

From policy to practice; how praxis works – enacting the
intercultural guidelines in the classroom

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Abstract

Policy makers make policies based on national and international best practice evidence; however, policies may not get enacted on the ground due to the lack of knowledge of the policy by practitioners or it could reflect a lack of commitment or a lack of awareness of obligations. In this paper we examine how primary school teachers enacted the intercultural guidelines (NCCA, 2005) in the classroom. A cohort of teachers (n=25) undertaking a module on Intercultural education as part of a Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning (MATL) conducted small scale action research projects in which they sought to practice intercultural education in the classroom and school. Interculturalism argues that normality is diverse and diversity is normal; it takes an anti-bias curriculum (Derman-Sparks & ABC Task Force, 1989) approach by eschewing discrimination of any kind whether it is based on race, gender, religion, disability, sexual orientation, family or marital status, age and Traveller status. Policies encourage teachers to be political activists and to challenge discrimination of all kinds. The European Council emphasises the importance of intercultural competence and dialogue, exchange and education in building a common European future based on values and principles, so that human rights and democracy are safeguarded (Huber 2012). The Council of Europe further argue that there is a great need for education so that intercultural competence can be developed, learned and maintained throughout life. They go so far as to say that intercultural competence is at the heart of education. The paper will examine diversity in Irish society based on the results of the Irish census (2011) and provide a brief resume of current laws, policies and strategies on intercultural education. It gives examples of how teachers can promote an anti-bias curriculum in the classroom in relation to ethnicity, religion and Travellers.

Keywords

Intercultural, primary school teachers, ethnicity, religion, Travellers, policies, strategies, diversity, discrimination, racism,

Introduction

Intercultural education is based on the principles of social inclusion in terms of the multiple and intersecting identities that everybody possesses. Normality is diverse and diversity is normal. In Ireland, in keeping with equality legislation, intercultural education proscribes discrimination on the basis of nine grounds: age, gender, ethnicity/race, religion, marital status, family status, disability, Traveller identity and sexual orientation; these are also aspects of the anti-bias curriculum (Derman-Sparks & A.B.C. Task Force 1989). As part of a Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning (Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) 2012) students (25 current teachers in early childhood education and care, primary and post-primary schools) undertook a module entitled Intercultural education which was delivered over 10 weeks by the authors of this paper. Students were asked to write a 3000-word essay, based on a reflective analysis of the conduct of a designed classroom or school-based intervention, aimed to promote intercultural awareness and improve inclusion. They were required to examine the intercultural education guidelines (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2005) (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2006) and exemplars and develop interventions in the form of inclusive practices for their own educational environments. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how three teachers enacted various aspects of the NCCA policy (in relation to religion, ethnicity, and Travellers) in a primary school setting.

Irish laws, policies and strategies

There is no doubt that the founders of the Irish constitution embraced and promoted the concepts of equality and had a vision for an Irish society in which every child would be cherished equally (Articles 40.1, 40.3.1, 40.3.2 and 44.3.3) (Government of Ireland 1937). The concept of equality was further elucidated and promoted in a range of Irish Acts and policies fifty years later. The Unfair Dismissals Acts 1977 (amended 2005) (Government of Ireland 1977) and the Employment Equality Act 1998 (Government of Ireland 1998b) prohibit discrimination in employment, on nine grounds. Equality is to be promoted within a pro-diversity ethos. The Education Act (1998) (Government of Ireland 1998a) enshrines respect for diversity; the Equal Status Acts (2000-2004) (Government of Ireland 2000b) cover education and other

services provided by the Department of Education and Science (now Skills). Subject to certain exemptions schools are also bound by these Acts which prohibit discrimination and harassment. The nine “grounds” in the equality legislation are various aspects of our personal identities: *Gender, Marital status, Family status, Sexual orientation, Religion, Age, Disability, Race and Membership of the Traveller community*. Principals, teachers and others in positions of responsibility in a school cannot harass, victimise, or discriminate against anyone on any of the nine grounds; and they must not permit anyone with a right to be in the school, such as students or parents, to do so. According to Lodge and Lynch (2004) the Equality Authority is mandated to promote equality of opportunity and to combat discrimination in all areas of society including the field of education. *Diversity at School* (Lodge & Lynch 2004) furthers the work of the Equality Authority by promoting the inclusive school that ‘respects, values and accommodates diversity across all nine grounds in the equality legislation’ (Lodge & Lynch, 2004, p. x). It provides guidance to teachers on how to put policy into practice.

