

# **Irish Schools as Communities of Practice for Citizenship Education: The Experiences of One Particular Primary School.**

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## **Declaration**

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of the degree of Doctor of Education, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative research study focuses on the development of citizenship education in one particular primary school by exploring the views and experiences of the whole school community – pupils, teachers and parents on citizenship and education. The first part of this study explores the various philosophical theories which lie behind citizenship as a concept and, later, examines the interconnectedness of citizenship, democracy and education from a theoretical perspective. The second part of this thesis is a case study analysis of the understandings, perceptions and experiences of one particular primary school community of the development of citizenship education. The findings of the participatory sessions carried out with the children and the one-to-one interviews conducted with the teachers and parents on issues related to the development of citizenship education are analysed in the context of the literature reviewed. The outcomes of the study are presented and some recommendations for the successful development of citizenship education in terms of practice, policy and research are proposed.

# Introduction

1

## **Introduction**

It is widely accepted that a basic task of schooling is to prepare each new generation for their responsibilities as citizens.

(Kymlicka, 2001b, p. 293)

### *Context of the Study*

Social, economic and demographic changes in Ireland have propelled citizenship to the top of the political agenda in recent years. Several factors including globalisation, the influx of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds into Ireland, a weakening in our sense of national identity, the decline of the Catholic Church, the substantial increase in crime rates and drug related offences that Irish society has experienced of late and the erosion of civic participation have forced us to re-examine the concept of citizenship. Many aspects of the idea of citizenship, including strong community involvement, neighbourliness, social networking and volunteering appear to be in serious decline and are of particular concern in many countries, including Ireland, at present. The establishment of a Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2006) highlighted the government's concern about low levels of political and community involvement, evidenced in the particularly low voter turnout in recent elections and the disinclination of many citizens to actively participate in their communities. One of the Taskforce's main recommendations to the government is "the expansion of education for citizenship in the school system" (Government of Ireland, 2007a, p.21). Essentially, for citizenship education, the time has come.

Citizenship education is part of the Primary School Curriculum (1999). The main rationale for citizenship education stems from the fact that Ireland, as a democracy,

needs active, informed and responsible citizens. Given that children spend so much of their time in school, it may be argued that the school has a powerful role to play in developing the skills and values of active citizenship. It is assumed by the government that teachers all over Ireland are working assiduously to ensure that children think of themselves as active citizens by presenting pupils with a participatory and inclusive curriculum which emphasises active learning and provides pupils with opportunities to engage and practice democratic activities. However, implementing a citizenship education curriculum and developing democratic practice is complex and challenging. Although citizenship education has been part of the Primary School Curriculum (1999) for almost a decade, the fact is we know very little about the development of citizenship education in schools. My interest in citizenship education stems, not only from my observations of and unease about the large numbers of community-based associations in decline in Ireland, but also from the challenges I face as a primary school teacher trying to teach citizenship and promote democracy. Together with the basic knowledge of why citizenship education is important and how this is supposed to be addressed in schools, comes the need to understand how children experience citizenship education, how teachers interpret the curriculum and how parents envisage citizenship education is taught both at home and at school. This thesis intends to explore the experiences of one particular primary school community in relation to citizenship education. In the remainder of this Introduction, I will discuss the purpose of the study. I will also briefly outline the sequence and content of each chapter in this thesis.

### *Purpose of the study*

The purpose of this study is to investigate the development of citizenship education in one mixed gender, medium-sized, rural Irish primary school. In particular, this study

endeavours to understand how a particular group of children experience citizenship and democracy at home and at school, appreciate the barriers which impede their parents from taking a more active role in their community and identify the challenges which their teachers face in effectively developing citizenship education in the school and in the community. At the outset of the study, I was primarily concerned with the children's experience of citizenship and democracy in school and my questions involved such basic issues as: What are the children's perspectives on their status as citizens? To what extent do they feel they are consulted on matters and decisions which affect them at home and at school? Do they feel that their classroom is organised and managed democratically? The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) provides a framework for a broader perspective of children's citizenship by stating that children ought to be given the right to be heard and to take responsibility for making decisions in accordance with their age and maturity. The increased emphasis on citizenship education in schools is strongly linked to the idea of children's voice and agency. If children and young people are to be encouraged to actively participate in their communities, then they need to be offered opportunities to voice opinions and become involved as active citizens. Thus, I was resolute that this study would engage in research *with* rather than *on* children. I was determined that the children, as citizens, would feel that they really had a voice, would be listened to and be actively involved in the research process.

Teachers and parents are, of course, also members of this school community and so their views and experiences are valuable in gaining insight into what might be happening both at home and at school in terms of citizenship education. I had a number of key questions I wished to pose to the teachers and parents in order to establish the extent to which there is a shared understanding of active citizenship among the teaching profession and some



of the parents of the children attending this school: What do teachers and parents understand by the term 'citizenship'? How do they conceive that 'citizenship education' is carried out in school? With whom do parents feel responsibility for citizenship education lies? Where do teachers feel it is best located within the school curriculum? Do teachers feel they are adequately prepared and that schools are properly resourced to teach citizenship education effectively? Are the parents confident that citizenship education is being taught successfully in this school? These questions need to be addressed if citizenship education is to be developed effectively in schools and in the community.

### *Outline of the Study*

The thesis consists of two main parts. Part I provides an extensive theoretical context that informs the interpretative work carried out in Part II. Part I explores a wide range of significant and influential writing pertaining to citizenship, childhood and education. Part II is a case study analysis of the understandings, perceptions and experiences of one particular primary school community of the development of citizenship education. The thesis consists of five chapters which are preceded by this introduction and are followed by some of the conclusions which may be drawn from the study.

Part I examines the theoretical background to the study and consists of two chapters. Chapter one examines the theory behind the concept of citizenship. In order to understand the contemporary significance of the idea of citizenship, it is considered necessary to begin by tracing the historical trajectory of citizenship and to later examine some of the philosophical perspectives which underpin our understandings of citizenship. The implication of the differing interpretations of rights and obligations for the liberal

and civic republican traditions of citizenship will be considered. Issues such as civil liberties and human rights, the practice of democracy and inequalities in terms of social class, gender and ethnicity arise in the course of the conversations which take place as part of this case study. Thus, in examining issues in citizenship education, I am inexorably drawn into some of the main perspectives and concepts within philosophy which are closely linked with citizenship, including liberalism, nationalism, egalitarianism, Marxism, feminism and democracy which are subsequently presented in Chapter one. However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to critically engage in a more detailed way with the material presented. Rather, it is my intention to simply build a theoretical context for the type of inquiry into citizenship education that follows in Part II.

Chapter two offers an account of some of the issues around citizenship education. The evolution of childhood internationally is discussed in order to understand how the idea of children's citizenship is related to our changing conceptions of children in medieval, modern and post-modern times. The current status and rights of children as citizens and members of the community are considered in terms of their practice of active citizenship. Thereafter, the issue of existing inequalities in education is briefly explored in terms of the legislation around equality of opportunity and the social class, culture and gender inequalities which lie within the educational system. The extent to which democratic practices are at the heart of citizenship education is examined by considering the suitability of the school, as a specific institution, as a site for citizenship education. Firstly, in terms of the intricate power relations operating within the school and later, in relation to the extent to which the school ethos and organisation, classroom practice and interactions with others shape children's experience of democracy and conception of

citizenship. A theoretical exploration of international perspectives on citizenship education follows in order to appreciate the reasoning behind citizenship education. An Irish perspective on citizenship education is also presented in terms of the knowledge, understanding and skills which the Primary School Curriculum (1999) seeks to develop and the notion of school ethos which undoubtedly influences the development of citizenship education.

Chapter three explores the key methodological issues involved in the qualitative analysis of data in Part II of this study. It begins with a short justification for choosing qualitative research methods for this inquiry which entails the interpretation of thoughts and feelings expressed by human participants. A brief description of the research context, the school under scrutiny in this study and the surrounding community, is then offered. Next, a rationale for engaging each group of participants, children, teachers and parents, is given. The various methods used to elicit the information from each group are then outlined. Age is a significant factor for children's citizenship and all children, regardless of age, can, in my opinion, participate as citizens. Thus, a total of twenty-four children from Senior Infants, Second Class, Fourth Class and Sixth Class participated in focus group sessions in order to elicit their views on citizenship and themselves as citizens within the school community. A multi-method approach to the study was adopted whereby various participatory techniques including photography, mapping, story-telling, decision-making charts and a diamond-ranking exercise were used to directly engage the children in research conversations. I was keen to engage the children as active participants in the research in accordance with the principles of citizenship and I endeavoured to encourage the children to talk freely, listen to each other and enable each other to speak about issues important to them as they arise. Of course, I had a specific focus of interest and a number of shaping questions and so it was necessary to construct the format of the

participatory sessions so that I could easily broach certain topics. Nonetheless, I was focused on ensuring that the children were enabled to speak individually of their interests and concerns. In an attempt to redress the power imbalance between the child participants and the adult researcher, the plan for the research study specifically sought to ensure that the need for spontaneity, fun and greater child participation was met. Furthermore, in order to offer the children greater autonomy, it was decided that the children would participate on their own terms and that the group would remain open and flexible to the possibility of making changes to the research plan if the children felt the need to do so during the course of the study. Some aspects of the thinking skills strategy known as the 'community of enquiry' approach, whereby a group of children engage in talk and discussion about philosophical or moral issues, were adopted in this study. For example, stimuli were shared with the groups, discussions transpired in which the children communicated with each other under conditions of equality and reciprocity and the researcher acted as facilitator by encouraging the children to think, question and talk. It was considered central to the researcher's concept of children's citizenship to undertake a study which takes children seriously.

One-to-one interviews were conducted with all nine of the teachers, including the principal, and seven parents over a number of weeks. A number of parents of children at different stages in their school life were approached and invited to participate in this study. Seven parents agreed to do so. Interview schedules were distributed to all, in advance of the interviews. The schedule pertaining to teachers was divided into three parts. The first part included some general questions in relation to citizenship and education for citizenship. The second part of the schedule raised issues including the importance of and main challenges to citizenship education, the feasibility of

successfully implementing the 'developing citizenship' strand of the Primary School Curriculum (1999) in terms of training, professional development and resources, leadership and policy, partnership and the significance of school ethos in developing citizenship education. The third and final part of this schedule looked at active citizenship in the classroom in terms of democratic practice, consultation with children and children's decision-making. The interview schedule designed for the parents participating in this study was also organised into three sections. Initially, some general questions on citizenship and education were asked. Thereafter, enquiries were made about the development of citizenship at home. Finally, a number of questions which would extract their thoughts on and obtain their perceptions of citizenship education at school were included. In bringing chapter three to a close, the role of the researcher in collecting the data is outlined. Finally, ethical issues around conducting research with human participants and engaging in school-based research are highlighted.

Chapter four presents the findings of the participatory sessions carried out with the children and discusses these in the context of the existing research and debates in contemporary philosophy and education, considered previously in Part I. The key themes discussed in the sessions with the children in relation to citizenship and education included a sense of identity, rights and responsibilities, participation and decision-making, autonomy and democracy and the power relations existing within the school. From the outset, the children's understanding of citizenship became clear as they enunciated their views on themselves and others as citizens of Irish society. Interestingly, it emerged that the children participating in this study found it much more difficult to articulate their rights as citizens than they did their responsibilities. Moreover, the discussion on children's rights revealed that the children are of the

opinion that while some of their rights are upheld, others are clearly contravened. The children maintained that they are offered some opportunities both in school and at home to practice democracy and, whilst they comment favourably on these, they draw our attention to the definite power relations that exist at school and the extent to which these impede or facilitate efforts to educate children for active citizenship in democratic society.

Chapter five develops the analysis of citizenship education in this primary school by focusing on the perspectives of teachers and parents on citizenship and education and analysing these in the context of the literature reviewed in Part I. To begin with, it presents and analyses the views of teachers on citizenship education. Initially, their understandings of the concept of citizenship are explored. Thereafter, their opinions on curriculum planning and resourcing, leadership and management, school ethos and environment, partnership with parents and community relations and the status of children are presented. The teachers interviewed repeatedly cited the challenges to planning, implementing and promoting the citizenship education programme. Clearly, these must be acknowledged and addressed if citizenship education is to advance. Later, in chapter five, the views of the parents in relation to citizenship education are examined in terms of their understanding of citizenship, their practice of citizenship at home and their perceptions of the teaching of citizenship at school. Interestingly, the conversations with parents revealed that those who are actively involved in clubs and/or organisations are motivated to do so by factors other than a deep-rooted sense of citizenship. The parents interviewed mentioned a number of obstacles which hinder them in making a more active contribution to the local community and they asserted that our government needs to provide volunteering opportunities that are compatible with the modern way of life.

The last part of Chapter five considers the extent to which there is consensus of opinion between teachers and parents on the development of citizenship education.

To conclude, I look at the significant findings that have emerged in the analysis of Part II and make a number of recommendations for citizenship education in this school, which may possibly be extended to other similar primary schools. It is almost a decade since the Primary School Curriculum (1999) was launched. Yet, the development of citizenship education in Irish primary schools remains under-researched and so, there is, undoubtedly, a need and plenty of scope for research into the development of citizenship education in Ireland. This study cannot profess to reach absolute conclusions about the development of citizenship education in this school as the views, understandings and experiences of the participants may not accurately depict reality. Rather, it sets out to record and transcribe the views of pupils, parents and teachers in one particular primary school and analyse this data in order to make inferences and draw conclusions about the development of citizenship education. Although this study focuses specifically on one particular school, the analysis of the situation provides valuable insight into the dynamics of citizenship education as a challenging process. Furthermore, it may bring to light the challenges faced by teachers in other schools striving to plan, implement and promote citizenship education. As a classroom practitioner, it is anticipated that this research study will promote inquiry, stimulate professional discourse and possibly initiate change in practice. This study is considered timely given the current wave of interest in citizenship and the key roles that schools and communities have to play in developing citizenship education and promoting active citizenship.

## **Chapter 1: Citizenship - A Philosophical Perspective**

### *1.1 Introduction*

This long tradition of citizenship is a bridge between antiquity and the modern era, linking the civic and political self-conception of the Greek *polis* and the Roman Empire with the French Revolution and Enlightenment emphasis on the equal moral worth of all individuals.

(Shafir, 1998 p.2)

For almost twenty years “citizenship has become the ‘buzz word’ among thinkers on all points of the political spectrum” (Kymlicka and Norman, 1994, p. 283), hence, the idea of citizenship has featured extensively in recent philosophical work. This chapter examines the philosophical theory behind the concept of citizenship. It begins by tracing the trajectory of citizenship from its earliest origins in the democratic Greek city-states and the republican Roman Empire. The classical or civic republican approach, advocated by Aristotle (382 BC - 322 BC), considers that political participation is central to the notion of citizenship and emphasises the obligations on citizens to actively participate in their political community. The liberal tradition, which originated during the time of the Roman Empire, regards citizenship primarily as a legal status and defines citizenship in terms of the civil, political and social rights of individuals. These two differing approaches to citizenship are outlined at the beginning of this chapter in some detail. In Ireland, the notion of citizenship is strongly connected to the concept of democracy and the nation-state. Thus, aspects of democracy that are relevant to the theory of citizenship are explored. Alternative conceptions of citizenship are thereafter considered. Initially, the philosophy of egalitarianism which, in contrast to the individualism underpinning liberalism, considers that all people should be treated as equals, is outlined. Marxist theories on citizenship within a framework of equality are



briefly considered. Some of the issues and concepts of citizenship from a feminist perspective, which criticise the liberal and civic republican models of citizenship for making a division between the public and the private sphere in relation to what constitutes political involvement and thereby excluding women working in the home (Lister, 2003), are offered. Theories of multiculturalism are closely linked with our understanding of citizenship, particularly in relation to our sense of identity as citizens living in a diverse society. Hence, literature which argues for and against the liberal ideal of treating all people the same regardless of their ethnicity or culture is examined. A section on nationalism follows as this will provide a historical context for citizenship education in Ireland which will be explored in Chapter two.

### 1.2 *Classical Background to the Theory and Practice of Citizenship*

The political tradition of citizenship originated in the Greek city-states and the Roman republic. The citizen, the Greek *polites* or Latin *civis*, was a member of the Greek *polis* or Roman *res publica* (Pocock, 1998). In the context of the Greek city-state, citizenship meant self-rule and freedom, underpinning Aristotle's characterization of the democratic citizen as one capable of ruling and being ruled, of making decisions and obeying decisions (Lockyer, Crick and Annette, 2003).

The citizen should be moulded to suit the form of government under which he lives. For each government has a peculiar character which originally formed and which continues to preserve it. (p.89)

The Greek city-states were governed by its citizens. A form of democracy was practised whereby those who had the rights of citizens were involved in determining laws and actively participating in the processes of deliberation and decision-making. As Philp (1999) points out it, is easy to see the attraction of citizenship in classical times from “the

vision of a virtuous, active citizenry, engaged in deliberation on the proper ends of their association and taking turns at ruling and being ruled – especially coupled with the assumption that civic virtue provides the natural completion of the broader moral values” (p.20). However, for Aristotle (382 BC – 322 BC), certain categories of people were excluded from citizenship altogether, only those who were male, head of a household and free to engage in politics qualified as citizens (Pocock, 1998). In claiming that only certain categories of people have the authority to rule, this model of citizenship excluded women, slaves, those without property and newcomers to Greece. Furthermore, in order to be fully considered a citizen, the man ought to rule others in the household and rule himself in the city (Pocock, 1998). In rigorously separating the public life from the private life, this civic republican model of citizenship emphasised the key role of the citizen in actively participating in society’s political institutions and is strongly linked to the concept of democracy.

The expansion of the Roman Empire profoundly altered the meaning of citizenship for the Roman citizen. Moving from the political status of the citizen in the small Greek city-state to the legal status that provided protection for citizens in the massive Roman Empire, the Roman citizen existed in a world of persons, actions and things regulated by law (Pocock, 1998). As individuals took and retained materialistic possessions, regulation was required as people interacted and entered into dealings with one another. Hence, the Roman conception of citizenship came to be regarded as a status guaranteed by equal law rather than as equal rights of political participation (Honohan, 2002). Walzer (1989) points out, for the Roman citizen, citizenship became an “important but occasional identity, a legal status rather than a fact of everyday life” (p.215) as the law existed to guarantee the freedom, rights and security of the majority of its citizens. Thus,

while citizenship in the Greek *polis* involved active citizens exercising their political power, Roman citizenship centred, not on active participation, but on the passive citizen with rights and responsibilities. In comparison to ancient Greece, the Roman conception of citizenship became increasingly more inclusive as citizenship expanded beyond the city-state and citizenship rights were extended to conquered people as the Roman Empire grew and developed. Roman citizenship, as Castles and Davidson (2000) point out, “may thus be seen as a step forward in terms of inclusiveness, but a step backwards in terms of democracy” (p.33). In considering what democracy means today, a critique of the concept of democracy will be offered in the next section.

### 1.3 Democracy

A democracy is more than a form of government: it is primarily a mode of associated living, a conjoined communicated experience.

(Dewey, 1916/1944, p.87)

The concept of citizenship underpins that of democracy (Benn, 2000). Yet, democracy itself is a highly contested term and differing understandings of democracy have implications for educational practice. The definition of democracy, from the Greek *demos* meaning “people” and *kratos* meaning, “rule”, is simply the rule of the people (McPhee, 2008). The ancient Greek *polis* was comprised of hundreds of city-states. Each city-state was a small, autonomous community and, in the true spirit of democracy, it was the people who ruled. However, the nature of citizenship changed dramatically “as the conception of freedom was altered in the transition from the small Greek self-governing city-state to the massive Roman Empire” (Shafir, 1998, p.4). The notion of all citizens participating in the political decision-making process was no longer viable and

so the concept of citizenship became a legal status granting protection to individuals from the emperor and his representatives (Shafir, 1998).

In his examination of citizenship in ancient and medieval cities, Weber (1998) examines the guild policy and notes that “in the Middle Ages citizen was an (economic) class concept, membership in specific class groups made the person a citizen” (p.44). According to Nisbet (1973) -

Medieval society was a vast web of groups, communities, and associations, each claiming jurisdiction over the functions and activities of its members. The church was powerful; but, so, after the twelfth century, were guild, profession, monastery, and manor. (p.36)

In other words, only those who contributed economically to the town - skilled tradesmen and merchants, were considered citizens. Thus, membership of the guild was a prerequisite to citizenship. The rights of other people in the Middle Ages depended on landholding and the individual's life was shaped by an unusual system of rules and practices known as feudalism (Hattersley, 2007). Citizenship became a political, legal and ritual concept in the Middle Ages.

Then, out of the Dark Ages came the Enlightenment. Those with money began to partake in governmental affairs and citizenship was revived by the Italian city-states in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance period. The Enlightenment, the French Revolution of 1789 and the American War of Independence significantly developed the idea of democracy and spread it throughout the world in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. John Locke's *Two Treaties of Government* (1690) and Rousseau's *The Social Contract* (1762) put forward the notion of governmental responsibility in terms of protecting people's

rights and promoting the input of the people in the running of the government. In his *The Social Contract*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762) presented his thoughts on the role of the citizen in the ideal republic. According to Rousseau (1762), individuals should, first and foremost, see themselves as citizens of the state and accept that decisions are to be made on the basis that they benefit the collective good. He envisaged that the liberty of all citizens would be guaranteed by allowing them to assume a role in law making. However, all laws would be based on the common good. All citizens in Rousseau's democracy were bound to obey the laws and to act virtuously in accordance with the law. Rousseau's view of citizenship is reasonable in terms of the obligations citizens ought to fulfil. However, in failing to consider that those in positions to make the decisions for the common good may be motivated to act in self-interest, his views on the government and the citizen may be considered unrealistic. Nevertheless, both Locke and Rousseau may be credited for their role in heralding the beginnings of modern democracy.

The democratic system that developed after the French and American Revolutions of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century gave power to the people and permitted them to have some say in the government's ruling of the country in the form of elections. Brubaker (1992) contends that the notion of state-centred modern national citizenship was as a direct result of the French Revolution.

The formal delimitation of the citizenry; the establishment of civil equality, entailing shared rights and shared obligations; the institutionalisation of political rights; the legal rationalisation and ideological accentuation of the distinction between citizens and foreigners; the articulation of the doctrine of national sovereignty and of the link between citizenship and nationhood; the substitution of

immediate, direct relations between the citizen and the state for the mediated, indirect relations characteristic of the ancient regime – the revolution brought all these developments together on a national level for the first time. (p.35)

Henceforth, citizenship was perceived in terms of rights – civil, political and social (Marshall, 1950) and duties (Aristotle, 350B.C./1946).

It is in the last fifty years that the idea of democracy, as we know and understand it, has emerged. Democratic citizenship entails common membership of a political community, wherein equality, freedom and a shared identity underpin discourses about citizenship. A deliberative, rather than an individualist, conception of democracy creates possibilities of a more active and inclusive citizenship within a variety of contexts. Enslin and White (2003) make the distinction between passive and active citizenship. They differentiate between citizens as “passive recipients of rights” and citizens “who are alert to the responsibilities sometimes required by those rights” (p.121). Commenting on contemporary democratic societies, Coote and Lenaghan (1997) note “the distances between the electorate and their electoral representatives can be very great. The distance is perceived both horizontally (the geographical distance between localities and increasingly centralised government) and vertically (multiple layers of decision-making, reinforced by a culture of secrecy, through which information and consent must be filtered)” (p.1). Of course, democracy is not simply the election of a representative government or the formation of an institution. It also influences how citizens think and act in society and has implications for how we define citizenship. The complexity and fragility of democracy cannot be underestimated. The ideal of democracy is linked to the

civic republican tradition of citizenship wherein all citizens participated in political decision-making. There is, however, another political tradition of citizenship which originated in Rome and considers that the best form of government is, in fact, one which seeks to safeguard the rights of individuals within the law. This is the 'liberal tradition' and, as a model of citizenship, will be explored in the next section.

#### 1.4 *Liberalism*

The word 'liberal', derived from the Latin *liber*, means free and, broadly speaking, liberalism emphasises the protection and promotion of the individual's rights within a legal framework. The liberal tradition of citizenship draws on ideas in Roman law which developed from the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. during the time of the Roman Empire. Within the modern tradition of liberalism, which developed from the seventeenth century onwards, citizenship is defined primarily as a set of rights for all citizens. T.H. Marshall (1950) defines citizenship in terms of three different types of rights – civil rights, political rights and socio-economic rights which he maintains developed during the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries respectively.

Liberal thinking, for much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, was concerned with ensuring the rights of individuals were met (Mill, 1859/1991; Rawls, 1971). John Stuart Mill's comprehensive theory in *On Liberty* (1859/1991) is founded on the natural goodness of humans and the autonomy of the individual.

Individuality is the same thing with development, and...it is only the cultivation of individuality which produces, or can produce, well-developed human beings...what more can be said of any condition of human affairs, than that it brings human beings themselves nearer to the

best thing they can be? Or what worse can be said of any obstruction to good, than that it prevents this? (p.71)

Mill makes the point that this theory about goodness and the promotion of development can only be accomplished when the absolute freedom of each individual is secured and guaranteed. His comprehensive theory of liberalism favours individuality and choice over community and society and Mill conceives that acquiring liberal autonomy is the best route to individual happiness and the moral life.

Rawls's theory of justice (1971) is centred on the liberal ideals of freedom, equality and fairness.

Justice as fairness is intended as a political conception of justice. While a political conception of justice is, of course, a moral conception, it is a moral conception worked out for a specific kind of subject, namely, for political, social, and economic institutions.

(Rawls, 1998, p.53)

Rawls (1971) equates justice with fairness and proposes that when cooperation between individuals is mutually fair then justice has been achieved. People, according to Rawls, have both a conception of goodness and a capacity for a sense of justice. He contends that his is a *political* conception of justice, which differs from the *comprehensive* approach concerned with providing a moral conception of the good life. For Rawls (1971), citizenship education ought to be based, not on comprehensive moral, religious or philosophical commitments but on minimum civic associations, for example, social co-operation in human relationships (Howe and Covell, 2005). Ultimately,

The defining feature of liberalism is that it ascribes certain fundamental freedoms to each individual. In particular, it grants people very wide



freedom of choice in terms of how they lead their lives. It allows people to choose a conception of the good life, and then allows them to reconsider that decision, and adopt a new and hopefully better plan of life.

