

In this essay I will be taking a look at the issue of immigration in modern day Ireland. More specifically I will be exploring the complex problems that the Irish education system faces, as schools with little experience of dealing with cultural and linguistic diversity face this changing reality. As well as identifying these challenges, I also hope to outline the opportunities that the Irish education system can embrace as Irish communities become rich with cultural diversity. This year gone by, Ireland celebrated its centenary with every school in the country reciting the Irish proclamation that was drafted in 1916. The proclamation states “The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all of the children of the nation equally..”( PEARSE, P. (1975). *The Easter proclamation of the Irish Republic, 1916*. Dublin, Dolmen Press.) Proclaiming that every Irish citizen will be provided with equal rights and equal opportunities was a decent and perhaps achievable aspiration for the new independent Irish state in 1916. Access to a fair education is globally recognised as a basic human right, according to article 26 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights; “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free; at least in the elementary and fundamental stages....Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups...”( UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 10 December 1948) Although as Ireland has gone through many waves of change since then, socially, economically and culturally; have the rights of every Irish citizen been protected and maintained? How does one define and identify an Irish citizen in Ireland today? Immigration into Ireland has revitalised debates on Irish identity. According to Johnson (1994), ethnically, “the Irish nation is a pluralist hybrid of Firbolgs, Celts, Vikings, Normans, English, Scottish, Huguenots etc. He argues that racial purity in the case of the Irish is blatant nonsense”. (Fidèle Mutwarasibo, *Adult Learner: The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education* AONTAS The National Adult Learning Organisation. 2nd Floor, 83-87 Main Street, Ranelagh, Dublin 6, Ireland) The issue of shifting Irish identity is one that stems from our long history of foreign invasion and the need to emigrate due to economic deficiencies. Emigration is something that has become part of our modern Irish identity; we

have been travelling to different countries to find work for generations. These days when we move elsewhere to work we are known as ex-pats, although the people that move to Ireland for the same reasons are known as immigrants. With our history and current situation of mass emigration, one would assume that the Irish would be welcoming those from other countries into our communities without hesitation. Though it seems as the levels of immigration have risen, Ireland is struggling to efficiently integrate these new citizens into our society and our education system. Former president Mary Robinson has spoken out on this matter on several occasions “This new reality is both a huge challenge and a great opportunity for modern Ireland... Integration is a complex and lengthy two-way process for the host county and for immigrants. Creating the conditions for integration requires an understanding of the very real barriers that exist for immigrants attempting to participate in Irish society.” (Mary Robinson *Race And Immigration In The New Ireland*. 1st ed. University of Notre Dame Press, 2016.) For any child in Ireland, ones integration into the wider society outside of the family begins when the child attends school. This is when one begins to meet their local peers becomes a part of the church, the sports or music community. Without the gate way of schooling and education, it is quite difficult to imagine how the new arriving citizens of Ireland are suppose integrate and prosper in our society alongside us. Though the ‘very real barriers’ Mary Robinson mentions understandably do exist, they are interconnected complex problems that the education system faces. I am going to look at in more detail the challenges posed by, language differences, diversity in teacher training, religious tradition and the problem of racist or xenophobic behaviour. I am also going to outline some progressive opportunities that the education system have the opportunity to embrace such as teaching cultural studies, integration through sport, intercultural festivals or celebrations and initiatives to promote integration in schools such as the school Yellow Flag Programme.