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004) (Government of Ireland 2004) establishes the principle of inclusive education for children with special educational needs as a legal requirement. The Education (Welfare) Act (2000) (Government of Ireland 2000a) requires schools to prepare codes of behaviour; these codes must recognise diversity of culture and needs. The Children Act, 2001 (Government of Ireland 2001) addresses issues relating to the care, protection and control of children, juvenile offenders, and child care proceedings. It assiduously protects the education rights of children who come under its remit. The law functions as shield and sword; it protects rights and enforces recognition of those rights. The vision informing the law is often more fully stated in policies, however, these Acts contain clear and precise statements of elements of that vision.

The Intercultural Guidelines

There has been substantial investment, internationally (United Nations Educational and Scientific Cultural Organization) (UNESCO 2005)(Huber 2012) and nationally, into drawing up comprehensive inclusion policy documents. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment publishes a wide range of diversity-related documents, to

support inclusive teaching in the primary school sector (NCCA 2005) and the secondary school sector (NCCA 2006). The INTO (Irish National Teachers' Organisation 2004) also published intercultural guidelines for primary schools. Intercultural guidelines for the early childhood education and care sector are a fundamental aspect of Aistear (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2009) and Síolta (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education 2006) policy documents. The fundamental principles of intercultural education are that it is education that celebrates and embraces the richness of diversity. It acknowledges that people have '*developed a range of different ways of life, customs and worldview and that this breadth of human life enriches all of us*' (NCCA, 2005, p.3). Intercultural education '*promotes equality and human rights, challenges unfair discrimination, and promotes the values upon which equality is built*' (NCCA, 2005, p.3). Schools as a microcosm of society are entrusted to respect diversity and ensure that children internalise the normality of diversity in their everyday lives. This respect permeates all aspects of the school culture and checklists are provided to ensure that schools comply with and promote diversity, in lessons, in school displays and in policies. This respect for diversity is part of the hidden curriculum and is not to be treated as an 'add on' to the curriculum. The hidden curriculum is that which is not part of the formal curriculum, it is a 'passive acceptance of the status quo' (Giddens 2009, p. 837), for example: heteronormativity is normal, or girls are not good at mathematics, or nomadism is not acceptable or only Christians go to heaven.

Ethnic and Religious Diversity in Ireland

The new ethnic and religious diversity in Irish society was revealed in the 2011 census (Central Statistics Office 2012). It is outside the scope of this paper to discuss the challenges involved in measuring ethnic or cultural diversity in population censuses, however, two aspects of identity will be focused on: nationalities and faith/religious profiles. Nationality is one indicator of ethnic diversity; Irish nationals still comprise the majority of the State population (94% in 2002, down to 86% in 2011 (CSO, 2012). Despite the economic downturn the number of immigrants working in Ireland remains high particularly those with children (Devine 2011). The number of non-Irish nationals increased from 224,261 in 2002 to just over half a million (544,357) in 2011 – an immigrant population increase of 143%. The Census 2011 enumerated people in the following categories: Irish (Irish-America, Irish-English, Irish-European, Irish-

Other); EU (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden), UK; Rest of Europe (Russia, Ukraine), Other; Africa (Nigeria, South Africa, Mauritius), Other; Asia (India, Philipines, China, Pakistan, Malaysia), Other; Australia (New Zealand), Other nationalities, Multi nationality, no nationality and not stated. Table 1 presents the largest immigrant groups in Ireland in 2011 (CSO 2012). Since this paper focuses on school children, the nationalities profiles for both the State total population and the State child population are given and ranked in order of size (percentages) in the child population. Only populations with 0.4% or higher representation in the child population are specifically named in the table. Irish Travellers are also included, because Traveller identity features so prominently in debates on inclusive education.