(Kymlicka, 1995, p. 80)

Within the liberal tradition, it is presumed that all citizens have equal status, equal rights and responsibilities and so problems of inequalities linked with class, gender and ethnicity are not considered relevant to the status of citizenship as such (Roche, 1987). However, as a theory of citizenship, this tradition might be said to underestimate the power relations associated with social class, gender and ethnicity which undermine attempts to realise the liberal ideal of citizenship. The next section looks at the extent to which the liberal notions of citizenship are characterised by tensions between egalitarianism and inequality.

### *1.5 Egalitarianism*

Citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respects to the rights and duties with which the state is endowed.

(T.H. Marshall, 1950, p.28-29)

There are, according to Marshall (1950), three dimensions to the equality implicit in citizenship - political equality, civic equality and social equality. The political and civic rights, to which citizens are entitled, are inextricably bound up with our understanding of citizenship as a legal status, while the social rights of individuals suggest a broader conception of citizenship characterised by values such as mutual respect, personal

responsibility and equal dignity. The social rights of citizens, it may be suggested, have lower status than political rights or civic liberties.

Social inequality is as old as human history, as universal as human societies. Everywhere and in every epoch there has existed some form of stratification with those at the top holding more privilege, power, and enjoying greater rewards than those at the bottom. Inequality, not equality, has been the predominant social rule by which most men at most times have lived.

(Reissman, 1973, p. 9)

Those who espouse the moral doctrine that equality ought to exist for all in society believe that, at a very basic level, all human beings have equal worth and importance, and, therefore, are equally worthy of concern and respect. Liberal egalitarians move well beyond the notion of basic equality by adopting a perspective which combines fundamental respect for the autonomy of individuals with a commitment to social and economic equality, thus defining equality in terms of individuals rather than groups. Multiculturalists reject liberal egalitarian views of citizenship, on the grounds that a commitment to liberty, individualism, universality of human rights and equal distribution of goods, fails to recognise the nationality, language, religion, culture and identity of citizens (Parekh, 2000b). While there is no doubt that “pre-eminence in egalitarian theory is one that gives primacy to the concept of having, either having or availing of material goods and services, or having opportunities to access, participate or succeed in particular spheres” (Lynch, 2001, p. 246), egalitarian theorists such as Baker (1987), Fraser (1997), Young (1990) and Phillips (1999) argue that the concept of equality is committed, on its own terms, to the inclusion of cultural, ethnic, and other identity based

claims for group recognition and, thus, that liberal egalitarianism includes a politics of recognition of sorts.

Various groups of people do not necessarily identify with the national political community, have equal voice in public debates or have equal access to rights and, as such, have been discriminated against. Thus, while the concept of citizenship legally confers equal rights on all citizens, certain categories of people have been excluded from full entitlement to citizenship and civic rights. The next part of this chapter focuses on the class, gender and cultural inequalities often embedded in the practice of citizenship.

### 1.6 *Marxism/Neo-Marxism*

Marxism is primarily concerned with the elimination of the inequalities associated with a capitalist market economy. According to Marx (1848), the struggle against capitalist injustices is between two increasingly polarised classes in society (Kymlicka, 2001a) – the dominant capitalist class who owns the means of production and the exploited working class, who have to sell their labour in order to survive. In his essay *On the Jewish Question* (1843), Marx offered a critique of liberal citizenship. Although this essay was primarily concerned with the place of Jews in society, Marx (1843) questioned the extent to which individuals can truly be citizens in liberal-democratic society. He argued that the liberal model of citizenship, which considers all men to be free and equal, fails to recognise that when economic inequalities exist, the likelihood of genuine democracy and strong citizenship weakens considerably. For Marx, modern man was, according to Ignatieff (1995), "...divided between his identity as *bourgeois* and as *citoyen*; the former was his real identity, the latter a false, mythic identity. In the market, he lived as an unequal competitor; in the *polis* he was supposed to be a right-bearing

equal” (p.64). Faulks (2000) points out that “for Marx, citizenship in its liberal form represents a false universalism that masks the real sources of domination” (p.62). Nevertheless, Ignatieff (1995) notes, Marx remained loyal to the Aristotelian image of man as one who, liberated from material necessity and inequality, was free to realise his own disposition in relation to others, in proposing the social organisation of property and equal distribution of income and rejecting the market forces of capitalism which threatens this ancient concept of citizenship.

Traditionally, Marxism has been regarded as incompatible with liberal democracy as many of those in favour of a liberal democracy regard man as an atomised individual who potentially supports capitalism while Marx sees the citizen as a social being with obligations to others in the local community. Marx argues that people consider themselves in control, with the freedom to navigate between the public (citizen) and private (individual man) spheres of their lives, yet this power and freedom is only attributable to people in the formal sense. In the public arena, people are indeed equal before the law; however, in the private sphere real inequality exists. Continuing with this line of argument, Marx claims that democracy, with its liberal rights designed to protect the individual from public interference, has no control over the private sphere – where people subsist for much of their lives. Marx states that -

The state abolishes distinctions of birth, rank, education and occupation in its fashion when it declares them to be *non-political* distinctions, when it proclaims that every member of the community equally participates in popular sovereignty without regard to these distinctions, and when it deals with all elements of the actual life of the nation from the standpoint of the state.

(Marx, 1843 cited in J.M. Barbalet, 1988, p.3)

In short, Marx's critique of liberal-democratic citizenship is that the capitalist society which establishes the formal equality of its members is the very basis on which entrenched social inequality has been built. Issues of equality raise questions about the extent to which full citizenship rights are universally extended to all members of society. The next section explores the extent to which gender inequalities are inherent in notions of citizenship.

### *1.7 Feminism*

Feminist theory (Patemen, 1988, 1989; Young, 1990; Phillips, 1991 and Lister, 1997) sharply criticises women's exclusion from citizenship, in both theory and practice, for much of history. Much of the literature on the gendered nature of citizenship focuses on the division between public and private life and women's exclusion from the public sphere. In ancient Greece, male citizens actively participated in the public sphere while the work of women was relegated to the domestic or private sphere, thus suggesting women were inapt for citizenship. Feminist theory on citizenship is greatly concerned with re-examining liberal models of citizenship (Pateman, 1988) and rejecting the universalistic concept of citizenship (Lister, 2003). Carole Pateman (1989), one of the first theorists to examine the relationship between feminism and citizenship, wrote about "the problem of women's standing in a political order in which citizenship has been made in the male image" (p.14). According to Pateman (1989), this 'patriarchal construction' of citizenship is central to women's exclusion from democratic citizenship. Ruth Lister's (1997) analysis of citizenship as both a status involving rights and a practice entailing responsibilities provides a useful lens through which to consider the relationship between feminist and citizenship theory. Rights are at the heart of the liberal

approach to citizenship, however, women have always struggled to achieve equal rights with men (Lister, 2003). The responsibility to actively participate politically is central to the civic republican tradition of citizenship, yet traditionally, women have undertaken their responsibilities in the form of unpaid work within the home. It is apparent that the two main models of citizenship – the civic republican tradition and the liberal approach, were constructed in the interests of men rather than women. It is hardly surprising then that feminists (Lister, 2003) have called for a more ‘woman-friendly and gender-inclusive’ model of citizenship. Lister (2003) proposes that there are different approaches which might be taken in order to re-gender citizenship - the ‘gender-neutral’ model of citizenship, the ‘gender-differentiated’ model of citizenship and the ‘gender pluralist’ model of citizenship. These first two approaches – the gender-neutral model and the gender-differentiated model of citizenship are deep-rooted in the equality-difference debate. Mary Dietz (1985) and Anne Phillips (1991) support a gender-neutral model of citizenship which considers the gender of the citizen irrelevant in relation to the allocation of rights and exercise of responsibilities and insists that women should be enabled to compete on equal terms with men in the political arena. Those in favour of a gender-differentiated model of citizenship (Pateman, 1992; Young, 1990) argue that gender-neutrality requires women to assimilate into a model of citizenship developed by men in the interests of men (Lister, 2003). A gender-differentiated model of citizenship, it is proposed (Young, 1990, Pateman, 1992), which focuses on difference rather than equality, accommodates the experiences of women and recognises that women, including mothers, have invaluable qualities to bring to the political arena. A gender-pluralist model of citizenship is considered to be a more inclusive model of citizenship as it recognises the multiple identities of citizens and the diverse contexts in which they may claim citizenship. Lister (2003) calls for a ‘women-friendly, gender-inclusive’ model of

citizenship which combines aspects of both gender-neutral and gender-differentiated models of citizenship within a framework of gender-pluralism. According to Susan James (1992),

Despite the giant emancipator/ strides of the past hundred years, women are still denied full citizenship. And despite its egalitarian aspirations, democratic liberal theory still nurtures a conception of politics which implicitly marginalises and disadvantages women. (p.43)

Clearly, if citizenship theory is to be relevant to citizens then the needs of all citizens, including women, must be taken into account by citizenship theorists (Voet, 1998). The feminist literature also raises questions about how theories of citizenship can recognise and transcend differences in a social and cultural diverse society and how we are to understand the relationship between citizenship and nationality, under conditions of pluralism. The next section considers a multicultural model of citizenship which seeks to eradicate the cultural inequalities entrenched in traditional notions of citizenship.

### *1.8 Multiculturalism*

Multiculturalism is best seen neither as a political doctrine with a programmatic content nor a philosophical school with a distinct theory of man and the world but as a perspective on human life.

(Parekh, 2000b, p.336)

Multiculturalism, also referred to as the 'politics of difference', 'identity politics' and 'the politics of recognition', seeks to challenge the traditional model of citizenship-as-rights and demands that a more inclusive view of citizenship is adopted in our culturally plural and diverse society. T.H. Marshall (1965) envisaged that a conception of

citizenship which included social rights would integrate previously excluded groups within British society and promote a common national identity and culture among citizens. This liberal, formal conception of the citizen, as one who has an entitlement to universal individual human rights and equal to all others, has been rejected by some on the grounds that it marginalises certain social and cultural groups.

In a society where some groups are privileged whilst others are oppressed, insisting that as citizens persons should leave behind their particular affiliations and experiences to adopt a general point of view serves only to reinforce the privilege; for the perspective and interests of the privileged will tend to dominate this unified public, marginalizing or silencing those of other groups.

(Young, 1989, p. 257)

Theorists within the liberal tradition of thought (Taylor, 1994; Gutmann, 1994 and Kymlicka, 1995) have made attempts to develop a model of multicultural citizenship which maintains the cultural belongings of individuals, as well as their opinions, values and goals as central to the concept of individual difference and is essential for individual equality. Charles Taylor (1994) defends a system of basic rights within a conception of the nation as a community of shared cultural traditions and practices and does this by proposing a “politics of recognition” which means that minority groups should be recognised and respected for their cultural identities, values and practices which makes them different from other groups. Taylor (1997) subsequently points out that requesting citizens to share a common national language, culture and identity privileges members of the majority culture over others.

If a modern society has an ‘official’ language, in the fullest sense of the term, that is, a state-sponsored, inculcated and defined language and



culture, in which both economy and state function, then it is obviously an immense advantage to people if this language and culture are theirs.

Speakers of other languages are at a distinct disadvantage. (p.34)

Liberalism's affording of equal respect to all citizens regardless of race, religion, class or gender does not, according to Taylor (1994), recognise the uniqueness of human beings as individuals or as groups. Hence, he proposes another version of liberalism which, rather than considering people as isolated, solitary individuals, would recognise the shared identity-related goals of cultural groups, thereby balancing group rights with individual rights. Taylor (1994) proposes that we ought to examine other cultures in order to recognise, understand and value them as communities and, in doing so, seek to broaden our horizons and "transform our standards" (p.67). After all, "a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves" (Taylor, 1994, p. 25). Parekh (2000b) takes this argument further by pointing out that human beings are culturally embedded in their own culturally structured worlds and that each culture differs in its conceptions of the "good life". Like Taylor, he contends that each community has a right to its culture and that this right should be respected given that "different cultures thus correct and complement each other, expand each other's horizons of thought and alert each other to new forms of human fulfilment" (Parekh, 2000b, p. 167).

While Parekh (2000b) acknowledges that liberalism, along with other ideologies which offer a particular vision of the good life, is a powerful political and moral doctrine, placing great emphasis as it does on values such as freedom, equality, choice and dignity, he believes that values such as human solidarity and a common sense of belonging can

only be cherished in a truly multicultural society. He points out that “from a multiculturalist perspective the good society does not commit itself to a particular political doctrine or vision of the good life and ask how much diversity to tolerate within the limits set by it” (Parekh, 2000b, p.340). Rather, multiculturalism has the ability to expand our “categories of thought”, to bring us “new forms of human fulfilment” and to promote the “good life” if we accept that “however rich it might be, no culture embodies all that is valuable in human life and develops the full range of human possibilities (Parekh, 2000b, p. 167).

Whilst Kymlicka (1995) and Gutmann (1994) take the liberal norm of individual equality as their starting points in arguing for a liberal multiculturalist view of society, and Taylor (1994) and Parkeh (2000b) focus on the cultures themselves, all are agreed that human beings are deeply connected to their culture and that this cultural belonging needs to be acknowledged and respected. In her concern for the recognition of cultural identities so that all individuals may achieve equality, Gutmann (1994) highlights the fact that an individual’s life acquires shape and meaning through the culture to which they belong and that the state has an obligation to support groups to preserve their cultural belonging by protecting minority groups from interference by other cultures. Tully (1995) reminds us culture is “over-lapping, interactive and internally-negotiated” and not something akin to a “billiard-ball” as though it fitted neatly within clearly defined boundaries (p.10).

Brian Barry (2001), a self-professed egalitarian liberal, attacks multiculturalism and completely rejects the arguments of a diverse group of philosophers including Kymlicka (1995), Parekh (2000b), Taylor (1994), whose writings, Barry (2001) argues, promote “the politics of difference, the politics of recognition, or most popularly,

multiculturalism” (p.5). In arguing that supporting policies aimed at specific groups actually undermines the pursuit of justice for the very people multiculturalists claim they are representing, Barry (2001) claims that –

Pursuit of the multiculturalist agenda makes the achievement of broadly based egalitarian policies more difficult in two ways. At the minimum, it diverts political efforts away from universalistic goals. But a more serious problem is that [it] may very well destroy the conditions for putting together a coalition in favour of across-the-board equalisation of opportunities and resources...

(p. 325, note 5)

Barry (2001) defends the principle of universality of humankind and considers that all cultures share similarities. He goes so far as to express the opinion that not all cultures are of equal value and asserts that the demand that *all* minority groups *everywhere* be recognised and afforded equal respect and equal value is impossible to accomplish, both logically and psychologically (Barry, 2001, p.270-271, note 5). This judgment that not all cultures are equal is unlikely to sit comfortably with those responsible for the education of children and young people. Barry is not alone in his criticism of multiculturalism policies. Given that “there is a growing fear that the public-spiritedness of citizens of liberal democracies may be in serious decline” (Kymlicka, 1995, p.176), it is clear that “much work needs to be done concerning the impact of multiculturalism on social unity and political stability” (Kymlicka, 2001a, p. 37). Today, it is recognised that the issue of identity in multicultural Ireland, and other countries in Europe, is related to the upsurge of a new nationalism which is generally more hostile to people from various ethnic groups establishing themselves in society. The next section examines how

citizenship is linked to the individual's moral and political attachment to a particular community – nationalism.

### 1.9 *Nationalism*

The term *nationalism* refers to the devotion of individuals within a state to the interests or culture of that nation and the pursuit of certain political and cultural goals on behalf of the state. It is a sense of identity with others who share an ethnic origin, a language, a culture and a historical past and regard themselves as members of the same community and as an ideology believes that each nation is entitled to its own state and that each state will benefit greatly from being autonomous. There is a tendency to confuse use of the terms nation and state (Miller, 1995). A *State* is a self-governing political entity. A *Nation*, however, is a community of people who identify with each other and share a common history and culture. The term *nation-state* refers to the socio-cultural community of people living and ruled by a sovereign government within the defined borders of a political entity. Presenting a theory of nationalism is problematic. As Calhoun (1997) points out, “nationalism is too diverse to allow a single theory to explain it all. Much of the contents and specific orientations of various nationalisms is determined by historically distinct cultural traditions, the creative actions of leaders, and contingent situations within the international world order” (p.123). Ignatieff's (1994) distinction between ‘civic nationalism’ and ‘ethnic nationalism’ is useful in understanding how people may identify themselves as members of a particular group, community or state. Civic nationalism defines national identity in political terms and is based on the democratic theory that the nation is a community of equal rights bearing citizens who, regardless of their ethnicity, colour, gender or language are united in their patriotic attachment to the nation's political practices and values (McLaughlin and

Juceviciene, 1997). Civic nationalism, also known as liberal nationalism, has been defended by political philosophers such as Miller (1995) who believe that this form of nationalism, which endorses citizens' active participation in the community, is equated with citizenship. Civic nationalism considers that people can belong to the nation if, having chosen to live there, they are committed to the political community. Ethnic nationalism, on the other hand, defines national identity in ethnic terms and is based on the theory that identity is heredity and that people can only belong to a particular nation if they have been born into it. McLaughlin and Juceviciene (1997) point out that "while civic nationalism can be rational, flexible, pluralistic and morally rich, ethnic nationalism is tempted by irrationality, fanaticism and authoritarianism" (p.27).

The Republic of Ireland is a nation-state. Historically, citizens were regarded as a national community of people connected geographically and culturally with a common language, religion, customs and traditions. The homogenous identity of the dominant majority culture perpetuated the notion of a common national identity and the 1937 Constitution, which defines the status of citizens in terms of rights, as well as a republican tradition of self-rule, resulted in the perception of democratic citizenship as a shared history and national sentiment in Ireland. The extent to which national identity unites fellow citizens and underpins citizenship or simply propels a single version of citizenship, and thus sees people bound into single identities, has been subjected to much debate in recent years because, as Breuilly (1993) points out, "the notion of the state and sovereign state is becoming increasingly difficult to employ as a description of reality" (p.395). Globalisation, increased mobility and cultural diversity of inhabitants, greater accessibility to the world market as a result of expanding trade links and heightened media coverage, and the accession of political decision-making by many countries to

supra-national level, have contributed to the decline of the nation-state. Citizens are defining themselves to a far lesser extent in terms of local and national communities and increasingly as citizens of Europe and the wider world.

In the context of these challenges to the nation state, the question of whether the idea of a national identity should be discarded (Williams, 2006) or restructured to take account of recent political and cultural changes arises (Miller, 1995; White, 1996), given the tensions resulting from the proliferation of multicultural groups in Western European countries (Kymlicka and Norman, 1994). In spite of the challenges of multiculturalism, Miller (1995) supports a moderate, civic form of nationalism. He defends the principle of nationality arguing that “a shared national identity is the precondition for achieving political aims such as social justice and deliberative democracy” (p. 162). Furthermore, Miller (1995) is of the opinion that we have greater ethical responsibilities towards our co-nationals than to those from other ethnic backgrounds – “nations are ethical communities...the duties we owe to our fellow nationals are different from, and more extensive than, the duties we owe to other humans as such” (p.11). Young (2000) criticises Miller’s (1995) defence of liberal nationalism for assuming that other states are positioned to viably support the needs and uphold the rights of their citizens and for failing to extend solidarity beyond the state.

Clearly, as Beiner (1995) points out, “theorizing citizenship requires that one take up questions having to do with membership, national identity, civic allegiance, and all the commonalities of sentiment and obligation that prompt one to feel that one belongs to *this* political community rather than *that* political community” (p.19). The emergence of the European Union, increased globalisation and greater movement between countries

has undoubtedly tested our simple, nationalistic concept of citizenship in recent years. These changes offer the opportunity for an open debate about identity and the chance to review the significance and meaning of citizenship in Ireland.

### *Conclusion*

A new kind of citizenship is emerging that is neither national nor cosmopolitan but that is multiple in the sense that the identities, rights and obligations associated... with citizenship, are expressed through an increasingly complex configuration of common community institutions, states, national and transnational voluntary associations, regions and alliances of regions.

(Meehan, 1993, p.1)

This chapter examined some of the philosophical theory behind the concept of citizenship. It has emerged that it is not easy to find a definitive meaning for 'citizenship'. Essentially, the balance between rights and responsibilities and what is involved in each of these approaches lies at the heart of contemporary debates which attempt to define citizenship (Lister, 2003). There are two contrasting historical conceptions of citizenship. The ancient Greek approach to citizenship, likened to the civic republican approach, emphasised the dominance of the public sphere, the political obligations of the citizen and the importance of active participation in the community. The Roman model of citizenship, resembling a contemporary liberal perspective, emphasised participation in the private sphere and the legal protection of the individual's civil and political rights. These traditional conceptions of citizenship which, on one hand, present the citizen as a public figure developing laws and, on the other hand, as a private individual with little time to actively engage in politics, are indicative of the

unresolved tensions in the issues encountered in debates about citizenship today. The 'liberal' and the 'civic republican' traditions are, thus, significant in understanding citizenship today. In clarifying the modern conception of citizenship, differing and diverse theories regard citizenship as a formal legal status conferred upon citizens of a State, an equal entitlement to the civil, political and social rights of citizenship, a responsibility and loyalty towards fellow citizens and the State, a commitment to contributing actively to society, a right to individual liberty and autonomy within the private sphere, and a shared identity with the community in which we live (Marshall, 1950; Gutmann, 1987; Held, 1989; Macedo, 1990; Galston, 1991; Kymlicka and Norman, 1994; Miller, 1995; Williams, 2006).

What is clear, therefore, is that the term 'citizenship' has several different meanings. On one level, it is a matter of legal status or political identity which entails specific rights and responsibilities which are enshrined in law. 'Citizenship' also means involvement in the political community, which necessitates voting in elections and taking an interest in politics, and in the local community, which involves behaving in a socially expected manner and developing a sense of moral commitment to the contributing to the common good. Lastly, the term 'citizenship' also refers to an educational process which prepares individuals so that they are enabled to be active, informed and responsible citizens in democratic society. It is to this end that the preparation of young children for active citizenship is the focus of the next chapter. In offering a rationale for why children should be taught citizenship education and how schools may initiate active citizenship, Chapter two reviews literature relating to children, schooling and citizenship education.



## **Chapter 2: Citizenship and Education**

### *2.1 Introduction*

The previous chapter examined some of the main perspectives and concepts which lie behind citizenship as a philosophical or political theory. Given that the citizenship education of primary school children is the focus of this research study, this chapter explores the theory behind the notion of citizenship education. Initially, it begins with an exploration of the concept of childhood. Given that an investigation of how children were treated in the past is necessary if we are to understand how we have come to understand contemporary children, this chapter traces the evolution of childhood from the Renaissance onwards to its present-day manifestation as a state clearly distinguishable from adulthood. Thereafter, the status of children as citizens and their ability to participate fully as members of society are examined. The rights of children, as enshrined in law, are delineated and the discussion is framed in terms of key policy initiatives such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which have forced us to re-examine the concept of citizenship. In an attempt to draw together the theories which emerged in the preceding chapter, the philosophical underpinnings of citizenship education are outlined. Furthermore, the main principles of citizenship education, and the extent to which these underpin educational practice, are considered. Finally, this chapter raises questions as to whether schools are in fact the best places to teach democracy as we endeavour to develop children's citizenship skills beyond the content of the formal curriculum and develop citizens who are critical thinkers, autonomous learners and active participants in democratic society.

## 2.2 *Conceptions of Childhood*

Childhood is unknown. Starting from the false idea one has of it, the farther one goes, the more one loses one's way.

(Rousseau, 1762/1979, p.33)

Childhood is understood as a social, cultural and historical construction (Jenks, 2005). Given that societies change, cultures vary and time passes, it follows that new ways of thinking about children will influence our conception of childhood. From the outset, the history and trajectory of childhood appears contentious as there is little consensus of opinion on the extent to which children's experience of childhood has altered dramatically since 1500. Philippe Aries, author of the prominent work *Centuries of Childhood* (1962), claims that a clear conception of childhood, as distinct from adulthood, did not emerge until the seventeenth century. Shulamith Shahar (1990) refutes this suggestion that a notion of childhood was lacking in the Middle Ages and she offers evidence that suggests that some historians in the Middle Ages understood childhood to be divided quite clearly into various stages. David Archard (2004) concurs that "the evidence fails to show that previous societies lacked a concept of childhood. At most it shows they lacked our concept" (p.24). He makes the point that societies have always had a concept of childhood, recognising that children are in fact different from adults, though they varied in their conceptions of childhood.

It is necessary to make the distinction between the concept of a child and the concept of childhood. Cunningham (1995) differentiates "between children as human beings and childhood as a shifting set of ideas" (p. 1). The notion that children are a distinct group of people has not altered over time. Conceptions of childhood have not, however, remained static over the centuries, as our attitudes, beliefs and values have altered

dramatically with the passing of time. The existing and dominant conception of childhood in modern western society is that children are essentially different from adults. Children, it is considered, are in need of nurturing and are entitled to adult care and protection and so it seems unthinkable that other societies, both past and present, would not have regarded the protection of children as a fundamental value. It is necessary to journey back in time and examine perspectives on childhood, in order to draw some tentative conclusions as to how children may have been perceived in the past. Unfortunately, there is little documented evidence available to explore the experience of being a child in the past. As Cunningham (1995) points out, “ideas about childhood in the past exist in plenitude; it is not so easy to find out about the lives of children” (p.2). Nevertheless, an exploration of the ways in which ideas about childhood changed over time may offer some insights into the experience of children in the past and allow us to reach a greater understanding of our current conception of children and our existing ideas of childhood.

### *2.2.1 Medieval and Modern Conceptions of Childhood*

In famously claiming that the concept of childhood did not emerge until the late seventeenth century, Philippe Aries (1962) prompted the debates on the history of children and childhood.

In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist; this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, the particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adults. In medieval society, this awareness was lacking. (p. 128)

Using historical sources to support his chronological thesis on the changing conceptions of childhood, Aries proposed that societies in the past lacked the idea of childhood and that children were simply regarded as miniature adults. He claimed that “medieval art until about the twelfth century did not know childhood or did not attempt to portray it” (Aries, 1962, p. 33) as children were represented in paintings and sculptures by smaller versions of men. By examining the portrayal of childhood in terms of the way the children were dressed, the games they played and the work they did, Aries concluded that children in medieval society advanced from infancy to adulthood at around the age of seven years when, in addition to wearing similar clothing to adults, they engaged in the same work, games and pastimes as the adults around them. Furthermore, Aries suggested that even before they reached the age of seven, children were integrated into the world of adulthood (Cunningham, 1995). Children’s lives were not segregated from the lives of adults as they lived, ate and slept in close proximity to each other and the children were privy to activities and exposed to behaviour in society, which today might be considered unsuitable for children. In support of his argument that children in medieval society were accorded a low status, Aries (1962) cited a fourteenth century poem:

Of all the months the first behold  
January two-faced and cold.  
Because its eyes two ways are cast,  
To face the future and the past.  
Thus the child six summers old  
Is not worth much when all is told.