Linguistic disparities are an obvious issue that non-English speaking migrants are going to face attempting to integrate into our society and one that needs serious consideration in order to accommodate them. Language differences are among the most difficult challenges for new settlers and receiving societies alike. Lack of necessary language skills can limit economic opportunity, access to social resources (shops, banks, the media) and negotiation of social institutions (education and health care facilities). With the more

recent increase in non-Irish and non-English-speaking immigration, these problems relate to much large numbers, and language issues have rapidly moved up the national policy agenda. ( Padraig O Riagain *Race And Immigration In The New Ireland*. 1st ed. University of Notre Dame Press, 2016) Schools have a central role in the integration of immigrants into Irish society, both for the new arrivals and for the existing Irish population. In 2006 the estimated number of children under 14 from non-English speaking countries was estimated to be over 50,000, in the last 10 years that number has doubled. The current approach of the Irish authorities to the education of migrant children has four elements. First, all immigrant children are placed in regular mainstream classrooms in which instruction is in English or, in a minority of schools, Irish. Second, the Department of Education and Science authorize the use of assessment tests to assist in determining the language proficiency of pupils. The tests have been designed for use at primary level but are being adapted to make them appropriate for use in post primary schools. (Padraig O Riagain *Race And Immigration In The New Ireland*. 1st ed. University of Notre Dame Press, 2016) I believe placing immigrant children into regular mainstream classrooms alongside children from their community is a good first step towards integration. The concern is then how do teachers manage a classroom where English is second language to a percentage of the class, teachers who perhaps have not had training in dealing with situations like this. According to the department of education the third element in providing education to migrant children is allocating “additional teacher support to primary and post primary schools according to the number of enrolled pupils for whom English is a second language and the associated levels of pupils’ language proficiency . In 2009 there were 1,650 full-time language support teachers in Irish primary schools, and 560 fulltime equivalents in post primary schools” (Padraig O Riagain *Race And Immigration In The New Ireland*. 1st ed. University of Notre Dame Press, 2016) I think this initiative by the department of education to support students with their English language skills is the right step forward. It is important that these students have the same opportunities as they progress as their native Irish classmates. As with any differentiation learning strategies in the classroom though, it is important that it is treated in a manner that does not segregate certain students. While students with linguistic challenges need the appropriate support, they also need to be integrated with native English classmates. How this is done comes down to the style of individual teachers, they create the climate in their classroom, whether it is going to be accepting of other languages

and cultures or not. While it is important to support migrants with their English, it is also essential that their first language is acknowledged and can be used as a source of education for all in the classroom. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment observed that “the right to one’s own language is important in enabling people to develop a strong positive self-image. People also generally find it easier to develop complex thinking in their first language. For both ethical and educational reasons, then, it is important that the student’s first language is valued and affirmed within the school context... Learning in a bilingual environment can be positive experience for all children” (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, *Intercultural Education in the Primary School*. 1st ed. Dublin: Irish National Teachers Organisation, 2006.) I believe there is certainly a lot that needs to be addressed to properly meet the educational needs of the large amount of migrant children that are arriving to this country. The Irish education system has never had to deal with these linguistic challenges before. The numbers of migrant children coming to Ireland is going to continue to rise, and I think the education authorities need to plan for this growing situation by planning and investing in teacher training programs so that teachers of the future will be adequately equipped to educate in a modern multicultural Ireland.

As the agenda of a countries education system changes over time, so does its teacher training programmes. In the wake of 1916, once Ireland regained rule of state from the British, top priority on the new government’s agenda was to reclaim and establish the Irish identity. To begin this process, authorities concentrated on the education system, to re-establish the Irish language and catholic religion, they would begin by investing in the states future citizens. Teacher training at this time would have focussed on making sure primary school teachers would emphasise the importance of Irish and religion. We are 100 years later and in a lot of primary schools, gaeilge and religion is still the strongest focal point. Although as ‘Irish identity’ changes with Irish citizens becoming diverse and multicultural- how will our education system adapt the profile of people qualifying to teach them? I think that is important the Irish education system considers diversifying the profile and training of our teachers to avoid the alienation and underachievement of ethnic minorities in this country. Writing for the Irish Times Stafford Hood talks about the pressing issue of challenging the diversity of teacher profiles in this country “Ireland’s emergent transformation from a traditional homogenous society to a nation of new immigrants means