Nationalities	% of total State population	% of State child population
Irish (excl Travellers)	84.9	86.8
Poland	2.7	2.3
Traveller	0.7	1.2
UK	2.5	1.1
Irish-Other	0.4	0.7
Lithuania	0.8	0.7
Irish-European	0.2	0.6
Irish-American	0.3	0.5
China	0.4	0.4
Nigeria	0.4	0.4
Latvia	0.5	0.4
<i>Not stated</i>	<i>1.2</i>	<i>1.7</i>
<i>All others</i>	<i>5.1</i>	<i>3.2</i>
State population	100	100

Table 1. General and child population nationality profiles (plus Travellers) in 2011 in Ireland (CSO, 2012) Source: Census 2011 - This is Ireland, Table 24 Persons usually resident and present in the State on census night, classified by nationality and age group.

Immigrant groups vary in terms of the percentages of their numbers who are children. As with Irish emigrants, most immigrants are of working age. Depending on where the newcomers decide to live in the host state, the school-going population can be more or less diverse (Devine 2011). Devine suggests that although some immigrants may have higher levels of education than native parents, many immigrants may cluster in certain poorer areas where they can find low-rental or less expensive

housing. The clustering of ethnic groups presents challenges for teachers who may have many children in their classroom whose first language is not English. Fertility rates also vary – so, for instance, Traveller representation in the child population is double that of their representation in the State population.

Ethnic diversity is often accompanied by religious diversity and is a good indicator of change in this hitherto highly religiously homogenous country. In 1991, 92% of the population registered as Roman Catholic; it dropped to 89% by 2002, and to 84% by 2011. Listed affiliations rose from five to eight in 1981, and then to 21 in 1991 (CSO, 2012). People registering as having no religion have become the next largest grouping after Catholics, and the number not registering any religion has also risen. The traditional major Christian churches remain significant, but Muslims and Orthodox Christians have entered the top six affiliations. The profile of these ranked in order of size in 2011 was as follows:

Affiliation	2011
Roman Catholic	84.2
No religion	5.9
Church of Ireland (incl Protestant)	2.9
Not stated	1.6
Muslim (Islamic)	1.1
Orthodox	1.0
Presbyterian	0.5

Table 2. Percentage profile of religious affiliations in the national population (CSO, 2012) Census 2011 lists levels for fifteen other smaller affiliations: Apostolic/Pentecostal (0.3%), Hindu, Buddhist and Methodist (0.2% each), Jehovah’s Witness, Evangelical Lutheran, Atheist, Baptist and Agnostic (0.1% each). Finally, Jewish, Pantheist, Latter Day Saints, Quakers, Baha’I, and Brethren each comprised between 0.04 and 0.01% of the population, and the remaining 1.2% registered across a cluster of other unnamed but clearly very small affiliations.

Intercultural Education Strategy

In 2010, Ireland launched its first Intercultural Education Strategy (IES) (Department of Education and Skills and the Office of the Minister for Integration 2010). The IES arose from the Government’s commitment at the World Conference against Racism in Durban to introduce an National Action Plan Against Racism (NPAR) which would incorporate an intercultural strategy. The IES strategy focuses exclusively on ethnicity; it acknowledges the increased immigration into Irish society which has

resulted in much ethnic and religious diversity and counsels teachers of the dangers of racism, bullying and stereotyping. It recognises that many teachers may have qualified during a time when Ireland was a relatively homogenous society and they may not have received intercultural education. A core aspect of this strategy is the need to 'build the capacity of service providers at all levels' (IES 2010, p.50). Teacher education should incorporate awareness raising of the importance of diversity in Irish society and of providing immigrants with information about the Irish education system (IES 2010). Teachers should have the 'knowledge skills to teach in a diverse classroom' (IES 2010 p. 28). English may not be the first language of immigrants; therefore initial teacher education and continuous professional development (CPD) should ensure that teachers are trained in English as an Additional Language (EAL) and 'cultural diversity principles and practice' (IES 2010 p.30) because they have a key role in developing the 'language competence of all learners' (IES 2010 p.39). Teachers should have 'high expectations' for their students and migrants should be encouraged to become teachers (IES 2010 p.30). In order to deliver a successful intercultural ethos and practice in education the strategy outlines ten key components: 'leadership', 'mainstreaming of education provision', 'rights and responsibilities', 'high aspirations and expectations', 'enhancing the quality of teaching', 'knowledge of language(s) of instruction', 'partnership and engagement', 'effective communication', 'data collection and research' and finally actions, 'monitoring and evaluation' (IES, 2010, p. 44).