(pp.13-30, quoting p.20)

In relation to the way children were treated by the adults around them, Aries, in noting that parents were unfeeling and indifferent towards their children, probably owing to the high infant mortality rates at the time, portrays a rather unsentimental treatment of children. Unlike other historians (De Mause, 1974; Stone, 1979), however, Aries does not claim that children in the past were subjected to harsh treatment and abuse although he does conclude that the treatment of children by their parents and by society has greatly improved throughout the centuries.

In his examination of English society in the sixteenth century, Laurence Stone, an anthropologist, describes society as a place in which “a majority of the individuals that composed it found it very difficult to establish close emotional ties to any other person. Children were neglected, brutally treated, and even killed; adults treated each other with suspicion and hostility; affect was low, and hard to find” (Stone, 1977, p. 99). DeMause (1974) endorses this viewpoint by stating that “the history of childhood is a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken” asserting that “the further back in history one goes, the lower the level of child care, and the more likely children are to be killed, abandoned, beaten, terrorized, and sexually abused” (p.1). Pollock (1983) challenges the social conceptions of childhood articulated by Aries (1962) and DeMause (1974). In her study of some four hundred first-hand accounts of childhood between 1500 and 1900, Pollock (1983) argues that most parents were affectionate and kind to their children and childhood was not the miserable state we may be led to believe. In relation to the mistreatment of children, Pollock (1983) notes that “the evidence does not agree with the arguments of such writers as Aries (1962), de Mause (1974), or Stone (1977) that children were harshly, even cruelly, disciplined, but reveals that brutality was the exception rather than the rule” (p.199). Furthermore, Pollock (1983) maintains that

“the texts reveal no significant change in the quality of parental care given to, or the amount of affection felt for infants for the period 1500-1900” (p.235). She concludes that, like today, societies in the past varied culturally and individually in the way in which they viewed and treated children.

It was not until the seventeenth century, according to Aries, that adults grasped the particularities of what it means to be a child and appreciated the differences between childhood and adulthood. Although, as Aries (1962) tells us, the notion of childhood “profited boys first of all, while the girls persisted much longer in the traditional way of life which confused them with adults” (p.59). He asserts that the concept of childhood first appeared among the upper classes when they began dressing their children differently than adults and noted that the treatment of working class children remained the same as in medieval times. Children came to be regarded as “a source of amusement and relaxation” (Aries, 1962, page 129). This change in the conception of childhood was attributed to a growing interest in education, the influence of Christianity and the emphasis henceforth placed on the function of the family.

Postman (1994) agrees with Aries that childhood is an invention of the seventeenth century. In his book *The Disappearance of Childhood*, Postman (1994) proposes that the concept of childhood was developed in response to the printing press. With the invention of the printing press, adults and children were clearly divided into two distinct groups – the literate and the non-literate. In order to become literate, schooling was regarded as a necessity. Thus, learning to read was central to making the transition from childhood to adulthood and so, the advancement of schooling, as we know it, was central to the emergence of a concept of childhood. Although, Aries (1962) and Postman (1994)

marked the seventeenth century as significant in the development of ideas about childhood, other historians (Locke, 1693; Rousseau, 1762) assert that the notion of childhood did not emerge until the eighteenth century.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, John Locke (1693) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1762) put forward their theories on what it meant to be a child and both are accredited with the formation of the modern conception of childhood in the Western world. The image of childhood as a period of innocence, purity and happiness flourished with the writings of Locke and Rousseau. Locke (1693) considered that children were a *tabula rasa* – a blank slate onto which adults, the experts, must transfer knowledge and attitudes given that children were “only as white paper, or wax, to be moulded or fashioned as one pleases” (p.265). In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Locke (1693) maintained that children have particular requirements and interests that must be acknowledged and provided for. Moreover, he asserted that children should be reasoned with and, thus, coercing children into behaving in a certain manner is not necessary. Education and schooling was, according to Locke, central to the development of a logic and reason necessary to make children better citizens. Given that it would take time to infuse these blank children with ideas and concepts, Locke (1693) proposed that a period of time ought to be reserved for the fruition of this impartation of knowledge and attitudes. This period in their lives would become known as childhood. In short, “Locke writes of children as the recipients of an ideal upbringing, citizens in the making, fledgling but imperfect reasoners and blank sheets filled by experience” (Archard, 2004, p.1). To be fair, Locke’s thoughts on childhood are not too far removed from the philosophical writings of modern theorists.

While Rousseau (1762) agreed that a particular period of time should be set-aside for children to experience childhood, his reasoning for differentiating between childhood and adulthood differed from that of Locke. Rousseau (1762) was of the opinion that children are more than citizens in the making and should be valued for their uniqueness as children. In his romantic presentation of children as closer to a “state of nature” than adults, Rousseau conceived that it is necessary to preserve the integrity of children from civilisation for as long as possible. In *Émile* (1762), he advised us that children ought to be considered children, not miniature adults, and brought up in accordance with nature – “nature wants children to be children before they are men.”

Love childhood, indulge its sports, its pleasures, its delightful instincts.

Who has not sometimes regretted that age when laughter was ever on the lips, and when the heart was ever at peace? Why rob these innocents of the joys which pass so quickly, of that precious gift which they cannot abuse? Why fill with bitterness the fleeting days of early childhood, days which no more return for them than for you?

(Rousseau, 1762, p.43)

Rousseau (1762) rejected Locke’s (1693) recommendations to reason with children on the grounds that they should simply be allowed to be children. This era in their lives when children would be protected from harm would be known as childhood. Rousseau’s (1762) belief that childhood was a state of innocence and that children were in need of protection from society became popular, initially among the middle and upper classes, in the eighteenth century. This new status of childhood which came into prominence afforded all children rights and special treatment. Children became the subjects of legislation as Governments assumed responsibility for the welfare of children. The provision of formal education illuminated the presence and role of children in modern



society and the culture of childhood was idealised in the songs, rhymes, stories and games which separated the mystical world of children from adulthood.

It was also during the eighteenth century that the modern concept of childhood whereby the child has a central role in family life emerged from an awareness of the need to nurture and protect children from adult realities. The importance of children in family life increased parental responsibility. Drawing on the work of Aries (1962), Cunningham (1995) asserts that changing ideas about childhood were central to the development of the modern family.

From the eighteenth century, first within the middle classes, the ‘wall of private life’ was raised ‘between the family and society’. The old sociability of the community was lost. Children were at the centre of these families, in a privatised world, where adults were ‘obsessed by the physical, moral and sexual problems of childhood. (p. 6)

Interestingly, this increased segregation of families from society in the eighteenth century may well have implications for present day debates about citizenship, in which the social isolation of families and the breakdown of traditional communities and relationships in civil society are considered barriers to genuine citizenship. Ominously, Stone (1977) describes the modern Western family structure as “geographically, chronologically and socially a restricted and unusual phenomenon, and there is as little reason to have any more confidence in its survival and spread in the future as there is for democracy” (p.687).

By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with the onset of the industrial revolution, it became apparent that educational systems needed to be advanced if

children were to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills and be prepared for their future roles in the economy. Recognising the fact that those with a basic level of education were likely to make a more effective contribution to the workforce, the State assumed a greater interest in children. Consequently, laws restricting and prohibiting certain forms of child labour were increasingly introduced. Furthermore, though play has been practiced by children since the beginning of time, the importance of play experiences in the child's development was recognised. The importance of giving children opportunities to create, imagine, explore and learn was acknowledged and play came to be seen as the work of children.

All their innocent Folly, Playing and *Childish Actions*, are to be left perfectly free and *unrestrained*, as far as they can consist with the Respect due to those that are present; and that with the greatest allowance.

(Locke, 1693/1880, p.208)

Thus, as society's perception of children was changing so too was its conception of childhood. The notion of childhood, as distinct from adulthood, developed further in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with the development of schooling and the significant decrease in the infant mortality rate. Nevertheless, children continued to be viewed as the property of their parents and valued in terms of their economic contribution to family life. From the beginning of the twentieth century, however, parents began to see their children as more than merely contributors within the family economy and many parents were determined to offer their children a better childhood than they themselves had experienced. And so things changed - children no longer worked or played alongside adults. Their world of learning was separated from the adult world of knowing. The roles and responsibilities of adults were distinct from those of children. Although Archard (2004) encapsulates the modern child as "an innocent,

incompetent who is not but must become the adult” (p.50), he acknowledges that different theoretical understandings and cultural representations underpin the modern conception of childhood, making it a complicated concept to grapple with.

### 2.2.2 *A Post-Modern Conception of Childhood*

Childhood is often identified, too romantically I think, as a period of innocent and undiluted happiness.

(Noddings, 2002, p.205)

The profile of children has risen considerably in recent years and the need to protect the young is well documented. Attempts to ‘liberate’ children have dominated discourse relating to childhood. John Holt’s *Escape from Childhood* (1975) calls for the liberation of children so that they may acquire the rights and privileges that are rightfully theirs. The right of children to an identity and a voice in liberal democratic society challenges romantic notions of childhood, since today’s children are privy to previously untold secrets and “everywhere one looks it may be seen that the behaviour, attitudes and desires – even the physical appearance – of adults and children are becoming increasingly indistinguishable” (Postman, 1994, p.4). Their worlds blend simultaneously with the adult world. In fact, children have acquired almost equal rights to adults. The rights of children are emphasised in laws, including the Child Care Act, 1991 and the Children’s Act, 2001, which exist to safeguard children from exploitation. The creation of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children (2002) and the development of the National Children’s Strategy (2000) set out to give volume to the voice of the child and develop their powers of agency.

Yet, a more accurate picture of contemporary childhood emerges on our television screens. Images of starving children in Africa, injured children in war zones in Eastern Europe, child labourers in India, trafficking and sexual exploitation of young people in Thailand, the slaying of babies in China, the physical and emotional abuse of vulnerable children in Europe and the conditions of neglect, discrimination, homelessness and violence which affect millions of children worldwide challenge post-modern ideas about childhood. As Sommerville (1990) reminds us –

Children we don't see produce our carpets in Morocco and India, polish gems in Thailand, make glassware in Mexico, mosquito coils in Indonesia, toys in China, textiles in the Philippines, are posed for child pornography in Denmark and the Netherlands – all for export. (p.289)

It seems that the image of the autonomous, liberal child is in conflict with the romanticised notion of children and “our attempt to live by the icon of the child makes it more difficult to live with real children” (Gillis, 2002, p.46). The culture of childhood that blossomed in the late modern era where children roamed the fields and played on the streets, shared stories, laughed at jokes and sang songs until it was time to return home for tea, has diminished. As Dunne (2002a) points out, “children’s lives have become more scripted and scheduled, more subject to adult surveillance” (p.9). Furthermore, it may be suggested that in limiting “the possibility of children experiencing feelings like failure, sadness and disappointment” (Morgan, 2002, p.116) our young people are ill-prepared to deal with the problems they encounter in adulthood.

Of late, questions have been raised as to how best to empower children to *become* competent, fully-fledged citizens with the capacity, on one hand, to function autonomously in the knowledge economy and, on the other hand, to participate actively

in society. The status of children in society is changing as current discourse focuses on children's rights, rather than their needs. Given that "the concept of citizenship is founded on the notion of individual as actor in a democratic polity and this requires an understanding of and acceptance of human rights (Osler and Starkey, 2000, p. 4), it is considered necessary to examine the rights and status of children in light of recent legislative developments and the implications of these for schools.

### 2.3 *Children as Citizens*

The changing conceptions of childhood over the centuries have been crucial in the transformation of thinking about children as citizens. The fundamental question as to whether or not children are citizens has been determined by the culture of childhood that evolved in Western society over the past one hundred and fifty years. New understandings of childhood have meant that the concept of the autonomous, individual child as a citizen of democratic society has gained momentum in recent years. Yet, as Osler and Starkey (2005) point out, "young learners are not yet widely recognised as partners who need to be consulted. At best they are viewed as citizens-in-waiting who need to be inducted into their future role" (p.38).

Children are citizens. They are not 'future' citizens (Galston, 1991, p.253), nor are they naïve, passive recipients of knowledge. Furthermore, as citizens, children have the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. It is recognised that schools have a responsibility to develop citizenship education. As Orr (1992) (as cited in Holden and Clough, 1998) points out -

I see no prospect whatever [of a successful democracy] without an active, engaged, informed and competent citizenry...Education is not just about

society, it is about persons. At the individual level the goal is something like the Greek model of Paideia or that of the Renaissance person of wide understanding, competence and commitment to the common good. (p.15)

Thus, the obligation to develop children's capacity to reflect on issues and participate in decision-making has become central to developing active citizenship and the democracy process. After all, "citizenship education is unlikely to mean much to pupils unless they are simultaneously engaged in participation in school decision-making and discussion procedures" (Pearce and Hallgarten, 2000, p.13).

In recent years, the key concepts of consultation, participation, partnership and empowerment have defined legislation, policy and practice in Ireland. Citizenship education has responded by placing great emphasis on enabling children to participate fully as citizens in their school, community and wider world. Hart (1992) defines 'participation' as –

...the process of sharing decisions which affects one's life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which a democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured. Participation is the fundamental right of citizenship. (p.5)

Education for participation involves providing pupils with content and knowledge, empowering them with analytical and critical skills, developing positive attitudes and values and affording them opportunities to actively engage in decision-making and debate. Meaningful participation extends beyond listening to or consulting with children. It entails assisting children to influence decision-making and effect change. However, translating the principle of participation into effective practice is problematic. Hart's Ladder of Participation (1992) outlines eight levels of participation ranging from

manipulation to tokenism to child-initiated shared decisions with adults. Tokenistic gestures whereby children are seemingly consulted, for example, as members of an advisory group or representative body, but have no real understanding of the processes, are particularly common, according to Hart (1992), in the West. Many of the structures developed in Ireland in the last ten years recognise the importance of consultation with children, for example, the National Children's Office (2001), the Office of the Ombudsman for Children (2002) and Dáil na nÓg (2000). While children's voices are coherently heard and their opinions taken seriously, the extent to which children are actively involved in setting the agenda for discussion and genuinely engaged in the entire process - conceptualisation, negotiation, planning, decision-making and evaluation - remains questionable.

Given that children are not citizens in the formal political sense of voting, but are nevertheless citizens in their own right, citizenship education must be more than about preparing children for democratic participation in the future. Contrary to the opinion of Rousseau (1762) and J.S. Mill (1859), that the preparation of individuals for political life would ultimately foster a sense of duty and tolerance, an approach to citizenship education that places sole emphasis on active participation in public life is inadequate. As Kymlicka and Norman (1994) contend, "emphasising participation does not yet explain how to ensure that citizens participate responsibly - that is, in a public-spirited, rather than self-interested or prejudiced, way" (p.292).

Despite demands that children be seen as legitimate members of society, with the right and capacity to make a valuable contribution to the life of their community, children clearly exist in a culture of dependency. The vulnerable and dependent nature of

children is axiomatic and policy cannot negate the fact that children cannot exist fully independently of the adults in their lives. However, the adults who shape and control their lives can enhance the autonomy of children in the provision of opportunities to develop independence where possible. It is the adults who ultimately determine children's status as citizens. It is this power of adults which has made the trajectory to the acquisition of citizenship problematic for children.

### *2.3.1 Children's Rights*

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 1989, specifies the rights of children in a number of articles and it is in the context of this legislative framework that children's rights as citizens are addressed. Historically, children were regarded as immature, incompetent beings in need of preparation for the future when they would *become* citizens. They were, according to Verhellen (2000) "not yet knowing, not yet competent and not yet being" (p.33). In addition to identifying the civil, political, social, economical and cultural rights to which children everywhere are entitled, the Convention provides a framework for a broader perspective of children's citizenship. While the Convention does not extend full adult rights to children, it does give children the right to be heard and to take responsibility for making decisions in accordance with their age and maturity.

In clearly setting out the protection and participatory rights of children, the UNCRC (1989) offers all those working with children the opportunity to challenge traditional ideas about childhood and to recognise that these rights are linked with democracy and citizenship. The protection rights exist to protect children from those in power, as children have a right to life and growth (Article 6) and a right to be protected from harm



and from abuse, neglect and exploitation (Article 19). The participatory rights of the UNCRC (1989), which have stimulated much interest and been the focus of debates since its formulation, acknowledge that not only are children capable of having opinions but they have the right to express these opinions, be listened to and have their views taken seriously. Article 12 states –

State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Article 27 of the UNCRC (1989) specifies that pupils have rights to be informed about activities happening in the school and to take an active role in the running of the school. And in addition to recognising children as subjects of rights, and not as mere recipients of adult protection, articles 28 and 29, which specify the right to an education that promotes respect for human rights and democracy, provide clear guidelines for developing citizenship education. These participatory rights, as set out in the UNCRC, mark a fundamental shift in how adults are expected to respond to children. As Devine (2004) points out, “this rights-based concept of childhood is one which challenges adults to act not only in the best interests of children but also to incorporate children increasingly into decision making about their lives” (p.111). Given that children spend a significant proportion of their time in school, the UNCRC (1989) clearly has implications for children in schools. However, of all the rights pertaining to children, it is anticipated that these participatory rights are those which are most likely to be ignored or ineffectually addressed.

Traditionally, in Ireland the focus has tended to be on the rights of children to an education rather than on their rights as a group within the school system itself (Devine, 2003; 1999). While the government's increased commitment to children is evident in the considerable advances made in terms of the curriculum and the guidelines issued to schools in recent years, developments in educational policy have been concerned primarily with the rights and needs of children. The Government's White Paper (1995) states –

Each child is entitled to an education and learning environment, which facilitates the nurturing of her/his educational potential, in all its richness, and diversity...The school environment should be a caring one in which each child's right to a joyful and safe childhood is guaranteed at all times.

(p.14)

In using language such as 'nurturing', 'caring', 'joyful' and 'safe', it could be argued that the role of the school is described in paternalistic terms. The Education Act (1998) affords pupils the right to be informed about school activities (Section 23, No. 1 and 2) and to have greater involvement in the running of the school (Section 27, No. 3) as well as to be consulted on the setting and monitoring of school objectives. However, the fulfilment of these rights is wholly dependent on the adults within the system deeming children age-appropriate and mature enough to engage in consultation. The Education Act (1998) emphasises the need for consultation with all partners in education, yet this extends to pupils insofar only as they have a right to be informed of the school's activities or may be consulted if the adults within the school system consider it appropriate to do so. In using the language of 'consultation', 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'partnership' and emphasising the participative rights of children, it

is evident that legislation and departmental guidelines consider that children ought to be recognised as citizens and envisage that children will be taken seriously. In other words-

Respect for children as human beings means they are no longer perceived as mere *objects* of protection but as *subjects*, bearers of human rights like all human beings. This new perception applies to the child as an individual as well as to children as a social category.

(Verhellen, 2000, p. 34)

The extent to which children are, in fact, recognised as citizens with rights and responsibilities is at the crux of the debate. The next section considers equality as a fundamental principle of citizenship education and the extent to which inequalities underpin educational processes and practices in Irish schools.

### 2.3.2 *Equality in Education*

Equality is essential to the operation of democratic society and it is a fundamental principle of the Irish education system that all children shall have equal opportunities to access an education regardless of their social or cultural background, economic status, gender, religion or possible disability. The obligation on schools to promote equality of opportunity is expressed in legislative educational acts, set down in the curricula prescribed for schools and enshrined in school policies. Yet, we know that schools contribute significantly to the continued reproduction of the social and cultural norms, values and traditions of the society in which we live (Lynch, 1989). Thus, it is considered necessary to explore the issues of class, gender and race in relation to children's educational opportunities.

### 2.3.2.1 Social Class and school

While there is probably no single subject that has been researched in as much detail as class inequality in education, there have been no serious attempts at policy level to radically alter the class outcomes of education.

(Lynch and Lodge, 2002, p. 39)

Social class inequalities have a pervasive influence on educational achievement. In their book, *Schooling and Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life*, Bowles and Gintis (1976) maintain that there is a correlation between schooling, class, family and social inequalities.

We conclude that a family's position in the class structure is reproduced primarily by mechanisms operating *independently* of the inheritance, production, and certification of intellectual skills.

(Bowles and Gintis, 1976, p.120)

Bowles and Gintis (1976) claim that the hierarchical structure of schools mirrors the structure of the labour market. Furthermore, they reason that the socialisation which takes place in schools reproduces rather than eliminates social inequalities, as the children of parents with higher income levels generally achieve higher income status while the children of parents with lower income levels tend to acquire a similar low income status in society.

Drawing on the work of Bowles and Gintis (1976), Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh (2004) point out that "in capitalist societies, economically generated inequality manifests itself fundamentally as a social class problem in education, a problem of unequal access, participation and outcome arising from unequal access to resources" (p.145). In other

words, the children of economically well-off parents have more access to and show higher levels of participation in schooling, with the outcome of achieving higher academic results, while pupils from low income backgrounds, who do not have the economic resources to avail of educational opportunities, struggle to compete with other students. Given the direct correlation between social class, defined in terms of socio-economic status, and attainment at school, “the liberal state should devote as many resources to elementary and secondary schooling as necessary, and distribute those resources, along with children themselves, in such a way as to maximise the life chances of all its future citizens” (Gutmann, 1988, p.107). Yet, the reality is that “as knowledge-based industries and services gain increasing pre-eminence in the global economy, schools have become increasingly powerful players in the determination of life’s chances (Lynch and Lodge, 2002, p.5).

A Marxist or Neo-Marxist perspective on education critically examines the content of the curriculum in order to determine the extent to which it reflects the interests and views of the ruling class. The educational system, according to Clancy (1995) “is an instrument of cultural domination; its real function is best understood in terms of the need for social control in an unequal and rapidly changing social order” (p.471). In Ireland, the curriculum has always been strongly in favour of the development of pupils’ linguistic and mathematical skills, hence, “only particular forms of knowledge have been legitimated within education” (Lynch, 1999, p.275). This strong curricular emphasis on the teaching of mathematics and linguistics facilitates the reproduction of class inequality. This is because “linguistic capabilities in particular are differently developed across classes because of differences in culture, lifestyle, work and opportunity. The types of linguistic capabilities, especially oral capabilities, are not equally valued in

schools, thereby advantaging those whose class codes have not been made synonymous with schooling itself” (Baker *et al*, 2004, p. 149). Consequently, those students who are not considered to be as linguistically adept as those from other classes are automatically deemed to be academically less-able merely because their linguistic expression and communication skills differ somewhat to others. It is hardly surprising to learn that the school curriculum which is presented to pupils from low-income backgrounds is unappealing and irrelevant from the pupils’ perspective (McSorley, 1997). Likewise, the findings of a study carried out by Fagan (1995) revealed that the curriculum fails to reflect the reality of life for economically underprivileged children. Fagan (1995) noted that “by not using the life experiences of the young people as a basis from which to educate, and by not linking the background of young people to the curriculum, the curriculum is irrelevant and meaningless” (p.100-101). Hence, as a result of this disparity between the educational objectives of the curriculum and the educational expectations of parents and pupils, tensions arise and conflict occurs between pupils and their teachers and between families and the school.

By ceasing to engage in selective admission procedures and by diminishing the practice of grouping students in classes according to ability which “prepare students for the differential allocation in the labour market” (Clancy, 1995, p.470), schools themselves can take action in challenging the reinforcement of social class and other inequalities. Of course, the State must confront the reality that it has a significant role to play in perpetuating social class inequality and take the steps necessary to rectify the situation. The government must also recognise that “while distributing more education to those groups who want it is crucial, it may also be necessary to change the education system

itself to take account of the differences which various groups bring to that system” (Lynch, 1999, p.252).

#### 2.3.2.2 *Ethnicity and education*

Contemporary Irish society is multicultural. This means that there are distinct communities in society who are likely to have a specific group sense of identity arising from the ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic characteristics they share. Whilst a great deal of comparative research in relation to class and educational outcomes has been carried out, fewer studies have investigated the relationship between ethnicity and educational outcomes. The government’s commitment to the core liberal principles of equality and toleration is evident in recent educational legislation and guidelines issued to schools. The White Paper on Education – *Charting Our Education Future* (1995), notes “the democratic character of this society requires education to embrace the diverse traditions, beliefs and values of its people.” The *Intercultural Education in the Primary School: Guidelines for Schools* (NCCA, 2005) recognises the existence of cultural diversity in Ireland. A specific aim of the guidelines is to “support the aims of the Primary School Curriculum in the context of a growing cultural and ethnic diversity in a way that will maximise and enrich learning for all children, and make the curriculum as accessible as possible for children from ethnic minority groups” (NCCA, 2005, p. 5). Yet, the intercultural guidelines acknowledge that racism exists in contemporary society (NCCA, 2005, p. 13). Racist ideologies, prejudiced attitudes, discriminatory behaviour, structural arrangements and institutionalised practices can result in racial inequality for pupils in schools.

Given that education does not take place in a cultural abyss, questions have been raised in relation to how pupils should be enabled to appreciate and respect the richness of the diversity of cultures living in Irish society and be supported to challenge racial inequalities where they exist. Marginalised groups of people may experience what Young (1990) describes as ‘cultural imperialism’. We now know that costs are accrued when the dominant groups insist that their values, beliefs and ways of living are the cultural norm. As Williams (2006) points out –

Exclusion and marginalisation have not been the only costs of constructing national identities, policies of forcible assimilation for indigenous peoples have devastated their communities and are clearly tied to contemporary phenomena of anomie, poverty, ill health and extremely high suicide rates in many of those communities. (p.217)

Despite the legislation, policies and guidelines, schools, as microcosms of society, generate inequalities in their lack of respect and accommodation of differences (Connell, 1993). There are a number of ways in which pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds experience inequality in education. Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh (2004) recapitulate the means by which inequalities of respect and recognition are reproduced by asserting that “in schools, cultural non-recognition and misrepresentation is grounded in the practices and processes of curriculum provision and assessment, pedagogical practices, peer culture and organisational norms” (p.154). Taylor (1994) recognises that allegiance to one’s own culture is crucial to the development of a sense of worth among members of ethnic minority groups. He points out –

Dominant groups tend to entrench their hegemony by inculcating an image of inferiority in the subjugated. The struggle for freedom and



equality must therefore pass through a revision of these images.

