

# Intercultural education:

every teacher has a role

*Many of the more interesting intercultural moments are those that are unplanned – moments arising from incidents in the school or issues raised by children themselves.*

(Teacher involved in 'Celebrating Difference: Promoting Equality' project)

**Intercultural education is part of what every teacher does in schools throughout the country. It is about more than the curriculum and what we teach. Intercultural education should inform how we plan teaching and learning and how the classroom operates as a supportive learning environment.**

At its core, it has two focal points:

- It is education which respects, celebrates and recognises the normality of diversity in all parts of human life.
- It is education which promotes equality and human rights, challenges unfair discrimination and promotes the values upon which equality is built.

The NCCA recently developed guidelines for schools, *Intercultural Education in the Primary School* and *Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School* to support teachers and school managers in creating intercultural schools and classrooms.

The guidelines include detailed information about intercultural education and some practical ideas about

- school planning
- classroom planning
- curriculum audits for each subject including exemplar lessons
- approaches and methodologies
- assessment and cultural diversity
- language and interculturalism.

The guidelines emphasise the importance of creating a supportive environment as the key to the successful integration of new comers to our schools.

## How can I creating a supportive intercultural environment?

Intercultural education is not confined to a single curriculum area. It is embedded in the practices, 'how we do things around here', and dispositions that inform both the classroom climate and the 'hidden curriculum'. Every teacher has a part to play in creating an 'inclusive school'.

“ Because people generally 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. ”

In planning the physical and social environment of your classroom, you could use the **Classroom Review Checklist** on **Page 37** of the post-primary guidelines:

	YES	TO SOME EXTENT	NOT YET
<b>Physical environment</b>	✓	✓	✓
Do the pictures, images and displays in the classroom and school physical environment reflect in a current and accurate way the diverse cultural and ethnic groups of Ireland and of the school?			
<b>Social environment</b>	✓	✓	✓
Are routines in place for welcoming new students, for assisting them in becoming part of the class, for ensuring that their culture is affirmed in the environment and for ensuring that their capabilities and needs are recognised?			
Are classroom routines made explicit to all students?			
Can students and teachers pronounce each other's names properly?			
Do students engage in co-operative learning activities which enable them to recognise and benefit from each others strengths?			
Do students share responsibility for classroom organisation and for ensuring that all feel welcome and included?			
Are members of minority ethnic groups affirmed in a positive sense of their identity?			
Have strategies for dealing with discriminatory behaviour been considered and put in place?			
Has consideration been given to ensuring appropriate language and interactions between teachers and pupils?			
Is a supportive environment created for second language learners?			
<b>Choosing resources</b>	✓	✓	✓
Is there a method for vetting the appropriateness of images and messages contained in school texts and others resources?			

Classroom Review Checklist

Positive answers indicate a more intercultural classroom context. Negative answers identify areas which can be improved. For example, in planning a supportive physical environment, teachers might consider

- representing diversity as a normal part of Irish life and human existence.
- ensuring that representations of minority groups do not focus on 'spectacular' or 'colourful' events.
- ensuring that all students irrespective of their colour, religion, ethnic group, or ability can feel at home and represented within the classroom.

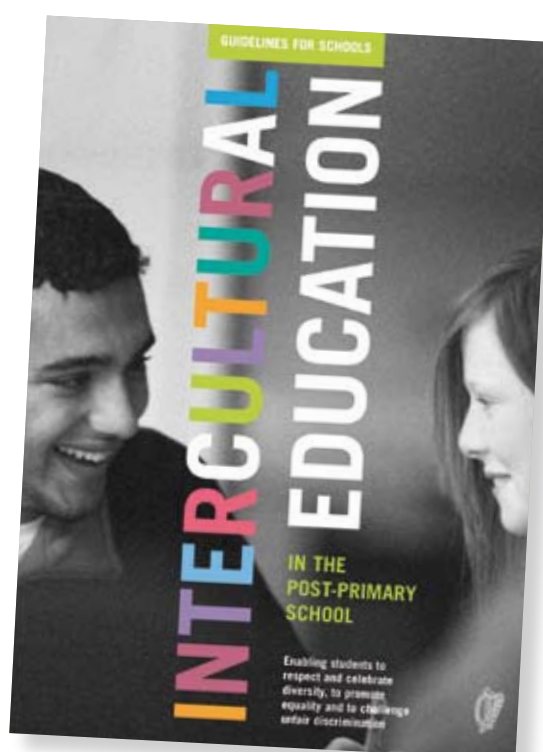
## Creating a supportive social environment in the classroom

