that is very important here since education moulds the society and contributes to its development. This way, schools have to play an important role in the development of intercultural society. While providing an education schools cannot have overall responsibility for fighting with racism and promoting intercultural competence as it plays an important role in the development of intercultural skills, values, attitudes and knowledge among children and young people. Intercultural education is essential for all the children in order to prepare them to participate in more and more diverse society. Similarly, education that is based on only one culture does not advance the development and abilities in children. Thus, schools' task is not to promote interculturalism but to teach it [16].

Many EU countries have difficulties with the integration of immigrants' children through education. The difficulties include:

- language barriers – the lack of or a poor command of the language of the host country,
- poor school marks connected with the lack or a poor command of the language,
- limited ability to communicate with peers and teachers,
- the lack of knowledge about the rules of compulsory education,
- the lack of knowledge about the language and culture of the country the student comes from,
- apprehension about cultural dissimilarity (bilateral),
- different or vague mutual expectations,
- inadequate teachers' qualifications as well as inadequate school conditions to work with children from other cultures,
- difficulties with making emotional contact with these children,
- difficulties with communication with their parents,
- difficulties with the preparation of educational materials,
- the lack of examinations adapted for those children, etc [17].

Intercultural Education in Ireland benefits all participants, regardless of whether they are members of the majority or the minority. Although problems may arise especially in

classes where the children are from ethnic minorities and having specific language needs or requiring protection against discrimination, it is important that the development of intercultural environment in the classroom will be essential for all the children. This is to help them understand the diversity and develop their imagination, their critical thinking skills, the ability to recognize and cope with prejudice and discrimination in general.

In order to accomplish all the tasks of intercultural education Irish National Teachers' Organization and National Council for Curriculum and Assessment define the objectives and tasks which Irish schools have to implement at different levels of education. The aims of primary education include enabling the child to:

- come to an understanding of the world through the acquisition of knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes and the ability to think critically;
- develop spiritual, moral and religious values;
- develop a respect for cultural difference, an appreciation of civic responsibility, and an understanding of the social dimensions of life, past and present;
- develop skills and understanding in order to study their world and its inhabitants and appreciate the interrelationships between them;
- develop personally and socially and to relate to others with understanding and respect [5].

If the primary aim of education is the preparation of young people for the challenges of living in the world today then intercultural education is an essential part of that process. Intercultural education is not another subject to be added to the curriculum, nor does it involve extra material to be covered in particular subjects. It is an approach to education that can be integrated across all subject areas and it has to be continued at the next levels of school. The aim of intercultural education in the first part of secondary education - Junior Cycle - is to:

- contribute to the moral and spiritual development of the young person and to develop tolerance and respect for the values and beliefs of others;
- prepare the young person for the responsibilities of citizenship in the

national context and in the context of the wider European and global communities.

The fundamental purpose of senior cycle education (II part of secondary education) is to enable and prepare people to live lives to the fullest potential within democratic society. Therefore one of the specific aims of this cycle is to educate for participative citizenship at local, national, European and global levels [16]. Therefore, intercultural education should be characterized by several features. Firstly, it has to be remembered that it is for all the children, because each child has its own culture and ethnic background, and learning its native values that shape its sense of self-identity. Moreover, intercultural education is not only based on knowledge itself – that is providing it, but also on emotions, skills, attitudes and values. Learning how to deal with one's own emotions and the emotions of others is crucial for the development of self-understanding and interpersonal understanding (relationships with others) as well as skills that the curriculum identifies as relevant to their personal, social and educational sense of fulfillment. Besides, it has to be integrated with all the subjects and the school life and should not be taught as a separate issue. Particular attention to the language should be paid, as it plays a key role in human development. Mutual understanding and the ability to express emotions as well as proper communication is absolutely essential for learning intercultural competence, because there can be no agreement without it. Finally, it should be kept in mind that intercultural education takes time and patience [5].