Multicultural curricula are meant to help in the process of revision.

(Taylor, 1994, p.66)

It is recognised that “it may be no easy task for schools to promote a sense of common citizenship in communities which contain disparate ethnic and religious groups of children” (Fortin, 2008, p. 60). Nevertheless, Dunne (2003) makes it clear, that “if a state is really to cherish its minority cultures then it will offer them moral and material support; without this, their advancement in educational and economic life, for example, will be at the cost of an assimilationist loss of identity” (p.108). A conception of citizenship that fails to grasp this cannot be endured in the plural liberal democratic culture that is Irish society. In short, steps must be taken to develop formal and informal curricula “that promote(s) interaction, understanding and integration among and between different cultures” (Farrell and Watt, 2001, p. 26) if we are to seriously address issues of cultural inequalities and institutionalised racism in schools.

#### *2.3.2.3 Gender equality in education*

Gender equality in education has been a major theme of educational research both at home and abroad in recent years. During the 1970's and 1980's feminist theorists (Stanworth, 1981; Arnot and Weiner, 1987; Skelton, 1989) were concerned about the educational performance of girls and questioned whether traditional approaches to teaching and learning somehow favoured boys. In Ireland, educational research on gender has only materialised since the 1980's (Drudy, 1991) and has focused almost exclusively on equality of opportunity from a liberal feminist perspective (Lynch, 1999) by measuring the proportion of women, in comparison to men, enrolled in courses or the number of women and men represented in pictures and texts. In short –

The main issues for feminists here are the sexism of both the overt and hidden curricula, discrimination against girls and women within the education system, the male control over institutions and other aspects of gender inequality.

(Tovey and Share, 2003, p. 200)

Gender inequality in schools manifests itself in numerous ways. Yet, there is “no substantive analysis of mainstream compulsory education in terms of its pedagogical, organisational or curriculum practices from a critical feminist standpoint” (Lynch, 1999, p. 134). Research on the discriminatory practices and attitudes evident within the formal curriculum and the hidden curriculum is essential if we are to determine the extent to which teaching and learning within schools is reinforcing gender inequalities. Of late, research has also begun to analyse the relationship between boys and schooling owing to the fact that “female predominance in school teaching is to be found in most countries throughout the world” (Drudy, Martin, Woods and O’Flynn, 2005, p. 6) and because girls appear to be out-performing boys in examinations (Arnot, Gray, James and Rudduck, 1998).

Gender strongly influences educational experience and educational experience, in turn, plays a key role in the formation of citizens. Schools, therefore, need to reflect on the extent to which they are responsible for the reproduction of gender inequalities if all children are to have equal opportunities to participate fully as male and female citizens in society. Beyond measuring girls’ performances in examinations in comparison to boys, steps must be taken to reduce gender inequality in education. The development of a policy on gender equity in the school is of paramount importance. Teachers must also consider the extent to which the ‘hidden curriculum’ has the capacity to perpetuate

inequalities. In addition to becoming aware of, and removing, potential gender bias or stereotyping in textbooks and learning materials used to implement the curriculum, teachers must reflect on how the role they assume in the classroom may in fact reproduce gender differences and consequently work towards eliminating these inequalities. Furthermore, as Arnot (2003) points out –

Critical engagement with gender issues requires citizenship education programmes which consider what it would mean to have equal partnerships between men and women, equal pay and a concept of male duty in relation to domestic work. (p.115)

It is apparent that the fundamental role primary schools play in the social construction of gender cannot be underestimated. It is acknowledged that while educational institutes are powerful institutions for challenging inequalities, they cannot, in reality, surmount economically generated inequalities in education without the support of capitalist workplaces, the media, the law and the government. However, the fact remains that in today's market-driven capitalist economy, "schools and colleges can and do contribute to class-based inequalities of educational resources through a host of mechanisms and procedures" (Lynch and Baker, 2005, p.136). Clearly, schools must critically reflect on the ways social and cultural inequalities are perpetuated on a daily basis and seek to challenge existing inequalities by recognising and respecting difference.

## *2.4 Education for Citizenship*

### *2.4.1 Schooling*

For democracies to be effective, and to ensure their future, they require the active participation of their citizens. Citizens may acquire the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions to be active citizens from many

sources, but it is well recognised that schooling should, and can, play a major role in that process.

(Print, Ornstrom, Skovgaard and Nielsen, 2002, p.193)

The school is crucial in paving the way for an active citizenry of children. According to Dewey (1916/1944), the school should be a microcosm of the type of society that is desired. Hence, citizenship education places an obligation on schools. As Gutmann (1995) points out, “the realm of public schooling is a democratic government’s single most powerful and legitimate means of teaching respect for reasonable political disagreement” (p.579). Of course, in an era of testing and accountability, schools are also under pressure to achieve results so that pupils may be suitably equipped to work in the market economy. It may well be that the current emphasis on competition and achievement promotes individualism and undermines the potential for the creation of a democratic learning environment and the development of citizenship education. Clearly, the tension between teaching curriculum content to meet standards and enabling children to make an active contribution to democratic life results makes it difficult to create new meanings for citizenship in classrooms. Of course, schools alone cannot assume full responsibility for the development of an active citizenry. As Lockyer (2003) points out, “the notion that the school either can, or should attempt to, provide a forum for the development of politically active citizenship is seriously contentious” (p.125). Additionally, Dunne (2002b) makes the point that “the best intentions and abilities of teachers notwithstanding, it defies moral-political gravity of a society to expect schools on their own to counter the deep-lying tendencies of a society – tendencies that bear very heavily on schools themselves” (p.86). Contemporary models of active citizenship emphasise interdependence and the importance of community involvement – local, national and international. The educative function of the community in school life must

be investigated and utilised if decision-making is to be shared, owned and supported by the community of which schools are a part. There is a wide range of additional contexts and resources which can also contribute to the development of citizenship education including the family, the media, political institutions, political parties, pressure groups, local initiatives and voluntary community activity (Tooley, 2000), as well as the powerful stakeholders in education, namely the State, Church, teacher unions and parent associations.

#### 2.4.2 *The Hidden Curriculum*

Each school has its own unique multifaceted hidden curriculum – an unwritten school culture embedded in the customs and tradition of the school. Difficult to define because it varies among pupils and their school experiences, broadly speaking the term “hidden curriculum”, coined by Philip W. Jackson in his work *Life in Classrooms* (1968), refers to the norms, values and beliefs unintentionally transmitted daily to pupils through the formal educational curriculum and the informal social interactions within the school. There are, according to Lynch (1989) two theoretical approaches used to analyse the hidden curriculum – the functionalist tradition and the neo-Marxist perspective. Although neo-Marxists theories on the hidden curriculum are more abundant, a description of both the functionalist tradition and the neo-Marxist perspective will be outlined below.

As a functionalist theorist, Philip W. Jackson (1968) argued that we need to understand that there are features of classroom life inherent in the social requirements of schools, which underpin teaching and learning. For pupils, this means coping with delays and the crowded nature of the classroom, contending with constantly being evaluated and in

competition with others and understanding the disproportionate power relations at work with the authoritative teacher effectively in control of the pupils' actions. Thus, according to Jackson (1968), pupils learn to wait patiently, to exercise self-control and self-discipline, to demonstrate obedience to teachers and loyalty to peers, to present themselves punctually and neatly and to quietly concentrate on completing their work to the best of their ability. Teachers, according to Jackson, do not understand school culture and, therefore, the educational goals of schools have failed "to come to grips with the reality of classroom events" (Jackson, 1968, p. 59). Jackson's theory on the hidden curriculum is termed 'functionalist' because it explains how the structures implicit in the school work as it attempts to promote the objectives and functions of the wider society.

In his work *On What is Learned in School*, Robert Dreeben (1968), another supporter of the functionalist perspective of the hidden curriculum, claimed that family life does not suffice in preparing children for the realities of adult life. Making the school, rather than the classroom, his focal point for his analysis of the hidden curriculum, Dreeben (1968) maintained that aside from being taught the formal curriculum pupils learn to "form transient social relationships, submerge much of their personal identity and accept the legitimacy of categorical treatment" (p.147). Thus, according to Dreeben (1968), values such as independence, achievement and universalism, all of which will be useful later in life, are transmitted to pupils through school requirements. Of course, today many would consider it reasonable to purport that rather than inspiring children to develop these particular values, schools which restrict the actions and thoughts of pupils, subject pupils to the power and control of those in authority and judge pupils' achievements by certain standards of excellence are more likely to promote constraint, hierarchy and inequality – values we certainly do not seek to cultivate in preparation for adult life.

In his work *Inside High School: the Student's World* (1973), Philip Cusick examined the effect of school structures and organisation on high school students and concluded that there are a number of "mutually reinforcing socio-cultural characteristics" which intentionally or unintentionally have effects for pupils. He makes the point that school, from the perspective of the student, "provides an enormous amount of time when students are actually required to do little other than be in attendance and minimally compliant" (Cusick, 1973, p.214). Once the students had left school and gained employment in various organisations, Cusick (1973) established that indeed they were compliant workers and that this was directly related to their attendance at school where they had been expected to comply with the rules and routines set down for them. The fundamental works of Jackson (1968), Dreeben (1968) and Cusick (1973) provide the basis for understanding the hidden curriculum as the way in which the structure of teaching and the social organisation of schools unintentionally transmits cultural values, beliefs and attitudes to pupils.

Neo-Marxist theories on education criticise schools for serving capitalism and perpetuating social class, racial and gender inequality. *Schooling in Capitalist America* by Bowles and Gintis (1976) was valuable in advancing the theory of the hidden curriculum. It examined the relationship between the norms of schooling and the structures of the capitalist system and pointed out that there is a direct relationship between the structural forces of the economy and the complexities of classroom life. The authors argued that there were particular social relations at work in schools including "the hierarchical division of labour between teachers and pupils; the alienated character of pupils' school work. Fragmentation in work is reflected in the institutionalized and often destructive competition among students through continual and ostensibly

meritocratic ranking and evaluation” (Bowles and Gintis, 1976, p. 131) which reproduce the social relations of capitalism through the formal and hidden curriculum. In short, Bowles and Gintis (1976) maintain that the hierarchical nature of the work and relationships in schools encourages pupils to be punctual, compliant and submissive at school and they later, as employees, transfer these skills and attitudes to their relationships in the workplace. Furthermore, they contend that the social class status, race and gender of pupils have implications for their social experiences at school. For Bowles and Gintis (1976), the context of the debate on the hidden curriculum goes beyond the classroom and the school and extends to the wider capitalist society.

Although the writings of Michael Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (1979), *Education and Power* (1982) and *Teachers and Texts* (1986), are within the neo-Marxist tradition, Apple’s theory on the hidden curriculum is presented from a slightly different viewpoint than that of Bowles and Gintis (1976), as he concentrates on the formal taught curriculum and the autonomy of teachers. Initially, Apple (1979) asserted that curriculum knowledge may be high-status or low-status and that certain groups of people, namely those who are socially underprivileged or from an ethnic minority, are excluded from acquiring the high-status knowledge due to the ‘technical’ nature of the knowledge and assessments. In this way, the curriculum is a mechanism for economically categorising pupils and determining their prospective careers. In *Education and Power* (1982), it is Apple’s contention that schools are not only distributors of culture but that they are producers of culture. Culture, he insists, is reproduced in schools through curricular knowledge which is either accepted by the career-oriented petty bourgeoisie or resisted by the underprivileged classes of society. Apple’s work *Teachers and Texts* (1986) explores the ways in which the reproduction of



inequalities occurs through teachers and the use of standardised textbooks in schools. Although primarily concerned with issues of education and reproduction, Apple's work is significant in highlighting how cultural reproduction arises from both the formal curriculum and the complex social dynamics of the hidden curriculum in schools.

In Britain, Paul Willis' work *Learning to Labour* (1977) examined the role of the school in the reproduction of class relations. He observed how the young 'lads' at the centre of his study refused to comply with the authority of the school system and subsequently constructed their own culture in resistance to conformity. Commenting on Willis' study, Lynch (1989) notes that "pupils, such as the 'lads' who 'see through' or 'penetrate' the arbitrariness of the exchange relationship between teacher and pupil, and who give expression to this penetration in forms of resistance, actually experience a sense of power themselves within the school system" (p.17). However, the point is that by engaging in this resistance to authority, these 'lads' were in fact reproducing their working-class status in society as it is probable that they would eventually find themselves in subordinate social positions, working as lower paid manual labourers. Thus, Willis (1977) notes, pupil resistance, rather than school structure, is central to our understanding of how the hidden curriculum may result in the reproduction of cultural inequalities. Although it may be subjected to criticism for its lack of generalisability on the ground that a study of twelve 'lads' does not constitute a representative sample, Willis' *Learning to Labour* is considered an original contribution to theories of educational reproduction and is commended for its illumination of what goes on inside a school and the supposition that a knowledge of school culture is pivotal to understanding the reproduction of inequality in schools.

For Lynch (1989), social inequality is perpetuated in schools through the “universalistic” and “particularistic” hidden curriculum. Schools, Lynch (1989) reasons, are universalistic in the sense that in Ireland there is prescribed curricular content, procedures for assessing knowledge and stipulations in relation to the length of the school day which apply to all pupils regardless of social class, race or gender. Particularistic aspects of school life include streaming, timetabling and reward system and sanction procedures. The practice of streaming pupils according to their academic ability is common in Irish schools (Lynch, 1989) and, not surprisingly, the type of knowledge transmitted to pupils in the upper and middle streams varies considerably from that distributed to pupils in the lower stream. Particularistic aspects of school life such as this, Lynch (1989) claims, serve to strengthen the interests of particular groups who use these to further themselves, while at the same time they are less obvious to or ‘hidden’ from others. Lynch (1989) concludes that the reproduction of inequality through the hidden curriculum is likely to continue until it is challenged by all partners in education.

#### *2.4.3 International Perspectives on Citizenship Education*

States need citizens and citizens are created, not born. States can only survive if they have a citizenry adequate to their nature and ends, and education is the principal tool for the creation of citizens.

(Archard, 2003, p. 89)

Citizenship is a complex, multifaceted concept and it is hardly surprising that citizenship education is a contested subject. While there are a number of different ways of defining and approaching citizenship education (Gutmann, 1987; Callan, 1997, Macedo, 2003, McLaughlin, 1992; 2000 and Kymlicka, 1999), citizenship education is broadly

interpreted as the preparation of children to play a part as active and responsible citizens in democratic society. Detailed descriptions of the role citizens ought to assume in contemporary society (McLaughlin, 1992; Callan, 1997 and Williams, 2006) clearly articulate the viewpoint that citizens have obligations beyond a mere commitment to democracy and advocate not simply equipping pupils with the necessary knowledge and skills to live within a democracy but enabling pupils to develop attitudes and values so they may actively seek to be democratic citizens in the truest sense of the word. McLaughlin (1992) proposes that citizenship is conceptualised and contested along a maximal-minimal continuum. A minimal approach to citizenship, he contends, is based on a legal framework and offers citizens rights which are defined in legal, technical terms. Hence, the citizen is regarded as a private individual entitled to the basic rights associated with citizenship with few obligations other than to vote, abide by the law and help one's neighbour. A maximal approach, on the other hand, considers that citizens have responsibilities to other members of their community and requires a "considerable degree of explicit understanding of democratic principles, values and procedures on the part of the citizen, together with the dispositions and capacities required for participation in democratic citizenship" (McLaughlin, 1992, p.237).

Commenting on his "politics of virtue" which is intent on "creating virtuous citizens", Callan (1997, p.3) notes that moral values, namely care and justice, must be defined in the provision of a liberal democratic education wherein citizens come to view their relationships with fellow citizens in personal rather than legalistic terms and to understand the importance of co-operation in achieving the common good. Furthermore, autonomy, "the capacity to rationally reflect on, and potentially revise, our conceptions of the good life", (Kymlicka, 2001, p. 307) remains central to citizenship. Philosophers,

however, differ on the extent to which citizenship education should teach children to engage in critical reasoning and encourage them to be autonomous individuals. J.S Mill (1859) considered that adults ought to make decisions on behalf of children, mainly because children are not yet capable of rational autonomy. William Galston (1991) believes that tolerance and inclusion must take precedence over autonomy and therefore civic education, as he sees it, should not foster in children the capacity to critically question their parents on their ways of life. Amy Gutmann (1989), on the other hand, is of the opinion that a “democratic society should educate children to be capable of participating in collectively shaping their society” (p.77) and, in doing so, children “must learn not just to behave in accordance with authority but to think critically about authority if they are to live up to the democratic ideal of sharing political sovereignty as citizens” (Gutmann, 1987, p. 51).

Thus, it appears that most are agreed on *what* the role of a true citizen of democratic society entails (Callan, 1997; Gutmann, 1987,). That is, citizenship is more than upholding the basic civic, social, political and economic rights of individuals but involves sharing responsibilities and actively participating in democratic society. *How* we teach pupils about, for and through citizenship is less clear and provides a challenge for all involved in the education of young people.

Heavy burdens arise for the common school from conceptions of common education which embody *inter alia* an account of public values and the public domain which is articulated in terms of (often complex) matters of principle which need to be understood by students, an expansive view of the form and scope of personal autonomy and of democratic citizenship, a view of diversity and its implications which is sensitive to complexity and

subtlety, and an ambition to engage educationally in a significant way with the 'non-public' domain.

(McLaughlin, 2003, p. 129-130)

While most would agree that citizenship education should involve a variety of citizenship elements such as knowledge, skills, attitudes, engagement and participation, there is disagreement about what constitutes an effective approach to citizenship education. Davies, Gregory and Riley (1999) highlight the fact that often there is much confusion around citizenship education and, hence, a lack of action.

We need to recognise that, whatever the common humane impulse that inspires them, citizenship education is not anti-sexist education, is not anti-racist education, is not multicultural education, is not PSE, is not values education, is not environmental education, is not global education, is not even human rights education. (p.126)

We know then what citizenship is *not*. Developing citizenship education is less straightforward given that developing citizenship is less to do with legal frameworks and more to do with cultivating a sense of identity and belonging in society despite the gender, ethnic, social and economic differences which exist among individuals.

#### *2.4.4 An Irish Perspective on Citizenship Education*

There are a number of reasons for the recent intensification of interest in citizenship and in citizenship education in Ireland. Firstly, it is recognised that democracy is fragile and dependent on the active engagement of citizens (Osler and Starkey, 2006). There is public concern about the lack of civic and political engagement in society, evident in the establishment of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2006) and the recent inauguration of a Steering Group on Active Citizenship (2008). Secondly, the increasingly diverse

nature of Irish society in the last decade has raised questions about cultural pluralism and social cohesion. Citizenship education is considered a means of addressing the issues around identity and diversity in light of the fact that “children who understand this unity-diversity tension and act accordingly do not materialise from thin air; they are educated for it” (Banks *et al*, 2005, p. 7). Several other factors including globalisation, a weakening of our sense of national identity, the decline of the Catholic Church and the significant increase in crime rates and drug related offences in Irish society, have compelled us to re-examine the concept of citizenship and consider how citizenship education might be developed in schools. This section sets out to examine the context of citizenship education in Ireland in terms of the formally prescribed curriculum and the informal, hidden curriculum.

#### *2.4.4.1 Primary School Curriculum (1999a)*

In acknowledgement of the dynamic and interactive relationship between education and society, the Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999a) envisages that all pupils will experience a participatory and inclusive curriculum which emphasises active learning and collaboration with others. From the outset, the Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999a) stresses the importance of providing pupils with opportunities to explore and develop understandings of citizenship and the democratic way of life. It is a specific curriculum aim “to enable children to develop a respect for cultural difference, an appreciation of civic responsibility...to develop skills and understanding in order to study their world and its inhabitants and appreciate the interrelationships between them...and to relate to others with understanding and respect” (Government of Ireland, 1999a, p. 34-35). Furthermore, it is a fundamental principle of learning in this curriculum that children be active agents in their own learning. An

examination of some of the curriculum documents is warranted in order to assess the ways in which primary schools might develop citizenship education.

#### *2.4.4.2 The History Curriculum*

In recognition of the culturally pluralistic nature of Irish society, the History curriculum does not propose a single vision of citizenship as a shared history and national pride. In fact, as Waldron (2004) notes, “it is striking that the words ‘Ireland’, ‘Irish’ or ‘country’ do not appear at all in the aims of the History curriculum...while in the named objectives... national identity itself is cited as only one of a number of identities which the child will explore and interrogate” (p. 217). The cultivation of national sentiment and allegiance to Irish language, literature, culture and traditions no longer dominates educational philosophy. Yet, questions remain as to how we, as a democracy, might use history to construct a shared identity and enable children to acquire a balanced understanding of local, Irish and international history. Galston (1991) does not outwardly reject the construction of an identity based on a noble tradition of heroism and nationalism. He ascertains -

Civic education, however, requires a more noble, moralising history: a pantheon of heroes who confer legitimacy on central institutions and constitute worthy objects of emulation. It is unrealistic to believe that more than a few adult citizens of liberal societies will ever move beyond the kind of civic commitment engendered by such pedagogy. (p.244)

Callan (1997) refutes this suggestion, arguing that this approach does not encourage consideration of alternative versions of events but rather engenders an automatic acceptance of the viewpoints presented.

A civic education that is rational rather than rhetorical and morally critical rather than moralising is not obviously a powerful instrument for the arousal of those political affections whose maintenance seems especially difficult in large, pluralist democracies whose present and future are overshadowed by a morally ambiguous past. (p.101)

In arguing for a critical and reasoned approach to the teaching of national history, White (1997) acknowledges that “there is no one true historical account of past events. Historians differ in their interpretations” (p.19). Nevertheless, White (1997) is resolute that the myths that feature extensively in national history must remain part of an education for democracy.

Democratic politics depend on a sense of common identity, as well as a sense of loyalty and attachment to fellow citizens and the constitutional order that connects them (Williams, 2006). Thus, in contrast to preceding curricula, for example, *Curaclam na Bunscoile/ The Primary Teacher's Handbooks* (1971), which centred on promoting nationalism and constructing a national identity, the Primary School Curriculum: History (Government of Ireland, 1999c) cites national identity as only one of a number of identities which children should examine in depth. To begin with, in the Infant classes, the History curriculum offers the child opportunities to explore their personal and family histories and later, in the middle and senior classes, to investigate the experiences of other people in a range of contexts - local, national, European and the wider world. Hence, “in this way history equips children to live as informed and critical citizens” (Government of Ireland, 1999a, p. 50) of the local and wider communities. While identity, a sense of belonging and the recognition of difference are central to the History curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999c), citizenship is not addressed specifically.



Although, as Waldon (2004) points out, “one could lament the absence of a strand or strand unit focusing on democracy, suffrage or human rights. It is, however, replete with opportunities to develop the type of skills, attitudes and dispositions on which the practice of citizenship relies” (p.219-220). Thus, empowering children to behave responsibly and live as informed citizens of their immediate and wider communities, as advocated in the History curriculum, will serve to reinforce the contemporary conception of democratic citizenship.

#### *2.4.4.3 The Geography Curriculum*

The themes of place, space and the environment are central to the Primary School Curriculum: Geography (Government of Ireland, 1999d). Like the History curriculum, the Geography curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999d) also focuses on developing the child’s sense of belonging and encourages them to consider their role in, relationship with and responsibility to a range of communities. While, in the Infant classes, the emphasis is on the child’s immediate environment of the home and the school, pupils in the middle and senior classes explore other environments in Ireland, Europe and the wider world for pupils. Hence, children, having acquired a sense of local identity in the early years, come to see themselves as citizens of Ireland, Europe and the world as they progress through school. Through an exploration of a various places and communities, it is envisaged that children will understand and appreciate the interconnectedness of people and, given the centrality of diversity to the curriculum, develop attitudes of respect and openness. In addition to stressing the importance of the development of skills fundamental to democratic citizenship such as analysis, talk and discussion, deliberation and cooperation, the Geography curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999d) emphasises the obligation on citizens to actively participate in civic society. It also

stipulates that children should come to develop an awareness of the need to care for the environment, evident in the fact that “the idea of an individual and collective role as custodian of the Earth’s environment and resources is embedded in the text” (Waldron, 2004, p. 222). Furthermore, from the outset, it is envisaged that schools will put strategies in place to ensure children can identify and take steps towards improving their physical environment at home, at school and in the community. By encouraging children to assume a shared sense of responsibility and take the necessary action to solve problems, it is anticipated that children will feel a sense of ownership in relation to their learning.

#### *2.4.4.4 Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Curriculum*

While almost all subject areas seek to develop the attitudes and values central to citizenship education, the SPHE Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b) focuses specifically on the preparation of children for active citizenship in democratic society. It aims “to develop in the child a sense of social responsibility, a commitment to active and participative citizenship and an appreciation of the democratic way of life” (Government of Ireland, 1999b, p.9). All strands of the SPHE curriculum teach the skills and attitudes integral to democratic citizenship. However, the discussion that follows focuses specifically on the strand unit ‘Developing Citizenship’, which is part of the strand “Myself and the Wider World”.

The ‘Developing Citizenship’ strand unit of the SPHE curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b) seeks to enable pupils to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and understanding they need to be active, responsible citizens who make a full contribution at home, at school and in the community. At Infant level, pupils learn about themselves

as individuals and become aware that they belong to various groups and communities such as their family and the school. They come to understand their rights, responsibilities and duties as members of their communities. As members of a class they learn that they have personal and social responsibilities, for example, to share, take turns, play fairly and help others. In preparation for their role as active citizens, it is envisaged that all pupils will be involved in determining the class rules so that they may come to agree that the rules are there to help them. It is also expected that pupils at this stage will be given opportunities to take responsibility for themselves and their environment. As pupils move through the school, it is envisaged that their learning will progress beyond understanding their responsibilities for themselves and their immediate environment to learning about the wider world and the interdependence of communities within it (Waldron, 2004). In addition to understanding the meaning of belonging and participation in the context of their classroom, school and local community, it is expected that the children will develop a sense of social justice and moral responsibility in the relation to local, national and global issues. It is also anticipated that, in exploring the diverse nature of the world in which they live, children will come to appreciate and respect the range of national, religious and ethnic identities living in Ireland and realise the importance of mutual understanding and respect for difference in a diverse society. In light of the fact that “a good citizen has a sense of individual and community responsibility in caring for the environment” (Government of Ireland, 1999e, p. 18), the need for pupils to deepen their awareness of the need for environmental care is expressed throughout the curriculum.