that the country's teachers are on the front line of educating a more diverse student population... Based on my research and evaluation work in the US, I would suggest that there are a number of issues that require Ireland's careful and immediate attention if the country is serious about avoiding the all-too-common alienation and underachievement experienced by ethnic minorities elsewhere." (Stanford Hood *Teaching Culturally Diverse Children Is A Challenge For Irish Schools*" Web. 29 Sept. 2015.) Here he talks about his experience researching the issue of diversity in education in the US, where multiculturalism has always been a factor to consider in their education system. He comments that the alienation and underachievement of ethnic minorities is very common, and that this problem needs immediate attention in Ireland if it is to be avoided. In the article several times he also mentions the levels of homogeneity he has witnessed in Irish teachers. For older generations that have not experience living in a diverse Irish society, I would imagine this homogeneity can be hard to avoid. Teachers are guides and role models for their students so I think it is really important that Irelands teaching force reflects the diversity of the student population. I think this would involve the Irish education system making a deliberate effort to increase the diversity of those who are being trained as teachers. "An equally important consideration is effective training of new teachers for this diverse student population and comparable professional development opportunities for current teachers. This training for new and current teachers must include instructional strategies and techniques that are culturally responsive in order to more effectively meet the educational needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds." (Stanford Hood *Teaching Culturally Diverse Children Is A Challenge For Irish Schools*" Web. 29 Sept. 2015.) To tackle the challenge of integration today in Ireland I think updated professional development training for existing teachers in this area is needed, although I can imagine quite a few teachers that think this issue does not affect them and may never will. Though with the current immigration figures and the predicted increase I feel this is not the case. The Irish education system is also going to need to consider how it deals with this diversity in its curriculum, and how much of the experience and culture of minority groups will be included. In a striking metaphor American poet Adrienne Rich describes the impact, not being acknowledged by ones education system can have on a child - "when someone with the authority of the teacher describes our society and you are not in it?" Such an experience, she said, can be disorienting: "A moment of psychic disequilibrium as if you looked into a mirror and saw

nothing." (*Teaching Culturally Diverse Children Is A Challenge For Irish Schools*" Web. 29 Sept. 2015.)

Xenophobia is another thorny challenge that immigrants and their hosting countries face. It is an issue the Irish education system needs to acknowledge if it is going to develop plans for successful integration. It is my understanding that Irish people have never thought themselves to be xenophobic; certainly if you ask somebody about the issue they will refute any accusation completely. As mentioned before, Ireland has a long history of fleeing to other countries for help in times of plight. For this reason it is believed that the Irish people would be more understanding towards the plight of others from different countries. But I think the notion of racism or xenophobia is more complicated than one simply trying to understand the plight of others. In 'New Xenophobia in Europe' Ruairi O'Connell writes about what he considers three prevailing myths that the Irish use to convince themselves that racism could not exist here. The first being the 'underdog myth' with our history of oppression, Ireland associates itself with an underdog identity. He comments "The problem with the underdog myth is that we find it difficult to realise that we too can be oppressors" (Baumgartl, Bernd and Adrian Favell. *New Xenophobia In Europe*. 1st ed. London: Kluwer Law International, 1995.) The second is the homogeneity myth, here he comments on Irish people that belong to the majority group class (white catholic) living under the assumption that all Irish people are the same. "It is very tempting for people to believe that all Irish people are the same... However it is not the case that all Irish people are the same... Gay men and lesbians, the mentally and physically handicapped, various small religious minorities and the Travellers are all groups that are not treated with respect in Irish life" This mistreatment of minority groups would vary across the spectrum of Irish geography especially urban areas compared to rural parts. Rural parts of western Ireland still hold untouched populations of white catholic majority. Which brings me to his third myth, which is Irish people holding the opinion that Ireland has no foreign people, so how could we possibly be xenophobic? I think xenophobia is a major challenge the education system in this country faces in light of the recent surge of immigration, I also feel that this may not be the most obvious challenge to government which is quite worrying. Throughout my research for this essay I found an alarming amount of documented accounts of xenophobic behaviour by young people in Ireland.