Intercultural education in practice

The primary objective of the school development plan in order to improve the quality of learning and teaching students of all races and nationalities is providing such an environment that meets the educational needs of each child [16]. So as to achieve all the school's goals to create the environment of co-operation of many cultures, "the physical environment in the classroom" must be planned properly. The characteristic code which is provided by means of the physical environment at school is extremely important, because it is often the first contact between a student or parents and the school. Therefore, the appearance of the school reflects its policy. Intercultural classrooms are marked by the fact that they show their attitude

towards cultural diversity by means of space arrangement. Thus, photos, posters and drawings relating to Ireland or other issues present people of different races and nationalities, which show that Ireland is a place of many nationalities, not just the country of the Irish. Announcements and important pieces of information are written in several languages. This also concerns interesting customs and cultural practices. Thus, the space arrangement of the classroom should indicate that each participant of the community is its rightful member and that the culture of a class does not form the Irish majority but anyone with his/her own cultural background. In practice, the walls are decorated with flags or symbols of the nationalities of children who are part of the class. This way we learn cultures from each other. The same fact applies to textbooks and their content. Teaching aids in intercultural classes are chosen in such a way that the core curriculum is taught along with the content which brings different cultures together [13]. Creating a positive atmosphere as well as the mutual integration from the very first contact is extremely important or even plays the most important role. Here, a key factor is the introduction of a new "foreign" student to the class community. Irish schools have booklets with guidelines relating to what should be checked and what information should be known when a new student comes to school. Thus, the teacher should find out:

- how the names of the child and the parents are correctly pronounced;
- what language/s the child speaks;
- what is the level of proficiency in these languages;
- how one says some key phrases in the child's first/home language, such as a greeting (please, thank you, join in, stop, well done…);
- if the child has had formal schooling before;
- if the child knows any other child/children in this school;
- if there are issues with regard to teaching and learning in particular subjects;
- what are the child's particular interests;
- what is the child's religion, how it is practiced and if it has any implications for school and classroom planning;
- if there will be specific challenges for children concerning food, jewelry or clothing;

- if there are any cultural practices that might affect classroom interaction;
- if there are actions which are deemed inappropriate or rude in the child's home culture but which may not cause offence to members of the dominant ethnic group (showing soles of feet/palms of the hand may be rude in some cultures; child making eye contact with an adult may be rude in some African cultures; standing close to someone may be deemed rude in some cultures ...) [18].

The content provided within the framework of intercultural education is integrated into the curriculum. In general, intercultural education can be considered from an interdisciplinary perspective which includes all the subject areas. The integration of content in the curriculum provides the child with a more consistent and richer experience. It is also more likely that good attitudes and values will be mastered by children if they take part in tasks carried out at school regularly than when the tasks are treated as separate values or "one-time" fashion. This approach makes it easier to include the intercultural content to the everyday life of the student and stops being an artificial and developed ability but becomes the way of thinking and acting. The support of integration and intercultural learning is presented in five thematic areas: identity and belonging, similarities and differences, people's rights and duties, equality of all people as well as conflicts and abilities to solve them [13]. The content of intercultural education is implemented in such subjects as: geography, history, language, mathematics, home economics, art, physical education, religious and many others. In geography lessons students learn many different countries all over the world, their culture, habits and specifics. Geography also affords the opportunity for students to explore the normality of diversity throughout the world - that many countries are multilingual and multicultural. In an inclusive history program students encounter diverse aspects of human experience in a variety of cultural contexts, learn that their own historical inheritance has many strands and facets, that human society is never static but constantly undergoing changes and that change is, therefore, a constant dynamic in the on-going development of human history. They also learn how human history is created by the interaction of different individuals, groups and institutions in a variety

of contexts. On Home Economics students learn to appreciate the value of foods, clothing, crafts and homes from many cultures, as well as their own. Students of all cultures are encouraged to contribute their experience of food, clothing and crafts from their own culture. They learn the value of diversity in shaping the foods, clothing and crafts available. Students are also encouraged to work in the traditions of their own cultures as well as to explore and produce work that reflects cultural diversity and learn how one cultural tradition borrows from others, for example in the diet or in fashion. In Mathematics students are presented with opportunities to examine information on local and global issues (e.g. population flows, consumption patterns, military spending versus health spending as % of GNP, etc.). They also compare calendars, number systems and mathematical contributions from around the world. In an inclusive English program students are exposed to literature from diverse cultures, etc [16].