From Policy to Practice

However, policy implementation ultimately depends on teachers having the necessary knowledge and skills to do justice to the policies, and to the children's diverse potential and needs. To achieve best practice requires professional development that promotes awareness of wider social issues, and awareness of prevailing policy ethos and legal obligations (Lynch & Lodge 2002). A recent survey (n=27) of teachers indicated that the majority (60%) were unaware of the intercultural guidelines; the majority did not know about the intercultural education strategy (89%); 50% said that their schools did not have an intercultural policy and believed they needed further training in embracing cultural diversity (Watson 2012). For the past decade, Devine has conducted studies on ethnicity in Irish schools; this has enabled her to track

changes in teacher's perceptions as well as observing 'consistencies of patterns that remain' (p.89) in the period (Devine 2011). Teachers may not be aware of their own racialised practices and may unwittingly have lower expectations for children of ethnic minorities because they are seen as 'other' or 'exotic' and are different to Irish children who are considered the norm in terms of culture (Devine, 2011, p. 88).

Methodology

In this study a secondary analysis of 25 essays on intercultural education was conducted (Whitaker 2013a). These essays were based on a reflective analysis of the management of a designed classroom or school-based intervention, aimed to promote intercultural awareness and improve inclusion. Documentary methods of analysis were used. Documentary research means that documents or other materials (be they photographs, Youtube videos, etc.) are the primary focus of the research (Gidley 2004). Gidley provides a definition of documentary sources:

Documentary sources are written sources – personal letters, diaries, scrapbooks, memoirs, legislation, newspaper clippings, business accounts, marriage contracts. These might have been produced at the time of the events described, or some time later. (Gidley, 2004)

Analysis of the essays revealed the myriad of ways that teachers designed and implemented inclusive practices; in some cases they used exemplars from the NCCA website (<http://action.ncca.ie>) and in other cases students came up with their own creative ideas and interventions. Essays were written on the following topics: race/ethnicity (n=7), promoting awareness of intercultural guidelines (n=4), religion (n=4), Travellers (n=1), homosexuality (1), increasing parental involvement (n=1) conflict resolution (n=2), policy development (n=1), racism (n=1), identity (n=2) and promoting equal opportunities (n=1). It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe all the interventions, therefore, three essays were chosen, which addressed inclusion on the basis of the grounds of religion, ethnicity and Traveller status. Challenging homophobia has been addressed in another paper (Whitaker 2013b).

Ethical Issues

This research complies with the British Educational Research Association guidelines (BERA 2011), in that no harm or detriment came to respondents. The principal of informed consent was used; teachers were asked and gave their permission for their essays to be used for a research paper. All the essays were collated and returned to the teachers as an aspect of peer learning. The data were treated as confidential in that the

teachers who participated in the study remain anonymous; pseudonyms have been used to protect identity.

Interventions to promote intercultural education

Religion

Janet teaches in an infant classroom in a Catholic primary school in which there are diverse religions namely: Catholic, Protestant, Baptist, Hindu and Jewish. She believed that this new religious diversity was being ignored rather than embraced. Janet developed an intervention to promote religious tolerance through play. Using the Aistear (NCCA, 2009) guidelines of 'identity and belonging' she promoted the principles of: the child's uniqueness, equality and diversity and children as citizens. Over the course of a month she developed a make believe restaurant in a socio-dramatic play station in the classroom to demonstrate that religion can be a strong component of ethnic identity and there can be rituals attached to eating. The children took on the different roles of chef, waiter/waitress or customer. Janet intervened with questions such as: What kind of restaurant is this? What type of food is served here? Who visits this restaurant? What kind of food do you cook – Chinese, French, Italian, Japanese, Irish, Indian? What might you do before you eat? The children enjoyed the exercise and it was noted that one little boy of Indian origin who was normally quiet and reserved entered into the play with enthusiasm and shared information about what his mother cooks at home. Similarly, a young Nigerian girl who is usually shy shared her experiences of being a Baptist and how they celebrate with food after every service. Janet researched culture-specific cookbooks to source the types of foods eaten in other countries and cultures. When a child served a meal, the class reflected on the culture, for example, if it was a Japanese restaurant, the customers would eat at a low table while sitting on cushions. The children learned that in Japan, you say "itadakimasu" ("I gratefully receive") before eating, and "gochisosama (deshita)" ("Thank you for the meal") after finishing the meal. If it was an Indian restaurant, they would use only the right hand for eating and passing the food around because in Indian culture, the left hand is considered unclean. Jewish cuisine and the laws of keeping kosher (eating only the foods allowed by Jewish law) opened their eyes to very different traditions. In Islam, Muslims must comply with Halal practices in relation to what food can be eaten; pork is prohibited so Muslims would not eat pork