Additionally, in preparing them to play an active role as citizens, all pupils are expected to explore, appreciate and actively experience the concept of democracy in a way that is

real and meaningful for them. The Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999e) clearly specifies that teachers must ensure that “the concept of democracy becomes real and meaningful for children as they are given the opportunity to voice opinions, undertake a variety of responsibilities, reach group decisions by consensus, listen to different points of view, work both as an individual and as a member of a group and be involved in school decision making (p. 17). In other words, there is a clear expectation that all children will be involved in making the class rules, engage in talk and discussion, participate in the decision-making process and make their contributions at assemblies and other whole school events.

While the SPHE curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b) and the ‘Developing Citizenship’ strand unit are a welcome development, there is a danger that because the main principles of citizenship education are specifically addressed within SPHE that teachers may consider the development of citizenship to be confined to one curricular area rather than as central to all curricular practice. However, as Walsh (2007) reminds us “curriculum tends to overlap with pedagogy, and more so than usual in DE (Diversity Education) and CE (Citizenship Education) with their high premium on life-skills and virtues” (p.21). Furthermore, as Devine, Lodge and Deegan (2004) point out, “issues to do with democracy, voice and respect/care should not be confined to SPHE alone but should inform the full scope and sequence of the curriculum in action” (p.253). It is envisaged that a cross-curricular approach will be taken to develop children’s appreciation of a democracy, to develop a sense of social and personal responsibility and to teach them the importance of community involvement and indeed, as Waldron (2004) asserts, “it is plausible to argue that a combination of history, geography and SPHE as envisaged in these documents provide primary education with a coherent and well-

balanced blueprint for citizenship education in the twenty-first century” (p.224). It is proposed that there are, in fact, three contexts in which the curriculum may provide children with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to be active and responsible citizens – through the discrete SPHE curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b), through other subject areas including History and Geography and through the organisation/management structures and activities taking place within a school. Having examined the Primary School Curriculum in relation to SPHE, History and Geography it is necessary to explore how citizenship might be incorporated into the ethos and culture of primary schools.

#### *2.4.5 School Ethos*

School ethos is the atmosphere that emerges from the interaction of a number of aspects of school life, including teaching and learning, management and leadership, the use of images and symbols, rituals and practices, as well as goals and expectations.

(Norman, 2003, p. 2)

School ethos refers to the intangible character and spirit that permeates the daily activities of school life and underpins relationships in terms of how people interact with each other within the school community and the wider community. Williams (2000) points out that “every human institution has its own ethos in the sense of a dominant, pervading spirit or character that finds its expression in the habits of behaviour of those who are part of it” (p.74). Thus, ethos is real and lives in schools, amidst the teaching and learning taking place. After all, “when lessons are forgotten, and differential calculus, the periodic table of the elements and irregular verbs have become shadowy memories, the ethos of the school we attended can remain part of our consciousness”

(Williams, 2000, p. 76). Every school has its own distinct ethos which, though intangible, can often be felt upon walking through the doors of a school. Of course, the ethos of a school may or may not in reality reflect the mission statement of the school, given the complexity and dynamics of the relationships and processes at work in schools. Historically, education in Ireland was largely provided by the Catholic Church and the Catholic bishops remain the patrons of 93% of Irish primary schools today. Given that “a school with a religious ethos aims, as a matter of policy, to foster in young people a commitment to a particular religion and the religion in question is reinforced as part of the school’s ethos” (Williams, 2000, p.76), the issue of ethos in Irish primary schools has always been addressed within the realm of religious education. All documents on education since the Second Vatican Council in 1962 express the fact that the Catholic Church considers education to be about the development of the whole person in schools where the ethos ensures the integration of faith and culture and encourages openness and dialogue among the school community. Ethos cannot, as Williams (2000) rightly points out, be imposed on a school. Yet, the Irish Catholic Church’s presentations to the National Education Convention (1993) claimed the right to safeguard the ethos of schools -

Such a right includes the general direction and government of the school, the ordering of religious instruction and worship and the appointment of teachers. For the State to insist on management structures which would inhibit the patrons/trustees in the exercise of their responsibility to guarantee the denominational and religious character of the school would mean...depriving the Catholic community of its unambiguous right to determine the ethos and philosophy of their schools.

(as cited in Norman, 2003, p. 12)

Clearly, there is a disparity in the meaning of ethos as described in the Catholic Church's documents *The Catholic School* (Catholic Church, 1977) and *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (Catholic Church, 1998) and that which was outlined by the bishops in Irish Catholic Church's presentation at the National Education Convention in 1993. Norman (2003) offers a concise encapsulation of this difference in understanding of ethos –

On the one hand, the Vatican documents articulate an understanding of ethos based on the need for dialogue of faith and culture, dealing with what actually goes on in a school. On the other hand, the Catholic trustees in Ireland see their role primarily in terms of maintaining an ethos which remains faithful to the trust that they have received from the founders of Catholic Schools. (p. 14)

It is evident that the Irish Catholic Church fails to recognise that ethos arises naturally from the actions of and relationships between those engaged in the daily activities of the school itself. Irwin (2005, p. 41-42) contends that this attitude towards ethos is reminiscent of Freire's 'banking approach' to education whereby values are 'transmitted' or 'deposited' through the top-down hierarchical approach to policy. Such was the powerful force of the Catholic Church that it exerted tremendous influence over schools. Teachers, certainly in the past, felt compelled to comply unquestioningly with the paternalistic ethos adopted by the Irish Catholic schools and, as we know, those who are never given the opportunity to question authority or make autonomous choices "live their lives as instrument of another's will, either because they see themselves as naturally subordinate to the authoritative other or because their upbringing has disabled them from seriously entertaining any choice repugnant to the other's will" (Callan, 2002, p.133). It is hardly surprising that consequently "teachers do not challenge the status quo in

Catholic schools and are slow to bring themselves and their students into dialogue with the tradition of the school” (Norman, 2003, p.15). The ethos of a school has significant implications for the development of citizenship education. After all, if we are to empower children to be competent, autonomous citizens who ask questions, analyse information and think critically, then an ethos of partnership which encourages all members of the school community – pupils, parents, teachers, the Board of Management and other agencies - to exercise their rights and responsibilities and partake in decision-making must infuse our schools.

### *2.5 Conclusion*

Citizenship is not just a certain status, defined by set of rights and responsibilities. It is also an identity, an expression of one’s membership in a political community.

(Kymlicka and Norman, 1994, p.301)

The concept of citizenship and what it means to be a citizen in the Irish context has been at the top of the political, social and cultural agenda in recent years and has raised questions about how best to educate children to participate actively as citizens in our increasingly complex and rapidly changing society. This chapter has documented some of the complexities and challenges inherent in the daunting task of bringing about active citizenship. The concept of children as citizens is not unproblematic. In seeking to empower children to be competent, fully-fledged citizens with the capacity to function autonomously in society, it is anticipated that schools have begun to address ways to cultivate the skills and values of active citizenship. It is paramount that pupils are presented with a participatory and inclusive curriculum which will develop the kind of skills and capabilities which will enable our children to be active, engaged citizens willing to participate in society. Furthermore, it is imperative that teachers concentrate



on developing a classroom climate which encourages children to form opinions, think critically, question openly and have opportunities to practice democratic activities, so as to foster the development of citizenship education.

That schools are required to teach citizenship education is formally set out in the Primary School Curriculum (1999b). Yet, there is little evidence available on how successfully schools have managed to implement the prescribed curriculum content to date. Hence, there is plenty of scope for research into the development of citizenship education in Irish primary schools since the inauguration of the Primary School Curriculum (1999b). From the review of the literature, it is clear that there is a need to explore children's perceptions of their schooling experience and their status as citizens, ascertain the views and attitudes of teachers in relation to the development of citizenship education and obtain parents' perspectives of citizenship education at home and at school. In short, the development of citizenship education in one particular primary school was the focus of this study.

## **Chapter 3: The Research Design**

### *3.1 Introduction*

This chapter offers a rationale for the research study undertaken. Initially, the aims of the study are outlined. A short justification for choosing case study as the most appropriate methodology for this inquiry will then be provided. A brief description of the research context, that is the school under scrutiny and the surrounding community, will be given. An outline of the Green-Schools programme (An Taisce, 2003) which promotes the development of active citizenship in schools, and is currently being implemented in this particular primary school, is included in the appendix (see Appendix A). An explanation for engaging with each group of participants, children, teachers and parents, will then be offered and the various methods used to elicit the information from each group of participants will be outlined. Finally, the ethical dilemmas of undertaking research with human participants, particularly children, will be considered.

### *3.2 The aims of the research study*

The main aim of this study was to investigate the development of citizenship education in one particular primary school by ascertaining the viewpoints, experiences and attitudes of a representative body of the school community – children, their parents and teachers. This study endeavoured to understand how a particular group of children experience citizenship and democracy at home and at school, appreciate the barriers which impede their parents from taking a more active role in their community and identify the challenges which their teachers face in effectively developing citizenship education in the school and in the community. The primary focus was on the children's thinking about and experience of citizenship education. The views, understandings and experiences of a representative group of parents and the teachers in this school, in

relation to citizenship and education, were also explored in order to obtain a broader picture of what is understood and practiced in this particular primary school, in terms of citizenship education.

### 3.3 *Case Study*

Given that the feelings and views of pupils, their parents and teachers about citizenship education was the main focus of this study and that “children and teachers in classrooms are conscious, sentient and purposive human beings” (Berliner, 2002, p.20), a case study was considered the most appropriate strategy of inquiry for the proposed research study. Commenting on the reason for focusing specifically on one instance, Denscombe (2003) points out that “there may be insights to be gained from looking at the individual case that can have wider implications, and importantly, that would not have come to light through the use of a research strategy that tried to cover a large number of instances. The aim is to illuminate the general by looking at the particular” (p.30).

Additionally, a case study approach was considered the most suitable strategy for this study as it would enable me to deal with the subtleties and intricacies of a complex social situation. In particular, it would allow me to use a variety of research methods in order to capture the complex reality of the school under scrutiny through the collection of data from interviews with teachers and parents and focus group participatory sessions with the pupils within this school community. Given that I wanted to assess the current situation with regard to citizenship education, the case study approach did not put pressure on me to impose controls or change circumstances. Rather, it simply allowed me to discover important meanings and gain a deeper understanding of the experience from the perspective of the whole school community.

Case studies, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) point out, “strive to portray what it is like to be in a particular situation, to catch the close-up reality and thick description of participants’ lived experiences of, thoughts about and feelings for a situation” (p.182). Hence, it was my intention to provide a rich description and critical analysis of issues relevant to the development of citizenship education, by focusing on individual members of the school community and seeking to understand their perception of events. The case study approach to research is often criticised for its failure to produce data which are generally representative and the results of small-scale studies are often rejected as being too insignificant to be valid. However, it is arguable that although many of the findings of this particular study may well, in fact, be unique to the medium-sized, rural primary school under observation, some of the findings may be applicable to other medium-sized, rural primary schools in Ireland, depending on the operational features and profiles of the other schools in question. In order to validate the accuracy of the findings, the principles of qualitative research were considered as part of the design process. These included credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability (see Appendix B). The next section explores the context of this research study.

### *3.4 The Research Context*

#### *3.4.1 The School Environment*

The focus of this research study was the development of citizenship education in one Catholic, co-educational primary school. The school is situated in a small rural community some seven miles from a large town in the North-East of the country. The town-land itself is considered somewhat unusual in that the local facilities and amenities are dispersed a considerable distance away from each other. For example, the church is two miles in one direction from the school and the credit union is one mile in the

opposite direction. The football field and hall are a further two miles away in another direction from both the school and the church. There is no longer a post office in the locality. There is no central point in this community. That the services of this town-land are not in close proximity to each other, in fact they stand in isolation, may or may not impact on the sense of community people feel in this parish. All homes in the area are privately owned. There are no local authority housing estates and very few rental properties in the vicinity. As a result, the population of this sprawling town-land is entirely indigenous Irish. According to the Central Statistics Office (2006), "the housing profile of non-Irish nationals is very different to that of the Irish. While owner occupancy continues to be the favoured status for Irish and UK headed households the picture for other non-Irish nationals is quite different...Almost eighty per cent of households headed by persons from the accession states were in rented accommodation" (p.13). The lack of rental property available in this particular town-land accounts for the absence of people from other ethnic backgrounds living in the area and, thus, attending the local primary school.

The school was built in 1970. The architecture of the building is such that each of the six main classrooms has its own door which gives direct access to the outdoors. However, there is no corridor connecting the classrooms to each other. There is no hall in the school, nor is there a reception area or central meeting point. Two prefabs have recently been erected to cater for the increase in student population. Finally, the parents of the children attending this particular primary school are almost all middle-higher income wage earners, thus the social background of the pupil population may be described as 'economically comfortable' and of indigenous origin.

It is of relevance to this study that the school under scrutiny is registered to participate in the Green-Schools programme (An Taisce, 2003) as the children, parents and teachers interviewed made constant referencing to its existence within the school. The Green-Schools programme (An Taisce, 2003) is an environmental education programme which aims to develop pupils' awareness of environmental issues and to take responsibility by caring for their environment. Whilst the programme primarily emphasises environmental awareness and care, it also encourages those involved in the programme to develop a strong sense of active citizenship as they work collaboratively to achieve a common goal. The programme in itself is not the focus of the study, rather the aim of this study is to understand how children experience citizenship education, how teachers interpret the curriculum and how parents envisage citizenship education is taught both at home and at school.

### 3.5 *Participants*

Firstly, the children were at the centre of my study. Presenting children with opportunities to express their feelings and voice their opinions is central to democratic citizenship. Thus, the views, understandings and experiences of the twenty-four participating children from Senior Infants, Second class, Fourth class and Sixth class were central to this study. This "in part reflects a move away from seeing children as passive recipients of adult socialisation, to a recognition that children are social actors in their own right" (O'Kane, 2000, p. 136). Secondly, in recognition of the primary role parents play in their child's education and the greater emphasis placed on parental involvement in their child's education in recent years, eliciting the views of a representative body of parents was considered an imperative. Finally, in exploring the development of citizenship education in this particular school, consultation with the nine

teachers including the principal working in this school was considered essential. Accordingly, it was intended that a participative and collaborative research study would be undertaken with the children, their parents and teachers who make up this particular school community.

### *3.5.1 Children*

Children's daily lives, and thus childhood as an institution, are structured by adult views of how those lives should be lived and of what childhood is.

(Mayall, 2000, p. 120)

In the past, research relating to children focused on "the study of what children will become" (Morrow and Richards, 1996, p.92) rather than how children, as people in their own right, experience their world. Children were regarded as passive beings and childhood was simply a transitory time of preparation for the future when children would hopefully advance successfully into adulthood. In the last twenty years or so, this view of children as adults-in-the-making has been radically challenged.

The child is conceived of as a person, a status, a course of action, a set of needs, rights or differences – in sum, as a social actor...this new phenomenon, the 'being' child, can be understood in its own right. It does not have to be approached from an assumed shortfall of competence, reason or significance.

(James, Jenks and Proutt, 1998, p. 207)

Of late, it is recognised that children are autonomous people with the capacity to participate actively in their environment and with the right to be taken seriously as participants in education.

This research study intended to establish children's understandings, views and experiences of citizenship education. A total of twenty-four children including six children from Senior Infants, six children from Second Class, six children from Fourth Class and six children from Sixth Class participated in this research study. The children were interviewed as class groups and age-appropriate participatory sessions were designed by the researcher. Each of the four groups was comprised of male and female representatives from the class to ensure gender balance. The children were selected to participate in this study by their class teachers. The nature of the study and what it would entail was outlined to all the children at the outset and they were then asked to reflect on whether they would be willing to participate in the study prior to giving their consent to do so.

We know that "developing a democratic research practice with children implies a research relationship that is reciprocal and honest and a research process that maximises children's access to decision making" (Waldron, 2006, p.97). Hence, from the outset, this study endeavoured to go beyond simply regarding children as research subjects and aimed to engage with the children as participants so that "the researcher, by moving the focus of interest from children as subjects to children as people, can show respect for children as citizens, not as adults in the making" (Ring, 2000, p.1). Thus, the researcher devised a multi-method approach in order to listen to the children about their lives in a way that is participatory, adaptable and spontaneous. In seeking to encourage the children to develop attitudes and form opinions, express and exchange their views and make sense of issues related to citizenship through dialogue and interaction with others, the characteristics of democratic citizenship were upheld in these focus group sessions which aimed to investigate the children's thoughts and understanding of citizenship.



Furthermore, it was hoped that engaging children as participants in this way, in order to elicit their views on citizenship and themselves as citizens within the school community, would promote a sharing of power between the children and the adults in their lives.

### *3.5.2 Parents*

As the child's first educator, parents have the most significant role to play in their child's learning. Yet, when their children start school, many parents relinquish responsibility for their child's education to the school, feeling that they themselves are less informed about the curriculum and trusting that the trained professionals are the best people to educate their children. The Primary School Curriculum (1999a) acknowledges the central role of parents in their child's education and reminds us "the life of the home is the most potent factor in his or her development during the primary school years (Government of Ireland, 1999a, p.21). Yet, many schools, in line with tradition, do not meaningfully engage with parents with the specific purpose of empowering them to take an active role in the teaching and learning of their child. As a result, parents may feel powerless to voice their opinions or effect change in relation to their child's education. Given that citizenship education is about the knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes that children develop at home, at school and in the community, it was considered essential that views and experiences of a representative group of parents would be ascertained as part of this research study. The principal suggested that he would list a number of parents, both male and female, who might be interested in participating in the study on the basis that they would be available for interview during the day as it was felt many parents were unlikely to be in a position to participate in the study due to work commitments. Subsequently, seven parents – five female and two male - agreed to participate in the study.

### 3.5.3 *Teachers*

Citizenship education is one of the main ways of preparing children for participation in democratic society and the role of the school in developing citizenship in liberal democratic society is crucial. In addition to promoting equality, justice and respect, teachers at primary school level are obliged “to develop in the child a sense of social responsibility, a commitment to active and participative citizenship and an appreciation of the democratic way of life” (Government of Ireland, 1999b, p.9). Yet, citizenship education poses many challenges for schools. Potter (2000) identifies six challenges that face schools and their communities as they plan, implement and develop citizenship education. These include leadership, curriculum development, professional development, management, context (finance, buildings, governance and partnership) and inspection. Clearly, a genuine understanding of citizenship necessitates going beyond the formal curriculum of teaching children citizenship education and extends to the creation of opportunities for children to develop their citizenship skills by engaging in dialogue, becoming involved in decision-making and assuming responsibilities. However, we know little about teachers’ understandings of and attitudes towards citizenship education. It may be suggested that, in many schools, the time devoted to citizenship education is irregular and infrequent in light of the fact that SPHE, of which ‘developing citizenship’ is just a small part of the curriculum, is allocated just thirty minutes per week on the school timetable. An exploration of the development of citizenship education in this primary school was considered an imperative. All of the teachers, including the principal, in this primary school agreed to participate in this study of the development of citizenship education.

### 3.6 *Data Collection Methods*

The human person was the primary collection instrument within this study. The data were the perceptions of people within this school environment. The focus was on ensuring the design and procedures gain real, rich and deep data. Thus, group interviewing sessions which adopted aspects of the 'community of enquiry' approach and involved the use of a range of participatory tools with the children, and in-depth structured interviews with both teachers and parents, were considered to be the most useful ways of gathering the required data in this particular study. This piece of research could essentially be described as interpretative and there is no escaping the personal interpretation of the researcher as the views and perceptions of the participants were recorded and analysed. However, every effort was made to eliminate bias and minimise the formation of value judgements as far as possible throughout the data collection process.

#### 3.6.1 *Group Interviewing with Children*

As group interviews are generally regarded as a more informal, non-threatening alternative to the formal, structured interview, this method of data collection was selected for the study on the basis that group interviewing is an appropriate way to explore the understandings, opinions and attitudes of young children. Although it was recognised that some children may attempt to dominate the conversation and that not all pupils are equally articulate and perceptive (Cresswell, 2003), the purpose of group interviewing, in this instance, was to gain insight into the children's perspectives on citizenship education through an open, receptive and emergent process. In light of the fact that "children need others to become themselves and to understand the selves they become" (Russell, 2004, p. ix), it was proposed that the children ought to be facilitated to

interact with and engage with others in a way which allows them to think, reflect and reason, to agree and disagree and to value the opinions of others. Thus, aspects of the 'community of enquiry' approach which creates a space for thinking, questioning and open-ended discussion by the children, and allows the researcher to perceptively advance the children's thinking to a more reflective level, were considered an appropriate tool for generating the data required.

### *3.6.2 Children as members of a 'community of enquiry'*

The 'Community of Enquiry' approach to learning stems from the writings of Matthew Lipman (1991), who pioneered the Philosophy for Children programme, which encourages children to think critically and democratically about relevant philosophical issues. This programme, now taught internationally as a thinking skills programme, has been adapted and modified by teachers and researchers in various countries to include, for example, the use of children's literature, pictures or snippets from the media as stimuli to engage the children and extend their thinking skills. It was decided that the format of the Community of Enquiry approach in its entirety may be too complex for the younger children participating in this study and so while some of the basic principles of Community of Enquiry were applied, these were modified to accommodate the capacities and abilities of the children. The aim of this study was not to specifically promote philosophical enquiry, the children were not actively encouraged to raise philosophical questions and a formal set of written rules establishing the rules for discussion was not drafted at the outset. Nevertheless, the researcher/teacher and the groups of children may be considered a Community of Enquiry in the sense of coming together to think, express opinions, listen, question, reflect and discuss. Thus, some of

the basic principles of the Community of Enquiry approach were used to encourage reflection and discussion among the children in the participatory sessions.

In keeping with the format of Lipman's strategy, the children were seated in a circle in order to be inclusive and to ensure that all members of the group could make eye contact with each other. A focusing activity (photography) or a stimulus (story/letters/flashcards) was used at the beginning of each session to engage the children's interest and to act as a springboard for questioning and discussion. For example, having retold the story of *Hansel and Gretel* as a group, the children listened to a letter, read aloud by a member of the group, written by Hansel to the children of Second Class, relaying his concerns that his sister Gretel is being bullied and seeking the advice of the children as to what steps he might take to intervene and eliminate the bullying behaviour of other children. A discussion on justice and fairness, rights and responsibilities ensued. The Community of Enquiry approach to Thinking Time in Ireland envisages less direct teacher intervention (Donnelly, 1994; Russell, 2000). Whilst the researcher endeavoured to ensure the needs of the children were met by consulting them on the ways in which they might like to present their views, for example, by using photography, mapping and decision-making charts, the participatory sessions were planned in order to ensure that topics linked to the focus of interest in this study, citizenship education, would almost certainly arise in the course of discussion. An outline of the plan for the sessions with the children is presented below.

### 3.6.3 Multi-Method Approach

In seeking to use a framework for research that would be participatory and reflexive, a multi-method approach for listening to the children express their views and recount their

experiences of citizenship was devised by the researcher. The methodology for this study was based on the Mosaic approach (Clark and Moss, 2001) which proposes the use of different techniques to gain young children's views and experiences of their lives in a particular early childhood institution. The participatory tools and techniques selected were considered fun and suitable for the age groups of the children involved. Given that the methods selected placed great emphasis on the active representation of opinions and ideas, it was anticipated that valuable information would be gained as the children partially set the agenda and guided the research process. Throughout the participatory sessions carried out with the children, I assumed a leading role in that I planned the format the participatory sessions might take and presented this to the children. However, the data collection methods were negotiated and sometimes rejected by the children. For example, the younger children decided they would like undertake a photographic tour of the school, while the older children rejected the idea of undertaking a writing activity in which they might explicate why they like/dislike certain aspects of school. There were times during the participatory sessions when I took my lead from the children and allowed them to direct the conversation as I wanted the children to feel free to raise issues of concern to them. For the most part, however, I led the discussions by questioning, probing and prompting the children as they offered opinions and relayed their experiences of citizenship. The forty-five minute to one-hour sessions took place in the afternoon within the school day and on the school premises. The sessions were tape-recorded with the children's consent. Having met with and agreed the framework for the research with each group of the children, the format that each of the sessions took is outlined below.

#### 3.6.3.1 Senior Infants

The first meeting began with a tour of the school. It was explained to the children that I wanted to know more about their experiences of the school, hence, it was decided that we would go on a tour of the school so that they could show and tell me what different places of the school meant to them. The children led the tour and decided to record their ideas using disposable cameras. Photography was selected as a research method on the basis that taking photographs would engage the children's interests and give the children control of the research process. Also, the tangible nature of the photographs would help focus attention and discussion on the topic at a future date (Cook and Hess, 2007). The children opted to document their ideas by making drawings on their arrival back to the classroom. This 'walking interview' encouraged the children to talk more freely about their experiences of school.

The second meeting focused on mapping the photographs they had taken the previous week. The children excitedly looked at the photographs and, through discussion, recalled their tour of the school. They selected the photographs they would use to map their feelings and ideas about school. They animatedly discussed the significance of the places/people they chose to photograph, for example, their favourite places, least favourite places and roles of people in the school and later decided to work in pairs to map their photographs. The researcher refrained from taking part in the discussion as far as possible in order to avoid directing the children's thoughts and contributions.

The third session was based on a lesson outlined in *Teaching Citizenship through Traditional Tales* (Ellis & Grogan, 2003). A fairytale, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, was the stimulus for the third meeting. One child retold the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. Another child read aloud a letter which 'arrived' for them in the school

post earlier that day from Goldilocks' Mammy and outlined the fact that Goldilocks would not do as she is told (see Appendix C). The focus of this session was on *rules*. The children were asked to consider why we have rules, the rules in place in their classroom and the school, those rules they agree or disagree with, the extent to which *Goldilocks* should have to do as she is told, the extent to which *Goldilocks* should get to have her say, the extent to which they get to have their say in the classroom or school, whether they listen to their teacher and whether their teacher listens to them. The transcript of one of the participatory sessions carried out with Senior Infants is included in the appendix (see Appendix D).

#### 3.6.3.2 Second Class

Like Senior Infants, the first meeting began with a tour of the school. The children opted to use cameras to take photographs in order to convey their perspectives and opinions on the school environment. The second meeting also involved a mapping activity whereby the children mapped their photographs of the school and talked about the significance of the photographs. They also drew their favourite place/least favourite place. A group discussion ensued which offered more insight into the thoughts and perspectives of the children. The third session was based on a lesson from *Teaching Citizenship through Traditional Tales* (Ellis & Grogan, 2003). A fairytale, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, was the stimulus for this third session. One child retold the story of *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Another child then read aloud a letter which has 'arrived' for them in the school post earlier that day from Jack (see Appendix E). In this letter, Jack explained that now he and his mother have acquired a lot of money, he feels he ought to be financially rewarded for tidying his bedroom. His mother, however, disagrees. The focus of this session was on *responsibilities*. The children were asked to reflect on whether Jack



should be rewarded for doing jobs around the house or whether he should just be helpful. They considered their responsibilities to those they live with, their responsibilities at school, the responsibilities of others at school, the extent to which they would like more responsibility at home and at school and the form this might take. The transcript of one of the participatory sessions carried out with Second Class is included in the appendix (see Appendix F).