### What can I do when things go wrong?

*Many of the more interesting intercultural moments are those that are unplanned – moments arising from incidents in the school or issues raised by children themselves. These incidents offer a great chance for dialogue and often provide some of the best opportunities for intercultural education*

**(Teacher involved in 'Celebrating Difference: Promoting Equality' project)**

Relationships and interactions within the classroom are framed by a set of agreed rules of classroom behaviour. While these are based on mutual respect, students sometimes respond to diversity with discomfort and may identify diversity as abnormal. Such responses might include laughing, name-calling, shunning or aggression. Such responses, while inappropriate, do offer the teacher an opportunity for engaging in intercultural education.





The guidelines suggest a number of steps that the teachers can take:

- Intervene immediately, rather than ignoring it or waiting to see if the behaviour will change on its own.
- Challenge the ideas – not the person.
- Gently make clear that certain behaviour or responses are inappropriate by making reference to agreed rules of classroom doing so in a way which does not leave the students who have engaged in discrimination likely to withdraw from conversing with the teacher.
- Support the student who was the target of discriminating behaviour.
- Enable students who engage in discriminating behaviour to relate to how they would feel if they were discriminated against in a similar way.
- Help students identify why they were uncomfortable with difference. For example, identify if there is a misconception or a prejudiced belief which underlies their actions and address these causes immediately, and if, appropriately, in ongoing work.

**(Intercultural Education in Post-Primary Schools: page 41)**

“**Relationships and interactions within the classroom are framed by a set of agreed rules of classroom behaviour.**”

As teachers, it is important that we continue to reflect on our own interactions with students and how we may be providing inappropriate cues. For example, can we pronounce unfamiliar names or identify appropriate language for referring to ethnic groups? By reflecting on our own use of language, we can prevent inappropriate messages being inadvertently transmitted.

## How can I support students' language development?

Language is a key part of a student's identity as well as playing a central part in their learning. The right to one's own personal language is important in enabling students to develop a strong positive self-image. Because people generally 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. It is also important to create an environment that supports the learning of a second language. The guidelines suggest that it is important to recognise and affirm the student's first language. This can be achieved by

- the teacher and students learning key words and phrases (greetings, simple instructions, etc.) in the students' first language.
- communicating positive attitudes towards linguistic diversity and multi-lingual students' skills, recognising the capacities of second language learners rather than identifying them primarily as people with 'language needs' e.g. Maria speaks fluent Spanish and she is improving her English everyday.
- providing multilingual resources where possible.
- providing a range of cues and supports in order to enable students to understand the language that is being used – gestures, other non-verbal means of communication and pictures can be useful supports to a second language learner in understanding what is being said.
- suggesting ways in which students can help and support their classmates, such as repeating and re-phrasing statements.
- modelling and/or role-playing strategies for asking clarification and for confirming that the students understands what is being done.

The classroom community can become a resource for learners of a second language. It is, after all, important that students feel that they can speak and make mistakes without fear or ridicule.

Further information on

- whole school approach to intercultural education
- resources
- welcoming new students
- supporting second language learning
- including intercultural education in your classroom planning and teaching
- working with exemplar materials

is available in *Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School: Guidelines for schools*. A copy of the guidelines, along with the accompanying CD, has recently been delivered to every teacher in your school and is also available to download from our website, at [www.ncca.ie/publications](http://www.ncca.ie/publications).

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