sausages or any pork dishes. Pupils cooked, served and tried food from other cultures and on St. Patrick's Day the children shared green jelly and ice-cream.

Religion is a significant part of many people's sense of ethnic, cultural, personal or national identity. When promoting religious tolerance in the infant classroom, she suggests that prevention (of intolerance) is better than cure. Nurturing equality and diversity at this impressionable age helps children to recognise, value and accept themselves and others. Each child was supported to feel equal to everyone else and not excluded because of ethnicity, faith/no faith, culture, language, family background, special educational need, gender, physical appearance or ability. Janet endorsed diversity by welcoming and valuing individual differences and celebrating these differences as part of life. Janet suggested that the promotion of religious tolerance happened almost by default because each child learnt to respect his/her peers regardless of faith/no faith.

Travellers

Deirdre teaches children age six to seven in a primary school. She was concerned about a young Traveller child who complained because other children were bullying, teasing and excluding him from play. Other children also made comments that could be considered discriminatory towards Travellers; these were dealt with in accordance with the school's behaviour and discipline policy. She designed an intervention that would develop an understanding of the Travelling Community and hopefully prevent discrimination, particularly as recent research by Tormey and Gleeson (2012) found that students in secondary schools held negative and discriminatory attitudes toward Travellers.

Deirdre chose two subjects Geography and History where children would have the opportunity to discover information about Traveller culture. In Geography, she covered the topic of homes. According to the Primary School Geography Curriculum (1999) children in first class, should be enabled to "recognise that people live in a variety of homes, describe his/her home, its location and surroundings, record some of these features using simple drawings, plans, displays, models and sketches, investigate materials used to construct homes and identify materials of local origin, develop an awareness and appreciation of different types of homes in the locality and in other areas houses, farmhouses, cottages, apartments, flats, caravans, trailers, mobile homes, homes in shanty towns" (NCCA, 1999). This provided the context to

explore the Travelling Community's tradition of living in a caravan or a trailer. The children were given the opportunity to draw their own homes and discuss them and what it is like to live in each. Children were able to share experiences of holidaying in mobile homes, and the Traveller child from talked about how he goes travelling in a trailer around England each summer with his cousins; sometimes moved on by local police.

In 'History', Deirdre explored the topic of when their grandparents were young because of the differences and similarities of experiences of settled people and Travellers. The children gathered stories from their grandparents about what school was like for them and compared it with school today. Deirdre worked in a disadvantaged area, many of the grandparents had similar negative memories of school or in some cases didn't attend school regularly.

For her daily read aloud session in English, Deirdre also chose a book from the class library that featured members of the Travelling Community. *Mr. Ape* (King-Smith 1998) features two gypsies that help out Ape on his farm; these characters were presented in a positive light and helped to depict Travellers to all of the children in a positive way as well as to ensure that Travellers are represented in the class library.

Ethnicity

Nora was a senior language support teacher in a junior primary school in a DEIS Band Two catchment. Almost one third of her school population comprised of pupils from different countries: Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia, reflecting immigration into the industrialised town in which the school is located. She works in three classes of twenty five pupils and facilitates language development both in a withdrawal- group setting and within the classroom. She focused on the promotion of intercultural education in terms of social integration and language support for newcomer children whose first language is not English using the Aistear curriculum (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2009).