#### *3.6.3.3 Fourth Class*

The first meeting focused on the home environment. The children were asked to consider their role in the decision-making process at home and a discussion ensued whereby the children talked about the various decisions they make/do not make at home. It was agreed that the children would make a decision-making chart (O’Kane, 2000) and the children themselves decided that they would use a ‘traffic-light’ system to indicate their opinions. The children elected to work in pairs for this activity. They were given sheets of A1 paper on which to formulate their decision-making charts. It was decided that each chart would have three columns. The first column stated some of the various decisions made concerning them at home, for example, ‘when I do my homework’, ‘what I wear’ and ‘when I go to bed’. In the second column, the children recorded who they felt makes that decision, for example, ‘Mammy’, ‘Daddy’ or ‘me’. In the third column, the children indicated how much say they get in that decision by drawing a circle and colouring it in red if they felt they get no say in making the decision, yellow if they felt they get some say in making the decision and green if they felt they get all the say in making the decision. In this way, the children, through talk and discussion, built a visual picture of the sorts of decisions made at home, presenting their perspective of *their* role/input in the decisions made at home. At our second meeting, the children

considered their role in the decision-making process at school by completing another decision-making chart, which, similar to the decision-making chart drafted in the previous session, built a visual picture of the sorts of decisions made at school concerning them and presenting their perspectives of their involvement/input into decisions made at school.

The third session was based on a lesson outlined in *Teaching Citizenship through Traditional Tales* (Ellis & Grogan, 2003). A fairytale, *Hansel and Gretel*, was the stimulus for this third session. One child opted to retell the story of *Hansel and Gretel* and another child then read aloud a letter which ‘arrived’ to the school earlier that day from Hansel. This letter outlined Hansel’s worries about the fact that Gretel is being bullied at school (see Appendix G). The focus of this session was on *rights* and *responsibilities*. They considered what Gretel might do about this problem and the rights Gretel has in going to school. The children were asked to consider, as a group, whether Hansel has a responsibility to stand up for Gretel and if it matters whether he does so or not. I then asked the children about their rights as children. I also asked them if they knew what a ‘citizen’ is and what the word ‘democracy’ might mean in order to establish the children’s understanding of these concepts. A discussion on democracy in school and democratic decision-making ensued.

The fourth session involved a diamond ranking exercise (Christensen & James, 2000) based on the UNCRC. The children decided to split into two groups of three girls and three boys for this activity. Each group was asked to consider the meaning of thirteen statements of rights for children and, following some group discussion, they had to arrange these in a grid in order of importance. Some of the statements of rights, for

example, included 'every child has the right to life', 'children have the right to enough food and clean water', 'children have the right to a free education', 'every child has the right to a name and a nationality' and 'children have the right to play'. Each group had to work together to decide which 'right' should go at the top of the diamond frame as the most important, which 'right' should go at the bottom of the diamond frame as the least important and the ones in between. Once the group had reached a consensus on the placement of their cards they then had to feed back their grid to the 6<sup>th</sup> class group, explaining the placement of their cards. The transcript of one of the participatory sessions carried out with Fourth Class is included in the appendix (see Appendix H).

#### 3.6.3.4 Sixth Class

Like the pupils of Fourth Class, the first meeting with Sixth Class focused on the home environment. The children reflected on their role, as well as the role of others, in the decision-making process at home by discussing and completing a decision-making chart, which again built a visual picture of the sorts of decisions made at home concerning themselves and presented their perspective of *their* role/input in the decisions made at home. At the second meeting, the children considered their role in the decision-making process at school (group decision) by completing a decision-making chart, which, similar to the decision-making chart drafted in the previous session, built a visual picture of the sorts of decisions made at school concerning children and presented their perspective of their involvement/input into decisions made at school.

The third session was based on a lesson outlined in *Teaching Citizenship through Traditional Tales* (Ellis & Grogan, 2003). A fairytale, *Little Red Riding Hood*, was the stimulus for this session. One child briefly retold the story of *Little Red Riding Hood*.

Another child read aloud a letter which ‘arrived’ for them to the school earlier that day from Red Riding Hood’s Mother (see Appendix I). In this letter, she told the children how she is worried about Red Riding Hood’s Grandmother’s safety and is of the opinion that Granny should come to live with them. Red Riding Hood’s Granny, however, does not wish to leave the comforts of her own home. The focus of this session was on rights and responsibilities. The children were invited to deliberate the rights and responsibilities Red Riding Hood and her family have towards Granny, Granny’s rights and responsibilities, the way in which Granny might feel about this situation, the advantages and disadvantages of living together for Granny, for Red Riding Hood and her Mother and the extent to which it is right to force people to do things they do not wish to do. The children were then asked to consider their rights as children and as citizens. They talked about the laws which exist to protect the rights of children and the necessity of these. The children were asked about their responsibilities to those at home/school/local community/wider world and they reflected on the degree to which they are given the opportunity to assume responsibility at home and school. The children were asked what they understood by the term ‘democracy’ and whether they felt that decisions concerning them are made democratically at home and at school. The fourth session involved the same diamond ranking exercise, based on the UNCRC, as outlined above. The children were asked to consider the meaning of thirteen statements of rights for children and, following some discussion and negotiation as a group, they had to arrange these in a grid in order of importance. They then fed back their grid to the 4<sup>th</sup> class group, explaining the placement of their cards. The transcript of one of the participatory sessions carried out with Sixth Class is included in the appendix (see Appendix J).

### *3.6.4 Interviews with Teachers and Parents*

Since “the use of interviews to illuminate salient features of culture and human experience has a long and established history” (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p. 80), one-to-one interviews were considered an appropriate way of eliciting the views of the nine members of teaching staff and a representative group of seven parents in this school community on citizenship education. In this case-study, it was decided to conduct one-to-one interviews rather than to facilitate focus groups for a number of reasons. Firstly, one-to-one interviews would be relatively easy to arrange in comparison to focus groups and, given the pressures of work and time constraints on people, it was decided to conduct the interviews at times which best suited the participants. Secondly, one-to-one interviews would offer more flexibility than group interviews and thus interviewing one person at a time enabled the researcher to explore the attitudes, perceptions and experiences of the participants in greater depth than a focus group might have permitted. Also, in seeking the best method of collecting information, it was noted that the issues under scrutiny in this case study may be considered sensitive and controversial. Thus, it was anticipated that one-to-one interviews would yield more specific information as clarification could be sought and participants who may not consider raising particular issues in an open forum may have been more prepared to discuss these issues in a confidential environment. Finally, one-to-one interviews were likely to be easier to control. Given that the researcher was intent on gathering specific information, it was decided that one-to-one interviews would allow the researcher to concentrate on assimilating the ideas of one person at a time rather than trying to discern what was being said by a number of people who may well interrupt each other and talk simultaneously in a group situation. After all, certain people may have tended to dominate the group interviews and others may not have got the opportunity to voice their

opinions. By conducting one-to-one interviews, all participants had the opportunity to voice their own opinions. Of course, it is acknowledged that conducting one-to-one interviews was demanding in terms of the time needed to collect and analyse the data. For the purposes of this particular study, however, it was considered necessary to engage with participants on a one-to-one basis in order to produce better data.

An interview is a conversation with a purpose (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). Thus, a structured schedule of questions was distributed to all teachers and parents in advance of the interviews in an attempt to mitigate any reservations people may have had with regard to being interviewed as part of a study. However, it was decided to make extensive use of open-ended questioning to enable the researcher to explore new avenues, probe salient aspects of the topic at hand and clarify the points being made by the interviewee so that “the depth of conversation moves beyond surface talk to a rich discussion of thoughts and feelings” (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p. 80). By endeavouring to ensure, as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) put it, that questions were not “offensive, intrusive, misleading, biased, misguided, irritating, inconsiderate, impertinent or obtruse” (p. 246), it was anticipated that all of the participants would be enabled to reflect on the issues around citizenship education, express their attitudes and experiences in their own way and advance their ideas. It is important to note that the interview schedule distributed to teachers varied slightly depending on their role in the school. The principal and learning support/resource teachers were given a different schedule than that distributed to class teachers as some of the questions included in the interviews with class teachers were not applicable to the principal/learning support/resource teachers. The transcript of an interview conducted with one teacher is included in the appendix (see Appendix K).

The interview schedule distributed to the participating parents also differed slightly than that circulated to the teachers in that questions relating directly to the curriculum were omitted and some questions relating to developing citizenship education at home were included. The transcript of an interview conducted with one parent is included in the appendix (see Appendix L).

### *3.6.5 The Role of the Researcher*

My personal history includes several years as a primary school teacher. My interest in citizenship education stems, not only from my observations of and unease about the large numbers of community-based associations in decline in Ireland, but also from the challenges I face as a teacher in my efforts to teach active citizenship and democratic participation. While citizenship education programmes undoubtedly present numerous possibilities and opportunities for the development of civic values and habits, ultimately it is the ethos of schools, the human relationships and the processes and events which determine the success or failure of the programmes in promoting citizenship awareness and promoting active engagement among all members of the school community.

Acting on the advice of Bell (1987) who urges that “permission to carry out an investigation must always be sought at an early stage” (p.42), it was necessary to enlist the support and involvement of all three groups from the outset in order to gather and record data on the school-based experiences of pupils, parents and teachers. As a teacher undertaking research within my own and immediate situation, termed “backyard” research (Glesne and Psehkin, 1992), it is accepted that my ability to raise divisive issues and reveal difficult information may have been compromised. Furthermore, the situation under scrutiny is my immediate working environment and, therefore, steps had to be

taken to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of my colleagues and the pupils and parents of the school. It was also recognised that this research study would undoubtedly make demands on me as a teacher in terms of time, energy and resources – all of which are often in short supply during the school day. However, in light of the fact that “there is insufficient educational research that is focused on the classroom and that supplies practical knowledge which can be used to improve the quality of teaching” (Hammersley, 2002, p.14), as a class teacher I remained strongly committed throughout the process to attaining a greater understanding about the development of citizenship education within this school. As a researcher and a practitioner, I was determined to make a positive and important contribution to educational research. Additionally, it was anticipated that the viewpoints proffered, attitudes expressed and issues raised within the context of this study would hopefully generate rich, illuminating and important insights into the way we teach children about citizenship and that the data generated would be of interest to all involved and concerned with citizenship education.

### *3.7 Limitations of the study*

This research study was positioned within the qualitative field of inquiry in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the development of citizenship education in one particular primary school. It is recognised that qualitative research is not without its weaknesses and limitations. A case study approach using was adopted as this would enable me produce rich, human and revealing data anchored in the school and drawn from the participants’ experiences and practices. However, collecting and analysing the case study data was a protracted process. This study generated twenty-nine taped interviews, and so, a great deal of data was accumulated and transcription of the interviews was time-consuming. The interpretation of the data collected involved making judgements about



the significance of the data, drawing out issues of interest and presenting the individual stories of the participants. While I strived to maintain an unbiased perspective, it is acknowledged that the research is not, and cannot be, completely objective. The potential bias of the researcher is inbuilt and unavoidable. This study of the development of citizenship education in one particular primary school involved carefully planned participatory conversations with groups of children and entailed in-depth interviewing with teachers and parents. However, it is accepted that undertaking participant observation would have given me the opportunity to gather the evidence first hand rather than relying on what the participants think or say is happening in terms of citizenship education. This method of data collection was rejected on the basis that I am a teacher in the school under scrutiny in this study. It was highly probable that my colleagues would have been unwilling to allow me to directly observe their teaching of citizenship education and document the extent to which democratic processes underpin their practices and the experiences of the children in their classrooms. In the event that the teachers in this school had agreed to allow me to undertake participant observation in their classrooms, it was possible that the participants may have, consciously or unconsciously, changed their behaviour and/or practices because they were being observed. Additionally, from a practical perspective, carrying out participant observation in other classrooms during the school day for a sustained period of time was simply not possible, given that I am a teacher with responsibilities for the education of the children in my own class.

It is also recognised that the findings of case studies are not generalisable in the conventional sense. According to Denscombe (2003) “the point at which the case study approach is most vulnerable to criticism is in relation to the *credibility of generalisations*

made from its findings” (p.39). This case study cannot claim to have produced statistically significant results and there is no way to establish the probability that the findings of this study are representative of other primary schools. Nevertheless, it is anticipated that practitioners, particularly those teaching in rural, medium-sized primary schools, will view the findings as meaningful and relevant in terms of their own experience.

### 3.8 *Ethical Issues*

As this piece of qualitative research involved personal involvement with human participants, a number of ethical considerations had to be taken into account due to the “messy, chaotic reality of on-the-spot personal interaction...sensitivity and experience” (Holbrook, 1997, p.49). As a teacher in this particular school, access to children, their parents and staff was not considered problematic. In conducting various types of interviews with all three groups and producing information about citizenship education, two main ethical issues were identified – informed consent and confidentiality. Prior to obtaining consent from all participants, it was considered both appropriate and necessary to inform them about the overall purpose of the research and its main features, as well as of the risks and benefits of participation. In order to ensure the integrity of the research and thus report findings accurately and honestly as they emerged in the process, it was, of course, necessary to maintain confidentiality and to protect the identities of the participants, given that potentially negative comments may be made about the school ethos and the role of leaders, as well as the policies and practices of this school.

### *3.8.1 The Ethical Conduct of School-based Research*

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) observe that ethical concerns encountered in educational research can be extremely complex and subtle, and “can frequently place researchers in moral predicaments” (p.49). One such predicament, the so called “costs/benefits ratio”, requires researchers to strike a balance between the demands placed on them as professional scientists in pursuit of truth, and the rights and values of their subjects, potentially put at risk by the research. In order to avoid any potential misunderstandings the researcher discussed the aims and purpose of the research study with all the parties involved so that everyone was clear about and approved of the nature of the research. Throughout the process, I was very much aware of my responsibilities to the participants, which as well as ensuring confidentiality and the protection of privacy, included the avoidance of harm, reciprocity and presentation of findings. Anonymity for the participants is an integral feature of ethical research and consequently the consideration of mechanisms to protect the identity of all participants was central to the design and practice of this study. It was decided to use alphabetical codes to refer to specific participants in all three groups. In terms of presenting the evidence gathered from children participating in the study, it was initially decided necessary to indicate the class grouping of the children so that their views, feelings and experiences could be interpreted and analysed in terms of their developmental level. However, a comment made by, for example, ‘Child A, Senior Infants’ would possibly identify the child’s teacher to members of staff within this school. Thus, in order to protect the identity of the teachers, the decision was made to cluster the findings of the children in Senior Infants and Second Class and present these as the evidence of children in the ‘younger group’ and to cluster the findings of children from Fourth Class and Sixth Class and present these as the evidence of children in the ‘older group’.

It is generally considered good practice to offer to provide participants with feedback on the outcomes of the research. In light of the fact that some of the findings of this study may be considered sensitive, it was considered unlikely that many of the participants, particularly the children, would be in favour of the idea of the researcher formally disseminating the information obtained from them to the other participants. Therefore, it was decided that the findings of this study would be informally imparted to the school community through the various structures and mechanisms the researcher is committed to putting in place on completion of the study. In testimony to the 'community of enquiry' approach adopted in this study, some of the participants read and commented on the findings as they are reported in Chapters four and five and in the Conclusion of the thesis.

### *3.8.2 Ethical Issues associated with Researching Children's Perspectives*

The study involved research with children, which in itself raised a number of ethical issues in terms of the suitability of the research context, the use of appropriate methods, the clarity of the language, the development of rapport, the validity and reliability of data, the interpretation of data and the role and assumptions of the researcher in carrying out the research, as well as the issues of informed consent and confidentiality. The class teachers selected the children who would participate in the study. As people should never be coerced or feel forced into helping with research and given that the school context is fraught with differential power relations, making it very difficult for children and young people to opt out of participating in research (Denscombe and Aubrook, 1992), the researcher ensured that all children were adequately informed about the study prior to consenting to participate, so that they could make a sound decision about whether or not they wish to participate. Fine and Sandstrom (1988) point out that when

children are involved in research they “should be told as much as possible, even if some of them cannot understand the full explanation. Their age should not diminish their rights” (p.3). Thus, the children participating in this study were informed about the aims, purposes and publication of findings and of potential consequences prior to giving their informed consent to participate in the study. The researcher endeavoured to lessen the power differential between children and adult researchers by offering a credible and meaningful explanation of the research intentions to the children involved prior to and during the research process. The consent of all children involved in the research was obtained directly from the children, as well as from their parents. Finally, the children were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any given time.

### *3.8.3 Other Issues*

Continued discussion with stakeholders in the research, my supervisor, research committee and the ethics committee in St. Patrick’s College was considered essential and of valuable assistance in coming to a decision about a particular course of action as various viewpoints, possible consequences and the different effects on participants were recorded and analysed.

## *3.9 Conclusion*

This chapter explored the key methodological issues involved in the qualitative analysis of data in Part II of this study. Chapter four presents the findings of the participatory sessions carried out with the children and discusses these in the context of the existing research and debates in contemporary philosophy and education considered previously in Part I. A number of key themes emerged from the sessions with the children in relation to citizenship and education. These included a sense of identity, rights and

responsibilities, participation and decision-making, autonomy and democracy and the power relations existing within the school. The conversations which took place with the children will be analysed in the next chapter in relation to each of these themes.

## **Chapter 4: Children's Perspectives on Citizenship and Education**

### *4.1 Introduction*

Children spend the greater part of their childhood at school. Yet, the dearth of research conducted in an Irish context confirms that their views and experiences of school are seldom investigated and documented. This study sought the views of twenty-four primary school pupils ranging in ages from six years to twelve years. Children are distinct from adults in that they are likely to have a limited use of vocabulary and words, are fairly less experienced in the ways of the world and may have a shorter attention span (Boyden and Ennew, 1997). The views and experiences of the children - six children from each of Senior Infants, Second class, Fourth class and Sixth class were elicited using a range of methods. Focus group participatory sessions were considered to be an effective method of gathering the children's views. The focus group sessions were supported in that participatory tools including photography, mapping photographs, decision-making charts, fairy tales and letters as stimuli and a diamond-ranking exercise were used to explore specific issues or themes as part of this research project. Given that many children are marginalised in society and experience unequal power relations with the adults around them (Devine, 2000), the format each of the sessions would take was negotiated with the children at the outset.

The majority of the children demonstrated an ability to think critically about the issues at hand and a capacity to reflect on and contribute ideas about their experiences at school and at home. In terms of interpreting the data gathered, it is acknowledged that "the views of adults may not necessarily represent children's perceptions and experiences" (Cook and Hess, 2007, p.29). However, it is hoped that having used research methods which provided the children with opportunities to express themselves and empowered

them to make their own decisions, the findings presented below are an accurate representation of the views and experiences of the children interviewed. A number of key themes emerged from the transcripts in relation to citizenship and education. These include a sense of identity, rights and responsibilities, participation and decision-making, autonomy and democracy and the power relations existing within the school.

#### 4.2 *Identity*

The way individuals practice citizenship depends to a large extent on their identities and on the way they perceive their roles in a range of communities.

(Osler and Starkey, 2005, p. 94)

Issues of identity and a sense of belonging are central to citizenship. Those who feel they belong believe that they are recognised, accepted and valued as a member of a particular group or of the community. For the children taking part in this research study, feelings of identity and belonging were positioned in the home, at school and in their local community. A strong theme running through the children's narratives was that citizenship is about belonging to a family, a school and a community. According to Osler and Starkey (2005), "a sense of belonging is a prerequisite of participative citizenship. If it is missing, so too is a sense of citizenship" (p. 12).

The home is the fundamental place of belonging, thus, when asked about the feeling of belonging, initially the children talked about their families and the way they feel when they are at home.

I feel happy because I belong with my Mam and Dad and they give me food and drink.



(Younger Child)

For the older children, belonging at home is associated with love and safety.

You feel loved...you're always going to be safe.

(Older Child)

Citizenship, Aristotle (*NE*, VIII, I, 1155a5) argued, is synonymous with friendship in that nobody would choose to live without friends. Friendship is important in sustaining democratic communities and is therefore central to the practice of citizenship. That friendship is a significant part of children's lives and is an expression of their social identity outside the family (Corsaro, 1985) is evident from the research. Even at a young age, children are capable of friendship, identifying a friend as someone to play with.

You know your friends like you and they let you play with them. You know that you're liked and wanted.

(Older Child)

I took a picture of the classroom because I like our classroom and I like having lots of friends. So I took a picture of all my friends.

(Younger Child)

Within the classroom, the proximity of friends to provide support in completing tasks is considered important.

We help other children who are stuck in their work and if they are stuck on a little sentence then you can help them if you know the word.

(Younger Child)

School was then cited by the children as a place where they feel they belong. This is not surprising given that the school is likely to be the main social and participative community in their lives.

I feel that I belong in the school because like I grew up here. I was here from Junior Infants.

(Older Child)

At school, friends were identified as a significant source of support by both younger and older children.

We help them to do their jobs and if they are stuck on their work we help them.

(Younger Child)

Furthermore, the children recognised that a number of people belong to this school community. They noted that a range of people belong in this school because they have jobs to do.

If (school caretaker) wasn't here with his machine, he wouldn't be able to be cleaning the floors...We won't even get to see the lovely colours if (names school caretaker) wasn't here and cleaning.

(Younger Child)

When asked how a sense of belonging is promoted in the school, the football team, the running team and the Litter Patrol team were mentioned. The majority of the children in the study were unfavourably disposed towards recent adjustments to their space in the school grounds. They stated explicitly that they did not like the prefabricated buildings which had recently been erected to cater for the increasing pupil population and were adamant that these were unnecessary and detrimental to the environment.

Well, I don't like the prefabs. I think if at the back we had less prefabs then we would have more room to play.

(Younger Child)

They're scaring away all the birds and rabbits and all that used to be around now with all the construction.

(Older Child)

Lastly, the community was cited as a place where they feel they belong. Osler and Starkey (2005) point out that "communities provide feelings of security and conviviality and are a major locus of identity...community is therefore a key concept within the definition of citizenship" (p.80). Throughout the sessions, the children clearly articulated a sense of belonging to a community, and the responsibility this entails, in their constant referencing to the Green-Schools programme (An Taisce, 2003) and their condemnation of littering.

You belong to your community...Belonging in the community means being part of a place.

(Younger Child)

Furthermore, the children recognise that, as members of a community, people are obliged to contribute to and actively participate in that community.

I'm taking a photograph of people and flowers...they're working together.

(Older Child)

When you are on Litter Patrol you would be helping your community.

Like if this was the only school in our community and we were getting the huge Green Flag that is going to be out there, then that would be kind of

helping our community because everyone that was passing the school would know that we are a clean school.

(Younger Child)

The findings suggest that these children feel part of a solid, safe community based on relationships and friendships that foster trust, concern for each other, self-worth and a sense of responsibility.

The local and wider community is not the main community in which the children feel they participate. Nevertheless, it is evident that they are aware of and care about what happens in the wider community. The conversations with the children revealed they are cognisant of the fact that while we all belong to communities, there is inequality in the distribution of goods and other people may not acquire what is rightfully theirs. The responses below show that the children feel a sense of gratitude for all that is good in their lives and a sense of responsibility towards others less fortunate than themselves.

We bring in *Trocaire* money for the people in like Africa.

(Older Child)

But you don't always have to send it off to Africa because there is poor people and they are in Ireland...It makes you feel really sad because you've got a perfect home, a car, lots of money...

(Older Child)

It makes you feel guilty...and you're still not happy because like you are always jealous of what someone else has.

(Older Child)

In making reference to the economic inequalities which exist in society the children demonstrate awareness of the fact that they are financially privileged in comparison to others. Surprisingly, however, they did not comment on the fact that people from diverse ethnic backgrounds live in Irish society. It was apparent that while the children involved in the study felt a sense of belonging with their family and friends and to their immediate environment, they did not demonstrate an awareness that they are members of a shared community. The children's concern and commitment to improving the lifestyles of their peers in Africa was evident in the fact that they collect money each week for charities working with children in developing countries. However, there is little evidence that these children consider that people with diverse ethnic backgrounds belong to the same community as themselves and, as Parekh (2000a) points out, "a multicultural society cannot be stable and last long without developing a common sense of belonging among its citizens" (p.341).

Clearly, the children involved in this study recognised the fact that they have multiple identities as members of their families, in terms of their roles in school, in the community in which they belong, in their religious commitments and through their membership of various clubs and organisations. This raises questions about the type of identity a programme for citizenship education should encourage children to develop. In Ireland, the theory of citizenship has, until recently, intrinsically been linked with the idea of nation-state wherein the mono-cultural population was considered united in its heritage, culture, language, religion and national values. Today, society is made up of multiple ethnicities, various religious beliefs and different cultural norms.

Some democratic theorists (Callan, 1997; Macedo, 2000) are of the opinion that a shared sense of political identity is a precondition of a stable democratic society. Callan (1997) comments on the urgency around “the task of creating citizens who share a sufficiently cohesive political identity” (p.221). Williams (2006), however, is sceptical that a shared identity is a prerequisite to a stable democracy. She believes that this view of citizenship-as-identity fails to recognise that “boundaries of political and cultural identity are no longer exclusive and singular. There is a steady rise in the number of individuals who hold dual citizenship, or who have strong bonds of membership in more than one country” (Williams, 2006, p. 225). Thus, she concludes, in excluding and marginalising those from ethnic minority backgrounds, “the model of citizenship-as-national-identity is obsolescent (Williams, 2006, p.227). She advocates the idea of ‘citizenship as shared fate’, which requires us to recognise that we are entangled in a web of relationships with other people on whom we are interdependent, though they may differ greatly from ourselves. Williams (2006) does not dispute the fact that children need to learn about their history. Rather, she argues, in addition to understanding that their democratic rights and practices are the outcome of struggles and trials in the past, “a part of children’s developing sense of political agency is to understand themselves as contributing to an ongoing story of democratic self-rule, a story that is not situated exclusively within the boundaries of their own countries” (Williams, 2006, p. 236). Education for citizenship as shared fate would undoubtedly encourage children to participate in and cooperate in programmes and activities with others people who may be different and distant from themselves. Jeremy Waldron (2003) is in agreement.