“A group of teenage girls shouted “*kill the fucking nigger*” at an under fourteen GAA player in Carlow last week, and were encouraged to do so by adults.” (*Race And Immigration In The New Ireland*. 1st ed. University of Notre Dame Press, 2016.) Quotes like this make for uncomfortable reading but cannot be ignored. As with any social issue such as this blatant prejudice, proper education is always the answer to progressing in the right direction. It is the responsibility of the education system to tackle social issues such as this, to make it mandatory for teachers to give lessons on tolerance and integration. Although first, authorities need to make sure that the teachers existing, and new entering, are aware of these issues and are able to overcome their own subconscious prejudices. The need to take racism seriously can be learnt from the decades of research conducted on the matter in the United Kingdom. “Study after study has highlighted how teachers have responded differently to black students than to other ‘ethnic minority’ or white students. Examples of findings include the role of stereotypes in disproportionate exclusions (temporary expulsions as a disciplinary measure) of black students, findings that black students tended to receive more criticism and negative feedback than white students and findings that even well intentioned teachers, committed to inclusive ideals unconsciously respond differently to black pupils than, for example, to Asian pupils” (Fanning, Bryan. *Integration And Social Cohesion In The Republic Of Ireland*. 1st ed. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011.) This kind of subconscious behaviour by teachers can be harmful to students from ethnic minorities and also indigenous children. Teachers are role models, and it sends a message to young people that it is acceptable to treat a person of an ethnic background differently. To combat these challenges the education system will need to look at how to develop its teacher training program, they also have the opportunity to include more cultural studies into the curriculum.

As the Irish population becomes more diverse, the Irish education system has the opportunity to introduce initiatives to educate children on how the world works and how people from other cultures live. According to the National Council for Curriculum (NCCA) they are developing a new curriculum area on Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics. This is proposed to be introduced at primary level. I think an important part of a child’s education is learning about and understanding lives, values and traditions of friends, classmates and members of the wider community. Learning about the cultural heritage of

the major forms of religions, their beliefs and traditions would enable children to develop a personal commitment to dignity and freedom of others. The NCCA claim that these are all essential in citizenship education and in the promotion of the shared responsibility we have as Irish citizens to uphold the common good. It is hoped that during these lessons children will share ideas about the world promoting friendships and relationships with their peers, and as children reflect on their own beliefs and values and those of others, they will come to an understanding of themselves, their community and the world around them. Patrick Sullivan, director of the NCCA discussed the new curriculum development with the Irish Times "In addition, the curriculum will include education in ethics, focused on making choices and decisions in a way that considers the effect on others. This will include learning about the dignity and freedom of humans, as well as the importance of human rights and responsibilities in society." (The Irish Times, "*Primary Schools To Have To Teach Religion Under New Curriculum*". 2016.) I think teaching children and adults too, these important values is an exciting opportunity Irish the education system faces in light of the recent high levels of immigration.

Integration through sport is another opportunity posed by this changing reality for the education system. Traditionally sports and sporting events have always been a catalyst for bringing communities together and promoting an inclusive community spirit. "The world of sport has not been immune from the challenges laid down by the New Irish. Whether in soccer, rugby, or Gaelic games, the various ruling bodies have developed policies to encourage the New Irish to play their games. These policies have been driven by the demands for integration that exist at government level." (*Race And Immigration In The New Ireland*. 1st ed. University of Notre Dame Press, 2016.). The GAA is the most Irish sporting authority in the country, it organizes games across the whole of Ireland, one could argue that it is the epitome of 'Irishness'. For this reason it makes sense that the organisation could be an effective tool for integration of the new Irish. "The GAA has pursued integration by staging family days at clubs across the island; the New Irish are brought into clubs, introduced to the games, and have the whole phenomenon of the GAA explained to them." (*Race And Immigration In The New Ireland*. 1st ed. University of Notre Dame Press, 2016.) The schooling system and the GAA have always worked in a close partnership, and I think it



is a wonderful opportunity for the education system to utilize the association in order to promote integration today.