Initially Nora took field notes of stressful episodes in relation to newcomer pupils. She used a time frame of one month to design, deliver and assess the intervention strategies. She started with an examination of the school procedures for newcomer children; Nora consulted with the management team, and they introduced new procedures involving a meeting with newcomer parents, the principal and language support teacher. This provided the opportunity to explain school procedures to parents

and the newcomer child in a warm and welcoming manner and to gather information about the newly-arriving child, their capacities and particular needs, anticipations and concerns. A checklist was devised in accordance with suggestions from the NCCA Intercultural Guidelines (2007). Important information was gathered regarding the correct pronunciation of the child's name, their language abilities and needs. Key words and phrases in the child's first language were requested. Information regarding the pupil's religion was obtained in addition to how it is practised and possible implications for school and classroom planning. To date, this checklist is proving beneficial to newcomer students and the teachers have reported a decrease in instances of cultural disconnect. Classroom routines are clearly explained enabling the newcomer children to settle in quickly.

Guided by the NCCA (2005) advice that people find it easier to 'develop complex thinking in their first language, it is important that student's first language is valued and affirmed within the classroom and the wider school context', Nora learnt key words and phrases such as greetings and simple instructions in the student's first language. On a regular and deliberate basis, she also communicated positive attitudes towards linguistic diversity and multi-lingual skills, for example "Emilija speaks fluent Polish and she is improving her English every day." Classmates were encouraged to help and support their peers, by repeating and re-phrasing statements. Nora also adopted role play strategies as a means of clarification and confirming comprehension. In small group settings she incorporated first languages such as Polish, Mandarin and Tagalog to scaffold learning both in oral language work and literacy activities. She compiled and sourced dual language books. Finally a classroom review checklist guided by the NCCA was devised and circulated to classrooms in which Aistear (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2009) and station teaching takes place. The checklist was completed jointly by the classroom and language support teacher.

The interventions proved beneficial. Nora observed that students were comforted to hear words and phrases in their first language spoken by the teacher. Filipino, Polish and Lithuanian pupils were eager to reply and continue conversing in their mother tongue. Her observations noted that the interventions clearly increased their sense of inclusion and recognition in the classroom; pupils were highly motivated and increased in feelings of self worth. Dual language dictionaries are now in place in the

language support room and in several classrooms; these are an effective pedagogical method for scaffolding learning.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined three examples (pertaining to ethnicity, religion and Travellers) of how teachers in the primary school setting have interpreted intercultural policies and in a creative and innovative manner have tried to effect change by designing and implementing changes to their teaching practices and to policies and procedures in schools in order to create more inclusive classrooms. Teachers reflected deeply on their own practices and demonstrated that they were reflective and reflexive practitioners. They enacted policies in their creative practices and engaged in praxis (Freire 1970) by putting theories into practice. The world social order is dependent on *inter alia* diverse ethnic and religious groups co-existing harmoniously. Recent wars have often involved conflict between different ethnic or religious groups; ethnic cleansing was carried out in the former Yugoslavia and Bosnia (Giddens 2009). In the past three decades, religious fundamentalism and Islamophobia has grown in strength (Giddens 2009) and has led to violence between Islamic and Christian groups in Indonesia, Lebanon and other countries. It behoves educators to promote religious tolerance and respect for all religions. Equally the views of those who do not adhere to any religion must be respected.

Travellers continue to be disadvantaged in Irish society (Tormey & Gleeson 2012); they have a high (84%) unemployment rate (Central Statistics Office 2012), have poorer health than the general population, higher levels of disability and historically they experienced segregated education (Danaher et al. 2009) and still experience prejudice and discrimination. Therefore, ethnic (including Traveller) and religious differences cannot be ignored by teachers nor can other dimensions of identity. Schools and teachers have an important role to play in the socialisation of children and teachers should not underestimate their influence on shaping children's attitudes, opinions and beliefs. The value of this module on intercultural education for teachers is highlighted; teachers internalised the theories and put them into practice in schools. The IES states that it is imperative that teachers in initial teacher education learn about intercultural education and that qualified teachers engage in modules on interculturalism through continuous professional development.

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