Civic education should not be conceived only in terms of love of one’s own country and its traditions, or concern for fellow members of one’s society. The moral concern we should be teaching our children is equal

concern for all humans in the world; and the identity we should encourage young people is an identity that involves 'recognising humanity in the stranger and the other' and responding humanly to the human in every cultural form. (p.23)

Clearly, a programme for citizenship education needs to teach children to recognise themselves as a 'citizen of the world' (Nussbaum, 1997, p.8).

All of the children were asked if they knew what a 'citizen' is and both younger and older children demonstrated a remarkable understanding of what it means to be a citizen.

It's being a person in a part of a town. It means you are part of a town and a few people or maybe a lot of people know you in the town. So, you can be a well-known citizen or not-a-lot known citizen.

(Younger Child)

It's a person of the country and of the world really...It's someone who does things for their community.

(Older Child)

The children were confident that a 'good citizen' would be concerned with assisting others.

You help your fellow citizens.

(Younger Child)

Like people in the town, like the milkman, who goes around the town with the milk.

(Younger Child)

Oh, and the bus drivers who bring you to school and also the teachers who teach us.

(Younger Child)

Get a job...They should go out...Like some people are unemployed and they don't really work and they don't look after themselves and a good citizen would go out and get a job and do something for themselves.

(Older Child)

The children demonstrated awareness that citizens have the capacity to take action and make a difference.

Like...they might raise money for charity or they might do something to help the government or to help their local council.....Like some people are unemployed and they don't really work and they don't look after themselves and a good citizen would go out and get a job and do something for themselves.

(Older Child)

Furthermore, they were aware of the importance of unpaid volunteer work.

Maybe they just do it for free because they want to.

(Older Child)

The children clearly recognised that citizenship is about inclusiveness (Lister, 1997) and involves solidarity with others (Osler and Starkey, 2005). Interestingly, when asked if they thought they were citizens, the children confidently recognised themselves as citizens.

So, are you a citizen now or will you be a citizen when you grow up?



(Researcher)

Well, all our life we could be a citizen

(Younger Child)

We're citizens of Ireland.

(Younger Child)

In relation to school, the children constructed their identity in terms of what they think they are good at and what they enjoy doing at school. When specifically questioned about what they like about their school, the children mentioned a range of activities they enjoy, including Art and P.E., using computers, reading, eating their lunch, doing Litter Patrol and playing with toys, as well as the physical environment – the yard, the Green-Schools notice board, mural and the trees surrounding the school.

The children, particularly the younger children, expressed their satisfaction regarding the reward system in place in their classrooms and conveyed their delight in receiving acknowledgement and praise for good work.

I like getting a certificate. Our teacher gives Golden Award Certificates that say 'Star Pupil' on them and I like them...It means you are the best student and you did the hardest work and teacher didn't have to tell you to stop talking or anything.

(Younger Child)

I like the lollipops in (school principal's) office.

(Younger Child)

The younger children spoke of enjoying going on messages, and securing their teacher's approval is clearly important to them.

I like doing work in my classroom...And especially our homework. Cos if we didn't do our homework we would get in a lot of trouble. And I like doing my homework... If we had no principal there'd be no rules in the school and so if we didn't like (school principal) he'd get really angry. So you have to like him and I do.

(Younger Child)

I like to colour pictures for our teacher and Barry.

(Younger Child)

I like doing the Maths book for our teacher.

(Younger Child)

I picked up some litter but the teacher on the yard didn't see me.

(Younger Child)

According to the older children, teachers like some children more than others. When asked what kind of people they think their teacher likes, a variety of responses, elicited from the children, indicates that they think their teacher prefers children who exhibit a certain type of behaviour.

The clever ones.

(Older Child)

And the ones who work the hardest.

(Older Child)

People who don't mess all the time.

(Older Child)

The ones who try their best to be good and do their work as best they can.

(Older Child)

When asked what they did not like about their school, fewer responses were elicited from the children. This could be because the children are genuinely happy at school and found it difficult to come up with any aspects of school life that they do not like. Or it may be that it was more difficult for the children to express negative views. They did indicate that do not like getting in trouble, being sent to the principal's office, staying in at lunchtime, being put in the corner or outside the door, the staff room, the prefabricated buildings, the bin shed, rubbish and the toilets.

I don't like (school principal's) office. I don't like it when I get sent there...I once got sent there by accident because I was messing a little in the bathroom.

(Younger Child)

The issue of status is closely connected with citizenship (Marshall, 1950) and the capacity to participate fully as member of society (Devine, 2002). In order to ascertain how the children perceive their status in relation to adults, the children were asked if they felt they are more important, less important or equally as important as the teachers in the school. The younger children were dubious about this. One child asserted that the teachers are more important than children to the principal.

I think (teachers are) not as important because if the children were here but the teachers weren't, he'd need the teachers.

(Younger Child)

Another child in the group disagreed.

I think we are more important because if we weren't here they wouldn't be able to have anyone to teach.

(Younger Child)

The older children, however, feel that as they comprise the majority of the school population that they should be seen as just as important as the teachers.

We're just as important as the teachers...'cos if there were no pupils, the teachers would have no job and if there were no teachers, the pupils wouldn't get educated.

(Older Child)

It's our school. The teachers wouldn't be like learning in it because they've already been to school. So, we should have more say because we are the ones learning here.

(Older Child)

Interestingly, some of the younger children compared their status with that of the older children.

It's not fair that the bigger people get the bigger yards and that the small people get a smaller yard.

(Younger Child)

Thus, the responses obtained from the children suggest that in terms of their status as citizens, the children involved in this study believe that others consider them smaller or younger versions of adult citizens. Citizenship as status emphasises the rights of children. Marshall (1950) described citizenship as "a status bestowed on those who are full members of the community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which status is endowed" (p.14). Hence, the concept of children's status as citizens stems from an understanding of and commitment to their rights. An exploration of the children's perceptions of their rights and responsibilities as citizens was thus considered necessary.

### 4.3 *Rights and Responsibilities*

Rights are central to the liberal conception of citizenship which considers that the main function of education is to emphasise the liberty and autonomy of the individual (Gutmann, 1987; Callan, 1997). A civic republican approach to citizenship, on the other hand, stresses the obligation on citizens to actively participate in the community and considers that the principle of function of education is to encourage citizens to contribute to the common good of society. According to D'Arcy (1999), "the concept of the active citizen draws on a combination of both the liberal and civic republican tradition by emphasising both rights and duties" (p.197). In accommodating both traditions of citizenship, the Primary School Curriculum (1999) anticipates that schools will teach children about their rights and their responsibilities as citizens.

#### 4.3.1 *Rights*

A right is not a right unless you know about it.

(Osler and Starkey, 1998, p. 316)

The enjoyment of rights is central to citizenship and schools have a responsibility to ensure that children understand and experience their human rights. Yet, as Fortin (2008) points out, "the concept of children's rights is not one that fills all adults with great enthusiasm" (p.55). As part of this research study, the children were asked about their rights as children and as citizens. Perhaps surprisingly, all of the children who participated in this study initially demonstrated a serious lack of awareness of their rights. After the meaning of the term 'rights' was briefly explained to the children, the younger children deduced that they have the right to play.

We have a right to go out to the yard and play and when we're done our homework we have rights to go out and play as well.

(Younger Child)

Similarly, the older children weren't entirely sure of their rights and needed prompting. However, after some clarification of the concept of human rights with the researcher, some of the older children articulated that they have the right to an education, to play, to watch television, to sleep and to a childhood.

We have the right to a childhood...I think it's bad that some children have to grow up too fast because they have no parents and so they don't really have a childhood.

(Older Child)

Interestingly, throughout the discussions around their rights, many of the children appeared to interpret their rights in terms of conditions attached, by adults, to the realisation of those rights. Even the youngest children were conscious that the actual realisation of their rights depends to a huge extent on the willingness of the adults around them to relinquish some of their control and seek to empower children.

You are allowed to take out your lunch but only when you are told to. If you take out a drink then you are going to get in trouble because you have to ask the teacher if you can do it first.

(Younger Child)

The children recognised that rules exist to protect them.

Well, we're not allowed to run in the yard because you might bump into someone and hurt yourself.

(Older Child)

We're not allowed to stand up on the bus because if the bus crashed you'll go flying.

(Older Child)

We're not allowed to throw things at each other because a child could get hurt.

(Older Child)

Interestingly, some of the children frequently asserted that rules in school are central to teaching and learning and should be upheld even at the expense of their rights being violated.

I think we have rights to go to the toilet without asking.

(Younger Child)

I think it's a good thing that we have to ask to go to the toilet because if a fire starts and you are in the toilet and the teacher doesn't know you are in there, she might think you are absent.

(Younger Child)

In relation to the healthy eating policy, one child asserted that he feels he has the right to eat foods and drink liquids of his choice. Another child disagreed.

I don't think we should...Crisps will get all over the place. If we don't have rules about what we eat then everyone will bring in like chewing gum and things.

(Older Child)

It was apparent that the children perceived their rights in terms of their relationships with the adults who seemed to have no difficulty informing children that they must act in

accordance with the parameters set down for their safety and yet appear less inclined to enlighten children about their rights and entitlements. The United Nations (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) signals recognition that children have civil, political and social rights (Roche, 1999). Thus, the older children were questioned on the rights of children which might be incorporated in this piece of legislation. A range of responses including the right to a good home, a childhood, food, water and shelter were elicited from the children. It was apparent that some children were somewhat familiar with the essence of Article 12 of the Convention, which states that children have the right to express a view and have that view taken seriously.

A right to say whatever you want, whenever and wherever.

(Older Child)

When asked to place thirteen cards stating the rights of the child as set out in the UNCRC in a diamond shaped grid with the most important right, in their opinion, at the top and the least important at the bottom, it was extraordinary that there was only a slight variation in the arrangement of cards in each of the groups. All of the children considered 'every child has the right to life' to be the salient entitlement of children. The basic rights of children to healthcare, enough food and clean water, to be with their family and to be kept safe and not be hurt or neglected, were generally considered to be extremely important. All participants considered 'children have the right to play' to be less of an imperative than the other rights.

In Ireland, we are increasingly becoming aware that cultural rights are part of human rights, and a good society should guarantee them to all its citizens. Yet, none of the four groups of children bequeathed significant importance to "children must be allowed to speak their own language and to practise their own religion and culture." In fact, all four



groups placed this card on the fourth or final level of the pyramid. Given that this school is entirely mono-ethnic, it may be that the children are not accustomed to hearing a variety of languages being spoken around the school and are unfamiliar with the practice of teachers making alternative arrangements for pupils with different religious beliefs during religious education, as is commonplace in other schools. However, the intercultural guidelines for schools published by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2005) propose that education has “an important contribution to make in facilitating the development of the child’s intercultural skills, attitudes, beliefs and knowledge...an education which is based on only one culture will be less likely to develop capacities in children” (p3). It may be suggested that the children participating in this study are not being fully prepared for the diverse nature of the intercultural society in which they live.

One child, in particular, felt strongly that the principle that ‘children have the right to say what they think and meet together to express their views’ was of great importance and insisted that the other children agreed to moving this card further up the grid. Upon reflection on the extent to which their rights as set out in the Convention are endorsed by the government in Ireland, almost all of the children concurred that all of their rights are upheld with the exception of the right to say what they think and meet together to express their views. The children explained in their own way that, while they are listened to on some occasions, they feel this is a tokenistic gesture on the part of teachers rather than a genuine attempt to hear their views and act upon them.

It’s happening a bit but it’s just not happening that much.

(Older Child)

When we ask and we get an answer, it's not really like we are being listened to. Well, you are being listened to but nothing much is actually done.

(Older Child)

Like sometimes when we need new soap in the bathroom and we say it, it might take ages to get it.

(Older Child)

We'd like a mirror as well and we said it and no one actually got it for us ever.

(Older Child)

The younger children also expressed their frustration at not being able to express their views and the disinclination of teachers to consult them on matters which affect them.

Say if someone was getting in trouble for something, like they pushed someone, then that person should be able to say what happened like they accidentally ran into him or something. That person should be able to speak.

(Younger Child)

These children clearly felt they had the capacity and skills to resolve conflict. Yet, an acknowledgement of the right of children to voice their opinions on matters of relevance to them is, according to these children, lacking in this school. Citizenship, as we know, is based on rights. After all, "rights provide the possibility to practice citizenship and to feel a sense of belonging...children and young people are citizens by virtue of their entitlements to rights and their capacity to practice citizenship" (Osler and Starkey, 2005,

p. 15). Hence, teachers in schools have a key role to play in providing opportunities and putting in place structures for pupil consultation and participation so that the rights of children, as outlined in the UNCRC, are upheld.

#### *4.3.2 Responsibilities*

Responsibility is a meaningful and everyday aspect of many children's lives. To shy away from recognising this...serves to deny children social citizenship.

(Such and Walker, 2005, p.54-56)

The upholding of their fundamental rights is the entitlement of all children. Although the fulfilment of responsibilities is not dependent on the endorsement of basic human rights, it is axiomatic that the willingness of citizens to fulfil their responsibilities is enormously important to the successful functioning of democratic society. In order to preserve social order, citizens must be disposed to obey the laws. To ensure the smooth operation of the economy, people must be willing to work. To facilitate the democratic election of a government, individuals must be prepared to vote. In an attempt to protect the health and safety of humans and the animal kingdom, the physical environment must be valued and cared for. In other words, so that it does not fall into a state of disarray, society depends on citizens to assume their responsibilities.

The children interviewed demonstrated greater awareness of their responsibilities. From the outset, they found it much easier to articulate their responsibilities as citizens, than they did their rights.

You have responsibility for being good and being excellent and really help teacher and let people join in your game and even do what teacher says.

(Younger Child)

It's your responsibility to clean your room.

(Older Child)

They acknowledged that there are rules in each classroom, which they have agreed to, and that they have a responsibility to abide by these rules.

If there were no rules in school you'd do whatever you wanted and that wouldn't be good because the principal would give out to you. If you went to the toilet then you could get in trouble because Teacher could ask where you are. And if there were no rules in school you wouldn't know when to take out your lunch or when to go out and play or you wouldn't know when to line up when it's time to go home.

(Younger Child)

Well, sometimes it get annoying when you don't understand why.

(Older Child)

All of the children, regardless of their age, indicated that they enjoy assuming responsibility. According to Howe and Covell (2005), "schools are the institutions in which children first develop their ideas about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship" (p.83).

I like football. And I also like to be in class when I'm leader at the table because you get to collect all the things and give all the things out.

(Younger Child)

I drew (a picture) of me and Julie going on a message up to (the principal's) office...I like going on a message.

(Younger Child)

I think it's great because like in 6<sup>th</sup> class lots of people have jobs. They take the *rolla* around or give out the milk and then everyone gets a turn during the year. So I think that's good.

(Older Child)

Interestingly, while the younger children generally felt that responsibilities are evenly distributed, the older children were not of the same opinion.

Some people just get it all...the people that the teacher likes the most.

(Older Child)

The children articulated that they feel a sense of responsibility towards others children.

When you are walking down the road with your brothers and sisters, it is your responsibility to keep them in because if they get run over then it'll be your fault.

(Older Child)

Oh, I know! We give *Trocaire* money. That's the important thing for the poor people out there to get food and drink...We bring in money for them...It gets sent to America or somewhere else.

(Younger Child)

They also expressed a sense of responsibility towards their environment.

Keep the class tidy, and even re-use, re-use and recycle.

(Younger Child)

It's your responsibility to clean your room.

(Older Child)

I saw litter on the yard and I got it and I put it in the bin.

(Younger Child)

It was clear from the conversations that took place that these children not only have the capacity and are prepared to respect and uphold the rights of others, but they also acknowledge and undertake their responsibilities. The participants asserted that they feel a sense of responsibility towards children in other parts of the world and it is evident that they share responsibility with their teachers for ensuring that their classroom is kept clean and tidy. Ultimately, they recognise that, as citizens, they have a responsibility to care for other citizens and to look after their environment. It emerged, however, that some of the participating pupils felt that they do not have enough opportunities to participate in decisions made in school. The extent to which the children believe the structures in place in this school inadequately facilitate greater participation of the pupils in decision-making will be explored in the next section.

#### *4.4 Participation and Decision-making*

Highly developed societies require children who can rapidly become adult citizens with sophisticated abilities. Children like this do not emerge from an overprotected childhood; they need their capacity for decision-making to be encouraged as early as possible.

(Fortin, 2008, p.58)

Participation is a basic right of citizenship (Hart, 1992). Of course, it is also a social responsibility in democratic society. The participation and citizenship rights of children

are clearly stated in the UNCRC. Article 12 states that “the child who is capable of forming his or her own views (has) the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.” In other words, schools must accept that children are capable of having their own opinions and should be listened to and taken seriously when decisions are being made. Yet, the conversations which took place with the children involved in this particular study revealed that they felt the opportunities for genuine participation in the decision-making process, at both home and at school, are heavily regulated by the adults around them.

To begin with, the older children were questioned about their input into decisions made at home. They made a ‘decision-making chart’ which helped them to reflect on the sorts of decisions made which directly affect them and extent to which they actually participate in the decision-making process at home. The children specified the types of decisions made at home. These included the clothes they wear, the food they eat, the time at which they do their homework, the time at which they go to bed, the programmes they watch on television and the occasions their friends visit. In general, the children concurred that they have some say in the decisions made at home which affect them, though in some instances there are conditions attached to the outcome of the decisions made by them.

I get to choose when I do my homework but it can’t be like after seven o’clock because I’d be too tired then.

(Older Child)

I think like I've got some say if I needed to have a say...I do have a say in when I go to bed, just not too late.

(Older Child)

The children acknowledged that parental influence in their decision-making is necessary for their own safety on occasion. The children were asked why they felt they don't have complete discretion over decisions made at home.

Because they're our parents and they want to make sure that we're ok and stuff.

(Older Child)

Because if you don't eat properly then you get sick. So they make things we don't like.

(Older Child)

However, it was made clear by the children that they like to seek clarification and obtain justification for decisions made by others. They were asked if they are satisfied that their parents inevitably have some say in the decisions made which affect them.

Well, sometimes it gets a bit annoying, when you don't understand.

(Older Child)

Interestingly, while most children surmised that they would feel comfortable confronting their parents on decisions they felt had they disagreed with, some of them said they would not consider approaching their teachers to discuss issues with them.

I wouldn't say it. I would be mortified.

(Older Child)

No...Because they might give out.

(Older Child)



In terms of the decision-making process at school, for the most part, the children articulated that they feel that they have little or no say in the decisions made at school which affect them. This is hardly surprising given that “practices of speaking with children, listening to them and involving them in the process of coming to a decision is unknown to too many professionals” (Roche, 1999, p. 478). The types of decisions made in relation to the children at school include when they eat, when they go to the toilet, when they play, who goes on messages, how much homework they get, the layout of the classroom and who plans the day. The children made it very clear that they felt that their teacher made the majority of decisions on their behalf and without consulting them. Furthermore, they patently expressed their frustration with their teachers’ lack of recognition of the capacity of children to make their own decisions, particularly in relation to going to the toilet.

I think we should have all the say. Because if we need to go to the toilet,  
then we need to go to the toilet.

(Older Child)

Yeah, because if we need to go to the toilet and it’s coming up to break  
time then Teacher asks us to wait, but if you really need to go...

(Older Child)

But if it’s like half an hour after break time and you need to go Teacher  
says you should have gone at break time.

(Older Child)

If you’d just come into the classroom and you needed to go then she  
wouldn’t let you.

(Older Child)

She'd say you should have went before you came into the classroom.

(Older Child)

The children at the centre of this study were able to express their views and had much to offer. They were clearly annoyed that some of their teachers would not allow them to use the toilet during class time. Waksler (1996) contends that -

Adult's control of children's use of bathroom facilities highlights adults' routine assumptions that they know better than children what children's inner states are. Adults' assumptions about how much control children have over their bodily functions may be at odds with children's experiences. (p.29)

The conversations with the children confirmed that "children are active social beings with the capacity to engage critically with their social and personal environment" (Devine, 2003, p. 111).

The children concluded that they get "way more say" (Older Child) at home and argued that they should have more say in the decision-making process at school. They are quite right, after all, "there is a fundamental contradiction in a school system that seeks to empower children through education and learning but does not recognise the importance of their voices in that process of empowerment" (Devine, 2003, p.143). However, that these children are reflective agents is evident in the fact that they rationalise the fact that it is in their own best interests that sometimes adults make decisions for them.

It's just that there are more people in school so it's probably for our own safety, so it probably makes sense.

(Older Child)

Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation stipulates that there are eight different levels of participation. The first three rungs of the ladder are degrees of non-participation and include the manipulation of children, decoration and tokenism. In Hart's view, genuine attempts at encouraging the participation of children involve the provision of information, consultation, shared decision making between adults and children and negotiation. They were asked if they felt that their teachers take time to listen to them.

No, not really. Because she has to teach us.

(Younger Child)

But the teachers, well they don't listen just because you are smaller.

(Older Child)

We tried loads of times this year.

(Older Child)

Normally, if you tell her something she says 'we will talk about it later...'

(Older Child)

And she never does.

(Older Child)

Furthermore, some children expressed the view that the choices they are offered are inconsequential and the decisions they are invited to make are unimportant, for example, which DVD to watch. They are not offered choices or invited to make decisions on significant issues, for example, the use of the 'spare' classroom. It was apparent that the older children felt that some of their teachers underestimate their ability to form sensible opinions and generate reasonable ideas in relation to their learning and experience at

school. Clearly, schools need to recognise that “far from being passive recipients of knowledge and culture, they are active participants in making sense, constructing meaning, and in the creation of their self-identities. In the process they are engaged in citizenship” (Wood, 1998, p. 33). In saying that, the children spoke positively of teachers who listened to them and treated them with respect and fairness.

Last year the teacher would listen to us. He would let us choose what we did for P.E. and he did loads of fun games.

(Older Child)

In addition to this, the children drew attention to the fact that, depending on the teacher, there is variation in the extent to which they are listened to and allowed to make their own decisions. Teacher autonomy undoubtedly influences pupils’ development as autonomous citizens.

It’s not all teachers. Just some teachers...It’s just we get listened to at different times.

(Older Child)

This suggests that some teachers are more willing to relinquish more responsibility to pupils than other teachers, probably because “the concept of children’s participation may be threatening to school managers: if children are given a voice in school they may challenge some traditions and injustices that adults have not questioned or recognised” (Osler and Starkey, 1998, p.314).

It was interesting to learn that those children who had been on the Green-Schools committee felt they had been afforded the opportunity to voice opinions, were genuinely listened to and were consulted on matters which affected them.

We all sat down and all the teachers, well, they weren't talking down to you – they were talking to you as if you were an equal.

(Older Child)

Children's participation is dependent on the necessary structures being put in place within a school ethos which recognises and appreciates the importance of empowering children to voice their opinions and strives to take those opinions seriously. When asked to suggest ways in which opportunities to voice their opinion could be created, the children decided that there should be a children's council or students' council in the school. This students' council, according to the children, should be made up of representatives from each class who would meet with the teachers to discuss issues of relevance to them. The importance of including and informing everyone was also emphasised.

Then this group would have to meet the whole school on some day and everyone would listen to the points of view. Then if they think it's alright then they have to do it, they can't say no just because it's too much money or they don't want to spend any money.

(Older Child)

These children appeared keenly in favour of a democratic approach to the organisation of their participation in the decision-making process. Their experiences of education for autonomy and democratic citizenship will be explored in the next section.

## *4.5 Autonomy and Democracy*

### *4.5.1 Autonomy*

Children can be reared or schooled in ways that gravely impair the realisation of autonomy. Once they suffer that impairment, then given that autonomy is necessary to their good, we must infer that their rights have been infringed, or at least that a basic interest of theirs has been invaded.

(Callan, 2002, p.118)

Education for autonomy, which equips pupils to critically make choices, decisions and judgements, is essential to the active involvement of citizens in democratic society. We know that pupils who are required to comply unquestioningly with demands, rather than think critically, make autonomous choices and lead independent lives, are quite likely to “live their lives as the instrument of another’s will, either because they see themselves as naturally subordinate to the authoritative other or because their upbringing has disabled them from seriously entertaining any choice repugnant to the other’s will” (Callan, 2002, p.133). Thus, the role of the school in nurturing powerful thinkers and autonomous learners is crucial.

In relation to the control they have over their own learning, the children expressed the view that they would like more autonomy.

I myself would like to have more responsibility like in doing my work.

I’d like to have a fairly high level in the lines that I write in the story.

(Younger Child)

And our teacher last year would let us do what story we wanted...She wouldn’t say it had to be about this or that.

(Older Child)

Our teacher this year decides what story we all write.

(Older Child)

Teachers have the authority to structure the learning environment and experiences of their pupils and are, therefore, hugely influential in determining the extent to which children become autonomous learners and critical thinkers who are capable of forming opinions, expressing their ideas, making informed choices and actively participating in society.

The tradition, however, has not been to exchange ideas, but to dictate them; not to debate or discuss themes, but to give lectures; not to work with students, but to work on him, imposing an order to which he has to accommodate. By giving the student formulas to receive and store, we have not offered him the means for authentic thought.

(Freire, 1974, p.38)

Yet, on the whole, the children participating in this research felt that opportunities to express their opinions and make decisions at school are minimal and they clearly are unhappy about this.

Teachers and principals have most, all the say. But children don't and I think that we should have.

(Older Child)

We should have more say. Not all the say but more say than we have right now.

(Older Child)

Yeah, because it's our school. Not just the teachers' and the principal's,  
just because they teach here.

(Older Child)

The capacity to think critically and proficiently is inherent in the concept of autonomy. Galston (1991) suggests that children do not have the capacity to engage in radical questioning. Gutmann (1987), however, argues that children “must learn not just to behave in accordance with authority but to think critically about authority if they are to live up to the democratic ideal of sharing sovereignty as citizens” (p.51). In the course of this study it became clear that children do indeed have sensible ideas, strong views and a deep sense of justice and fairness. The children demonstrated the ability to think independently, to question, to form opinions and attain values. Clearly, the challenge for teachers is to listen carefully to the concerns of the children, build on their capacity to think critically by engaging them in debate and prioritise collaboration among fellow citizens given that children in classrooms do not become autonomous learners by simply working independently. After all, “one cannot talk about individuals exercising their autonomy unless they become autonomous in the first place” (White, 1990, p.23).