Most Irish teachers consider the lack of knowledge of English as the biggest problem and obstacle in school. Therefore, they are encouraged to use all the possible means and methods of teaching English as a foreign language. In the beginning, the focus on the language reception and production should be provided. Using body language, visual aids, photographs, games and activities can be useful in early education. Apart from this, they group children of the same nationality in pairs, provided that one of them has a relatively good command of language and knows a lot about school's customs. Thus, the implementation is done in a gentle and non-invasive way. A few more steps to implement the idea of interculturalism in Ireland are:

- improving teachers' skills connected with gaining confidence and abilities related to intercultural cooperation and working in ethnically, culturally or linguistically diverse environment;
- preparing teachers to teach English as an additional subject, that is working with children whose first language is not English;
- the development of the culture of mediation of a school;
- the support of parents in order to enable them to be fully engaged in the school life

of a child; language training for parents to remove language barriers;

- studies so as to determine the large number of immigrants' children's impact on school life in order to get to know how schools respond to the needs of these students and what should be improved [13].

Within the framework of preparing teachers to work with children who are not fluent in English and cannot contact with other pupils without difficulties, a strategy has been formulated to support the child speaking a different language. One of the main slogans is: „Remember - Working in a second/third language all the time is exhausting!". Apart from this:

- Allow children with poor levels of English to listen without having to answer.
- Organize group work or pair work as this is a much safer arrangement than whole class work.
- Give individual help where difficulties arise with tasks whenever possible.
- Have plenty of visual supports: pictures, photos, maps etc. in use.
- Allow visual/oral responses rather than written responses all the time.
- Introduce a buddy system where the child is paired off with another child for support throughout the school day.
- Use lower levels of parallel schemes in any subject area where a spiral approach exists.
- Try to build up a selection of books in other first languages for the class library.
- Allow the child to do computer work to reinforce themes, vocabulary etc.
- Give them less work to do, ensuring what they do will yield a high success rate.
- Use maps when discussing new countries.
- Use posters which show diversity.
- Use songs and games from a variety of countries.
- Encourage the child to teach basic words to the class when he/she has settled in.
- Use art for self-expression and/or a starting point for talking, in fact it is useful to have an easel at the back of the classroom as a type of art therapy for children who need time out.
- Ask for help! Other teachers, resource or learning support and outside groups.
- Organize a number of thematic days/weeks .
- Use authentic materials where possible.

- Develop intercultural elements in the curriculum [19].

Conclusion

The wave of immigrants coming to Ireland after 2004 resulted in looking closely at the phenomena of interculturalism and multiculturalism. Ireland is a very open and friendly country. The newcomers, including Poles, were welcomed in a very warm way and with enormous interest. The attempts to integrate with foreigners are most visible in schools where integration meetings as well as extra language classes for parents and children (often free of charge) are held. There are more and more organizations employing those who are able to provide assistance to non-English speaking people. Thus, the contribution of Irish authorities in making life easier for immigrants is impressive and noticeable. Department of Education and Skills and the Office of the Minister for Integration have formulated Intercultural Education Strategy for the years 2010-2015, the aim of which is to enhance the development of the best practices in intercultural education in Irish schools, through engagement in teaching, learning and research. The first results of the strategy implementation are for example: €100mln provided for the year 2011 to schools for language support and the creation of an inclusive learning environment, continuing professional development provided to teachers and principals regarding EAL (English as an additional language) and integration [20], on-line courses in "Teaching English as an Additional Language" (in association with the INTO in Intercultural Education accredited by Trinity Dublin College (four modules – school diversity & intercultural education, EAL, religious diversity, and school-based research project) [21]. It is also €10mln allocated for the provision of English language classes for adult immigrants through the further education sector and funding to support the integration of all children in pre-schools, in line with the introduction of the free pre-school year for all 3- 4 year olds [20].