I believe that celebrating our new cultural diversity is one of the best opportunities our education system has to embrace. There are many examples popping up all around the country at the moment of people celebrating our New Irish communities. One such example of this is the Polska Eire festival, a national wide festival to celebrate Polish-Irish diversity, with 150,000 Polish people now calling Ireland home. Joanna Siewierska is one of the organisers of the event; she recalls moving to Ireland when she was 7 years old, and having little to no English. "When seven-year-old me arrived in Ireland 11 years ago, I never thought that I would be involved in organising a nationwide festival to celebrate Polish-Irish cultural diversity" The festival holds several events that focuses on the topic of integration for young people in schools, also perhaps most importantly the festival highlights the contribution of non-Irish populations to Irish society. On integration Joanna comments "For me, good integration means that today, after ten years in Ireland, I feel very much at home here and I know that I belong. It's important that we improve integration, in particular for young people, in order to help them be the best they can be and to make them feel safe and happy in Ireland; their new home. I can't wait to see the outcomes of the festival and I hope that we will all continue talking about and improving integration long after it." (The Journal.ie "*I Arrived In Ireland Aged 7, Not Able To Speak English – Now I'M Organising A Nationwide Festival*". 2015) The education system has the opportunity now to take example from events like this and formulate strategies to celebrate the increasing diversity in Irish schools. Students need to be given the chance to socialise and learn in an open, supportive and tolerant environment, where they develop the ability to treat others with respect and dignity. The Yellow Flag Programme is an initiative that is aimed at providing schools with the opportunity to actively engage in a course dedicated to becoming an inclusive environment by embracing and celebrating its diversity. Much like the green flag programme where schools are awarded the title after proving their ability to function in an eco-friendly manner, the Yellow Flag is awarded to schools that can prove their efforts at making their schools as inclusive as possible. "The Yellow Flag Programme provides a practical series of 8 steps that brings issues of interculturalism, equality and diversity into the whole-school programme and allows schools to apply them to the day to day running of

the school. It works with students, staff, management, parents and wider community groups so that issues of diversity and equality are not merely seen as "school subjects" but can be understood and taken outside the school setting into everyone's personal lives." (*"About Yellow Flag"*. *Yellowflag.ie*. N.p., 2017. Web) Pioneered by the travellers movement, the yellow flag programme was developed in response to the challenges faced by schools as the rise of immigration changes the profile of Irish citizens. Despite a commitment at policy levels to these challenges in schools, practical progress in the area integration and multi-cultural education has been slow. This programme offers a practical guide to schools facing this new reality, to work towards setting up inclusive educational environments for the future.

In conclusion, Ireland's transformation from a traditional homogeneous society to a nation of new immigrants means that the Irish education system faces many challenges but also has the opportunity to embrace this new reality and develop a progressive educational experience that provides an inclusive space for all. With levels of immigration set to rise, Irish education authorities need to plan and invest in solutions to integrate the New Irish. [1Extra support is needed in schools nationwide to deal with the linguistic challenged posed by the new settlers. The Irish teacher training ethos needs to be reviewed, in order to successfully equip new teachers with the skills necessary to embrace our new arrivals. The education system also needs to actively engage in diversifying the profile of qualifying teachers in order to reflect the diverse student population. As our Irish identity shifts and changes, xenophobia continues to be a deep rooted and complex problem for our nation. For our education system it is one of the most difficult challenges to face, it will require an active involvement by authorities to combat the issue. Reviewing the curriculum from primary stages is a key place to start. By introducing an education on Religions, Beliefs and Ethics (ERB), young people can learn how to understand and respect others in their community. Taking advantage of its close relationship with the GAA and other sporting organisations, the education system has the opportunity to create some genuine and long lasting integration strategies. As well as supporting multicultural & integration initiatives such as the Polska Eire festival and the Yellow flag programme in schools. Young people need role models to follow by example; the Irish education system has the responsibility to

ensure its young citizens of the future are going to build an Irish society built the basis of peace, understanding and respect for all of those who live here.