The Irish experience shows that the answer to migration problems is intercultural education, because in today's globalized world, in which one culture correlates with the other, it is essential to have a positive relationship with people from other cultures. Therefore, intercultural learning is very important to learn *...how to gradually become a citizen of the world without losing one's own roots, actively participating in the life of the nation and of the local community, (...) how to adapt without renouncing one's own identity, build one's own autonomy in a dialectical relationship with freedom and the evolution of other people...* [22]. According to J. Nikitorowicz, the answer is simple – people should not fight different or even contradictory ideas, tastes, beliefs, behaviors or actions. The supporters of tolerance do not demand the resignation or restraining the implementation of one's own opinions, judgments, beliefs or norms. On the contrary, they ask for the truth and demand respect for others and their different perspective and interpretation [23]. *There is no higher and lower culture–there are only various cultures, meeting the needs and expectations of their members in different ways* [24].

References

1. Coulter C., *The end of Irish history? An introduction to the book*, [in:] *The end of Irish history? Critical reflections on the Celtic Tiger*, (red.) C. Coulter, S. Coleman, Manchester University Press, Manchester – New York 2003, s. 16.

2. *This is Ireland*. Highlights from Census 2011. Central Statistics Office, Dublin 2012

3. http://socyberty.com/education/intercultural-education-a-way-of-teaching/, (16.04.2013).

4. Helleiner J., *Irish Travellers: Racism and the Politics of Culture*. University of Toronto Press 2003.

5. *Intercultural Education in the Primary School: Guidelines for Schools*. National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Dublin 2005.

6. http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml, (27.04.2013).

7. *European Convention on Human Rights European Court of Human Rights*, http://www.echr.coe.int/ ECHR/EN/Header/Basic+Texts/The+Convention+and+additional+protocols/The+European+Conventi on+on+Human+Rights/, (27.04.2013).

8. http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CERD.aspx, (27.04.2013).

9. *Convention on the Rights of the Child from 1989*. Art. 24e and Art. 29c, http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx, (29.04.2013).

10. http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=157&CL=ENG, (30.04.2013).

11. http://www.constitution.org/cons/ireland/constitution_ireland-en.pdf, (27.04.2013)

12. EDUCATION ACT, 1998 no 51 Preface http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1998/en/act/pub/0051/ (29.04.2013).

13. Taguma M., Kim M., Wurzburg G., F. Kelly F., *Ireland. OECD Reviews of Migrant Education*, Dublin 2010.

14. *INTO, Intercultural education in the primary school*. Irish National Teachers' Organization, Dublin 2004.

15. http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills28/bills/2010/3810/b3810d.pdf, (02.05.2013).

16. *Intercultural education in the Post-primary school. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment*. Dublin, February 2008.

17. Todorovska-Sokolovska V., *Integracja i edukacja dzieci imigrantów w krajach Unii Europejskiej*. The Institute of Public Affairs, www.isp.org.pl/files/17880708880897304001270035288.pdf (17.04.2012).

18. *Intercultural Education: every teacher has a role*. National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Dublin 2008.

19. *Intercultural education. Additional Materials for Whole School Planning*. Primary Professional Development Service http://www.educatetogether.ie/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/interculturalism_additional_materials-3.doc (01.05.2013).

20. Minister White's Speech on Conference on the Intercultural Education Strategy– One Year On, Dublin 2011, http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Conferences/Intercultural-Education-Strategy/Intercultural-Education-Conference-One-Year-On.html#sthash.MuTJ5DTx.dpuf (01.05.2013).

21. O'Toole B., *Lóchrann, Coláiste Mhuire*. Conference on the Intercultural Education Strategy – One Year On, Dublin 2011, http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Conferences/Intercultural-Education-Strategy/Intercultural-Education-Conference-One-Year-On.html#sthash.MuTJ5DTx.dpuf (01.05.2013).

22. *Raport dla UNESCO Międzynarodowej Komisji do spraw Edukacji dla XXI wieku pod przewodnictwem Jacques'a Delorsa. Edukacja. Jest w niej ukryty skarb*. Stowarzyszenie Oświatowców Polskich, Warszawa 1998.

23. Nikitorowicz J., *Edukacja międzykulturowa*. Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2005.

24. Kapuściński R., *Ten Inny*. Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków 2007.