#### *4.5.2 Democracy*

Many western nations think of themselves as having achieved democracy fully, though they teach the principles of democracy in a pedantic way in classrooms which are themselves models of autocracy.

(Hart, 1992, p.5)

The efficiency and survival of democracy is reliant on an active and engaged citizenry (Putnam, 2000). The school, as an institution responsible for the education of children from a very young age, has a key role to play in teaching citizens the knowledge, skills



and attitudes they need to participate successfully in democratic society. In relation to citizenship education, there are two mutually dependent perspectives on teaching democracy. The first regards democracy as a form of government and aims to teach children the workings of democracy. The majority of children were uncertain about the meaning of the term 'democracy'.

Yeah, I've heard of it but I don't know what it means.

(Older Child)

Another perspective views democracy as lived through participation in the everyday processes of the school (Dewey, 1916) and aspires to teach children toleration, mutual respect, listening skills, the ability to compromise and the importance of accepting opinions which differ from their own. In Ireland, the Primary School Curriculum (1999b) emphasises the need to prepare young citizens for life in a democracy and stipulates that pupils in senior classes ought to know about democracy as a system of government and understand the current political system. Despite the fact that "the school, as a community, is a place of rich possibilities for experiencing and learning about democracy" (Osler and Starkey, 2005, p. 138), the curriculum does not, however, specify how schools might empower the children as democratic citizens to actively participate in school life. Citizenship education is not simply about the acquisition of knowledge about democracy as a system of government but, more importantly, it is about promoting democracy through active participation in the classroom and in the school (Audigier, 1998). After all, as Howe and Covell (2005) point out, "citizenship is unlikely to be caught or taught unless lectures about democracy are replaced with the experience of democracy" (p.124). Some of the children interviewed feel that their school is a democracy to a certain extent. They cited the Green-Schools committee, the Parents' Council, their duties within the classroom and the recent election of a Class

President in Sixth Class as examples of democracy in practice. However, their constant referencing to their lack of opportunities to voice their opinions and affect decision-making is evidence that the authoritarian structures and undemocratic decision-making processes in this school limit the children's learning about democracy.

The teachers decide the stuff. So we don't get to say about things.

(Older Child)

Furthermore, the children's request for the establishment of a children's council/students' council suggests they feel they are capable of co-operating with teachers to influence the everyday life of the school.

In short, while some commendable efforts are clearly being made to teach children about the process of democracy in this school, for example, the Green-Schools committee, the fact remains that the children were of the opinion that their teachers need to create opportunities to allow them to share ideas, exchange opinions, discuss issues of relevance to them and participate in decision-making. This is hardly too much to ask, given that these interactions are central to the practice of democracy and are fundamental to the development of citizenship education. The next section will explore the views of children on the power relations that exist, both at home and school, and underpin their understanding of democracy.

#### *4.6 Power Relations*

Power relations are at the core of democratic schooling. This is because "children spend a considerable proportion of their childhood in schools – institutions which are constructed, shaped and administered by adults on their behalf (Devine, 2000, p. 189). The relationships between the teachers and pupils in classrooms can either reinforce

powerlessness or effect empowerment. The term 'empowerment' has been used numerous times in relation to citizenship education. Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1991) offer this definition:

Empowerment means the process of acquiring power, or the process of transition from lack of control to the acquisition of control over one's life and immediate environment. (p.138)

The institution of school is the first major site, outside the home, where children experience the formal exercise of power (Howard and Gill, 2000). Teachers occupy powerful positions in classrooms and, thus, exercise considerable influence over the events which take place and have significant control over the social interactions and experiences of their pupils. The discourse indicates that the children involved in this study are acutely aware of the power teachers have to organise and control their daily activities and suggests that a number of the older children, in particular, appear discontented with certain practices and processes at work in this school.

On the whole, the children involved in this study recognise and support the teachers' position of authority in school. From a young age, they are conscious of the fact that there are rules in the school and in their classrooms, which they are expected to obey. They are aware that there may be negative consequences if they break the rules and so are keen not to do so.

We're not allowed to go into (school principal's) office. Only if we're...if we're told we don't go. But if we did and we weren't told then we'd get in big, big, big, big trouble.

(Younger Child)

It is evident that the older children are of the opinion that a hierarchical relationship exists between themselves and their teachers. They reason that the teachers assume a more authoritative, influential position than the children, simply because they are grown-ups.

It's just like some teachers and people think that because they are bigger than us then they should have all the say.

(Older Child)

They think they are more powerful.

(Older Child)

Furthermore, the inequality underpinning the existing relationship between teachers and pupils was summed up in the contention that teachers have considerable power over the actions of their pupils but this is control is not reciprocated.

Yeah, like they can make us do more things and stuff that we can't make them do. We can't really make them do anything.

(Older Child)

It's like being at home and your cousins are down and they just boss you around. Like you can't do anything with them and they can do all sorts of things to you.

(Older Child)

The children were asked to give examples of the ways in which teachers exercise power in the classroom. For all of the groups, seating arrangements was a major issue either in terms of the physical structure of the furniture or in relation to the organisation of the pupils. The younger children articulated that they enjoy working in groups

Here's (a photograph) when we are in groups and in reading groups...when we work in groups we are allowed to ask for help.

(Younger Child)

Working in pairs is much more fun than doing it on your own. And you would get it done quicker. And better.

(Younger Child)

The older children, on the other hand, are not satisfied with the current seating arrangement in their classrooms.

We sit in like rows...We're not allowed to pick where we sit.

(Older Child)

There's people (sitting) in front of you, then you can't see but if it was like going in a U shape then you could see more.

(Older Child)

The children expressed their preference of sitting in groups over being seated in rows.

Because if you are sitting in groups you could be sitting here and your best friend could be this side of you another friend could be that side of you. So you'd like somebody on your table.

(Older Child)

The traditional seating of pupils in rows is an outdated mode of classrooms organisation.

As Riley (2004) points out -

Over a century ago, John Dewey railed against 'the ordinary school room with its rows of ugly desks placed in geometrical order'...If Dewey were

to visit many of our classrooms today, he would be disappointed at how little has changed. (p.52)

The curriculum is, according to the children, another area in which the teacher maintains a significant degree of control as he/she chooses, without consultation with the children, the content and context of the teaching of various subjects.

Well, sometimes she might let us do a bit of extra P.E.

(Older Child)

Yeah, but not often and she decides.

(Older Child)

It is apparent that the children perceive their teachers as powerful agents in control of the teaching and learning taking place and consider that they themselves are relatively powerless within the school setting. This is hardly surprising given that “practices of speaking with children, listening to them and involving them in the process of coming to a decision is unknown to too many professionals” (Roche, 1999, p.478). Yet, the development of autonomy involves power relations and children’s experience of the exercise of power in schools will ultimately shape their conception of democracy. Citizenship education cannot succeed unless existing structures of power within schools are reviewed and restructured.

#### 4.7 Conclusion

Seeing children through the lens of their citizenship gives a very different picture of their place in the social world. ... [citizenship] can be defined as an entitlement to *recognition, respect* and *participation*, ...Defined in this way, citizenship applies as much to children as to adults and it

suggests new ways for adults and children to relate to each other in their lives.

(Willow, Marchant and Kirby 2004, p. 8)

All of the children involved in this study clearly demonstrated their capacity to think critically about their schooling experiences and offered plenty of ideas about their role as citizens within the school, at home and in their communities. As the children recounted their experiences, common themes emerged from all of the groups despite the ages differences. These included identity, rights and responsibilities, participation and decision-making, autonomy and democracy and power relations.

At the outset, it emerged that issues of identity are central to children's citizenship. The children expressed the attitude that they feel a sense of belonging within a range of settings and that they have multiple identities as members of their families, as pupils in school, as neighbours in their local community and through their membership of various clubs and organisations. More recently, much of the literature on citizenship recognises that children are not future citizens or citizens-in waiting but are, in fact, citizens in their own right (Roche, 1999; Cockburn, 1998). Interestingly, the children involved in this study enunciated their present status as citizens in society. We know that our identities are shaped by our social contexts and by those with whom we engage (Osler and Starkey, 2005). The demography of the nearby town changed considerably over the last decade as the town experienced the migration of people from Eastern European countries and Africa. Surprisingly, however, none of the children participating in the study alluded to the existence of cultural diversity in the locality. Rather, all of the children made reference to the fact that they collect money on a weekly basis in school for economically less off children in developing countries. It was apparent that the

children's perception of people from other ethnic backgrounds is that, in general, they are economically poorer and live in other parts of the world. While this particular school population is comprised of an entirely homogenous, indigenous group of children (to the extent that any group can ever be entirely homogenous), society, of course, is not culturally homogenous. It was expected that the children might recognise the fact that many people from diverse ethnic backgrounds live in the nearby town and are economically well-off. However, they did not articulate this particular fact.

Earlier, in Chapter One, the two main contrasting historical conceptions of citizenship were outlined. The liberal perspective emphasised participation in the private sphere and the legal protection of the individual's civil and political rights. In order for citizens to feel that they belong in society, it is important for them to have rights and to know their rights (Marshall, 1950). The rights of children in Ireland are protected by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Yet, at the outset, the children participating in this study initially showed a distinct lack of awareness and understanding of their rights as child citizens. As a group, after some prompting from the researcher, the older children discussed the rights of children as delineated in the UNCRC (1989). They agreed unanimously that their protection rights are upheld by the adults around them but that their participatory rights, including their right to say what they think and to meet together to express their views, are contravened, particularly at school. Given that it is some seventeen years since the Irish government ratified the UNCRC and formally agreed to protect and respect the rights of children, it is unacceptable that children continue to feel that some of their rights are withheld and, as such, that they are marginalised as citizens.



On the other hand, the children participating in this study demonstrated a remarkable awareness of their responsibilities as citizens. The civic republican approach to citizenship emphasises the dominance of the public sphere, the political obligations of the citizen and the importance of active participation in the community. From their comments and observations, it was clear that these children are proactive in assuming responsibility in both the private and public sphere. In the private sphere, the children cited examples of the responsibilities they assume at home, including household chores and caring for younger siblings. In the public sphere, the children reported that they assume responsibilities in school, for example, passing messages, emptying bins, tidying the classroom and escorting younger children to the school yard. Furthermore, within the local community, many of the children are engaged in a fair amount of volunteering and social action through organisations such as Brownies/Ladybird Guides or as members of the Green-Schools Committee.

During the conversations which took place with the children, they revealed that they felt that opportunities for genuine participation in the decision-making process, at both home and at school, are heavily regulated by the adults around them. The older children maintained that they had a great deal more say in the decision-making process at home than at school. They also expressed the viewpoint that their teachers do not listen to them, although they acknowledged that, within the classroom, their teachers were extremely busy. Furthermore, the older children asserted that they would feel more comfortable challenging decisions they did not agree with at home than at school. In Chapter two, literature pertaining to the notion of children as citizens, who have the right to be taken seriously and who have the capacity to actively participate in school decision-making, was explored (Cockburn, 1998; Roche, 1999, Pearce and Hallgarten,

2000; Devine 2002). Article 27 of the UNCRC (1989) protects pupils' rights to be informed about the activities of the school and to be actively involved in the operation of the school. The older children, in particular, were clearly frustrated with the lack of consultation afforded to them. The one exception to which the children alluded was the Green-Schools committee. The children who were on the Green-Schools committee spoke positively about their experiences of being consulted and invited to participate in the decision-making process.

Claims that children have the right to autonomy emanate from liberal philosophical traditions of citizenship which emphasise the individual's freedom to make rational, autonomous decisions (Fortin, 2008). Dewey (1916/1944) and Freire (1974) criticised traditional schooling for failing to facilitate the development of autonomous individuals. Today, children lead increasingly scripted lives and the price, for children, is their loss of autonomy (Gillis, 2002). Most of the children interviewed asserted that they would like more opportunities to exercise autonomy in school in terms of their schoolwork and in terms of decision-making. Certainly, offering children increased autonomy to make decisions within the confines of their home and school will empower them to be reflective, rational and autonomous citizens of democratic society.

A democratic school experience undoubtedly considers children as citizens and not merely as citizens in the making. In the past, the way in which the school under scrutiny in this study was organised and managed was decidedly undemocratic. The children acceded that some efforts are made, at both classroom and school level, to promote democracy and cited the Green-Schools committee, the Parents' Council and the Class leaders/Class Presidents as evidence of democracy in practice. However, the children's

comments revealed that genuine teacher-pupil consultation is minimal, involvement of children in democratic decision-making processes is tokenistic and the absence of a children's council/student's council is disappointing. In seeking to empower children to be competent, fully-fledged citizens with the capacity to function autonomously in society, schools have begun to address ways to cultivate the skills and values of active citizenship, by presenting pupils with a participatory and inclusive curriculum which emphasises active learning and providing pupils with opportunities to engage and practice democratic activities. However, there remain tensions and difficulties in the reality of enabling schoolchildren to be effective members of such a democratic society.

Throughout the participatory sessions, the children made frequent references to the fact that they are subject to the power of the adults around them. On the whole, the children involved in this study recognise and support the teachers' position of authority in school. While the younger children perceived teacher power to be absolute, perhaps unsurprisingly, some of the older children were more critical of the exercise of power in school. They cited examples of and expressed dissatisfaction with the ways in which teachers exercise power in the classroom, including conformity to school/classroom rules, organisation of seating arrangements and implementation of the curriculum. Clearly, if children are to effectively participate and actively engage with others in democratic society, then a review of the existing power relationships within schools is a prerequisite of citizenship education.

Finally, the children who participated in this study demonstrated an enormous capacity to reflect on issues related to their schooling and their role as citizens within the school, at home and in their communities. Of course, if they are to engage more fully as citizens

and make a greater contribution to their schools and local communities, the participatory rights of children must be recognised and taken seriously by all the adults around them. The perspectives of those who are responsible for ensuring that the notion of extending citizenship to children becomes a reality will be investigated in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Teachers' and Parents' Perspectives on Citizenship and Education**

### *5.1 Teachers' Perspectives*

The views of nine teachers, including the principal, were sought as part of this study using one-to-one interviews. An interview schedule was distributed to each of the participants in advance of the interview, in order to secure their support and participation in this research study and to alleviate any concerns they may have had in relation to being questioned on citizenship and education. The distribution of the interview schedule prior to carrying out the interviews allowed the participants to reflect in advance on the questions being asked of them. Interestingly, a diverse range of knowledge, opinions and ideas in relation to citizenship and education were ascertained. The significant issues which emerged from the interviews could be generally categorised into a number of key themes. These included understanding citizenship, curriculum planning and resourcing, leadership and management, school ethos and environment, partnership with parents and community relations and their perceptions of children as citizens.

#### *5.1.1 Understanding Citizenship*

Citizenship education is a new term in the Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b). It is anticipated that all pupils will be taught how to be active and responsible citizens through the 'Developing Citizenship' strand of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum. Inevitably, teachers act as gatekeepers of the curriculum in that they determine what gets taught and how it is taught in classrooms. The way in which teachers control the gate hinges on their understanding of the subject

area. It may be that individual teachers conceptualise citizenship differently depending on their backgrounds, beliefs, personal experiences, teaching history and professional development. Thus, ascertaining the teachers' viewpoints of what makes a 'good citizen' was considered a reasonable starting point for addressing a range of issues related to citizenship education. While a multiplicity of opinions was expressed on what makes a good citizen, there was no doubt that all of the teachers interviewed regard active participation and supporting others within the community as fundamental to good citizenship.

A good citizen to me would be someone who plays an active role within their community, someone who is a good neighbour, a friend, someone who votes and is caring and supportive of others within their community.

(Teacher E)

Held (1991) concurs, "if citizenship entails membership in the community and membership in the community implies forms of social participation, then citizenship is above all about the involvement of people in the community in which they live" (p.20).

Tolerance of other peoples' views was also considered central to good citizenship.

A good citizen is someone who treats other people with respect...

(Teacher I)

People who forge partnerships, work in groups, respect what other people have to say and are not just out for themselves are good citizens.

(Teacher H)

Moreover, it was mentioned that good citizenship was a matter of abiding by the laws of the country and fulfilling obligations.

A good citizen has respect for property, is law abiding and contributes to the society in which they live. Also, if they are able to work then they work and pay their taxes.

(Teacher F)

This view of the good citizen as one who is employed in the public sphere and subsequently pays taxes endorses “the normative image of the independent wage-earning citizen which is at the heart of contemporary notions of social partnership and citizenship” (Moss and Petrie, 2002, p. 56). Feminist critiques of citizenship (Lister, 2003; Young, 1990, Phillips, 1991) would no doubt argue that women who labour in the domestic sphere do not cease to be citizens.

In considering why the government set up the Taskforce on Active Citizenship in April 2006, a minority of teachers admitted that, prior to agreeing to participate in this study, they were not aware of the establishment of a government taskforce to encourage and promote active citizenship. However, others offered a variety of suggestions as to why the government felt the need to do so. The significant increase in the number of people from other countries arriving in Ireland was thought to be a factor.

Probably because there has been such an influx of migrant workers and refugees and so the structure or composition of Irish society has changed suddenly.

(Teacher A)

Political participation underpins the concept of democracy. It is thought that the act of participating politically “enlarges the minds of individuals, familiarises them with interests which lie beyond the immediacy of personal circumstances and environment,

and encourages them to acknowledge that public concerns are the proper ones to which they should pay attention” (Oldfield, 1990, p.184). Yet, the lack of interest and general apathy people feel towards politics, evident in the low turn-out at elections, was mentioned as another possible reason why the government set up the taskforce on active citizenship.

They felt the need to promote active citizenship because there is a general disillusionment with politics and politicians, for example, there are various tribunals over money etc. There is a low turn-out on election days and people do not seem to have much faith in politicians.

(Teacher D)

Interestingly, the need to address the apparent breakdown of social order in society was mentioned repeatedly by teachers in relation to why the government set up the Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2006).

I think nowadays there is a general feeling that there is a social breakdown and a breakdown of law and order in society, lack of manners and mutual respect between people and I think the government is trying to deal with that...If people are not active citizens then you end up with a fractured, disjointed society with no positive interaction between people and a breakdown of social order.

(Teacher I)

This apparent breakdown in social order is associated with a decline in social and moral responsibilities which, in turn, is strongly linked with a lack of civic engagement. The decrease in the number of people engaged in volunteer work and the implications this has for the government was also referred to.



From what I can gather, society as a whole has become very dispersed, especially with everybody working and people have become very concerned with themselves and are insular. They are not concerned with people in the community which I think is putting more pressure on the government services, for example, looking after elderly people.

(Teacher C)

I would think that the government recognises the importance of active citizenship and that the work that is carried out by volunteers in the country is enormous. Active citizenship and voluntary participation is a key element of this and I would imagine that in monetary terms it would be impossible for this government or any government in the developed world to replace the level of service that is given voluntarily.

(Teacher A)

Clearly, the teachers involved in this study recognise that individuals must transcend their own interests in order to benefit themselves and other members of the community by acting in a public-spirited way (Galston, 1991; Macedo, 1990). The government relies on citizens to be reasonable, act responsibly and work together to create a better society for everyone by, for example, assuming responsibility for the care of elderly or disabled relatives in their homes, and respecting public policies. For example, the government's Race Against Waste environmental policy (2003) can only be implemented successfully if people agree to reduce, reuse and recycle their waste. Of course, in the absence of cooperation and self-discipline, the capacity of society to function successfully is weakened significantly (Kymlicka, 2001b).

All of the teachers involved in this study agreed that active citizenship is hugely important. When asked to consider why the government has decided that children need to be taught citizenship education in primary school, almost all of the teachers concluded that the government recognises that the skills associated with active citizenship must be taught from an early age if children are to successfully participate in democratic society.

Children need to be prepared for life, be prepared for the future. And if this is not addressed in primary school then it is almost too late...we have to remember that it is the children who are going to be responsible for society in the future and the decisions they make in the future will affect life for everybody.

(Teacher H)

Lastly, the teachers were asked what they considered citizenship education to be about.

I suppose citizenship education is a type of social learning. It's about identity and the children finding their own identity. It's about rights and knowing their rights as human beings...It is about children learning about responsibilities, how they should be responsible for themselves, their friends and their possessions. I suppose the government comes into it too in that you are teaching the children to be democratic citizens and if the classroom is set up in a democratic way then they are learning about leadership and authority in a balanced way.

(Teacher G)

This study shows that, generally, all of the teachers interviewed have positive feelings about citizenship, though they appeared to consider particular aspects of citizenship to be more important than others. Clearly, these teachers regard the development of an

individual's social and moral responsibility as fundamental to citizenship education. They repeatedly mentioned the need for children to develop a sense of respect and concern for the welfare of others, to become tolerant of a diversity of views and to realise the importance of active participation, given their obligations and responsibilities to their fellow citizens in the community. While a small number of teachers asserted that children ought to acquire knowledge of political issues so that they may participate in the democratic process, it was apparent that the majority of teachers view citizenship as a type of social education rather than political education. They recognise that "children need more than just formal knowledge of how a political system works if they are to become active, socially conscious citizens, they also need to understand the *purposes* of democratic systems and the *principles* that underpin democratic citizenship" (Howard and Gill, 2000, p. 358). Having established *why* citizenship and citizenship education is important, it was necessary to determine *how* citizenship education, according to the teachers interviewed, is implemented in this particular primary school.

### 5.1.2 Curriculum Planning and Resourcing

Citizenship education has been part of the Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b) for almost a decade. As part of this study, the teachers were asked what the Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b) says about citizenship education in relation to the children they teach. One teacher confessed to not being previously aware that citizenship education was actually on the Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b). A small number of teachers felt the need to consult their curriculum books in order to ascertain what the primary School Curriculum says about citizenship education in relation to the class level they are currently teaching.

I had to go to the books, to be honest, to have a look at them. Although I attended in-service on SPHE, I wasn't even aware that citizenship education is to be promoted...I think it's great but if the Department actually think this is happening in reality...I don't think this is happening, not at the moment anyway.

(Teacher F)

Other teachers admitted that they consulted their curriculum documents, prior to being interviewed, in order to establish what citizenship education entails in relation to the children they teach. Again, in response to this question, the teachers focused on the social dimensions of citizenship. They referred to the necessity of cultivating a sense of respect towards others, tolerance of other peoples' views and assuming an active role in the community. Interestingly, while most teachers recognise that the teaching of citizenship education is part of the SPHE programme, a number of the teachers interviewed also noted that a cross-curricular approach may be taken to the teaching of citizenship.

Well, it is part of SPHE. In terms of the children I teach, citizenship education involves the school community, the local community and environmental care. You can expand on these topics within other subjects every day so that it's not just done through SPHE.

(Teacher E)

Similarly, a few teachers alluded to the fact that citizenship education may be taught through teaching by promoting active and responsible pupil participation in classroom and school daily life.

I mean it is something that is going on anyway. It is an on-going thing. Certain aspects of it have to be taught in discrete lessons but you are promoting citizenship from 9.10am until 3pm each day. It is going on throughout the day as you are guiding them and teaching them to be a good citizen.

(Teacher D)

It is about pupils undertaking responsibilities such as Litter Patrol, giving out copies etc. Also, that pupils will listen and respect each others' points of view.

(Teacher D)

When questioned on the importance of citizenship education, all of the teachers who participated in this study acknowledge the value of educating children for active citizenship. However, many teachers expressed the viewpoint that there are a number of other subjects – namely English, Irish and Maths which, as well as being more time-consuming, tend to take priority over the teaching of SPHE. Thus, due to time constraints, the teaching of citizenship as part of SPHE may not be considered an imperative.

I do think SPHE is important as it covers things like hygiene and safety as well as citizenship, but you are under pressure to get through an English and Maths programme...I do think SPHE is important, as I said, but I really feel the pressure to cover the concepts in other subjects – they have to be met before children can progress into the next class so I do think teachers struggle to find the time to fit SPHE in as well.

(Teacher C)

These findings are not surprising. As Davies, Gregory and Riley (1999) point out, “there is a welter of evidence suggesting that, for a variety of reasons, citizenship education is a highly marginal curricular concern. In so far as it is being pursued at all, it is as a cross-curricular theme” (p.120).

There are a number of challenges to the teaching of citizenship education which are considerable and are not to be underestimated (Kerr, 2003). The teachers interviewed made reference to a number of obstacles which impede their teaching of citizenship education. Almost all teachers mentioned the considerable pressures and time constraints on teachers to implement/deliver an already overcrowded curriculum.

Time. Definitely time because you are only allocated half an hour to SPHE per week and citizenship education is just a small part of the SPHE programme.

(Teacher C)

Furthermore, a lack of space, given the large class sizes, and hence overcrowded classrooms, was also highlighted as an obstacle in trying to organise activity-based lessons. A paucity of resources in terms of teaching materials for citizenship education was identified by the some teachers as a barrier to the effective teaching of citizenship. Other challenges mentioned in relation to successfully educating pupils for citizenship included the absence of a school policy on citizenship education and the presence of untrained teachers on staff, who may not be as well-informed about the teaching of citizenship as they ought to be. In addition to all of the above, the majority of teachers criticised the government for failing to provide adequate resources, funding and in-service training for the teaching of citizenship.

The Department of Education and Science provide very little in-service training and throw the responsibility for teacher education back to the Board of Management without proper dedicated funding or time allocation.

(Teacher A)

The curriculum as it is won't cover it. Nor do we have a pack that you can open up when you want to teach a particular topic or part of the SPHE curriculum. That is typical of the government; of course, they include something, put it in the curriculum, but not actually give the back-up and resources that are needed to teach it. Nor do they give the money so that these packs can be put together for schools.

(Teacher B)

All of the teachers, with the exception of one who trained in England, made it clear that the college training/in-service training they received on citizenship education was insufficient.

I am only qualified two years now and I trained in X teacher training college. While we had a considerable amount of time allocated to SPHE on the timetable, when I looked back over my notes last night I could see that there was very little time spent on citizenship education. We spent a lot of time on teaching about relationships and sexuality and also the various methodologies, for example, Circle Time, which are used in SPHE but again very little on citizenship education. There is very little in my notes from college that I could use in any class in the school.

(Teacher C)

Clearly, there are a number of challenges to surmount if the curriculum for citizenship education is to be implemented successfully. The pressures and demands on teachers to implement an overloaded curriculum in an era of testing and accountability have been highlighted. The pre-service training and in-service training on citizenship education currently offered to teachers are considered inadequate. The scarcity of resources and materials available which might support the teaching of citizenship education is most alarming. Once again, the findings of this study are in line with those revealed by others who note that “factors frequently mentioned as discouraging citizenship education are uncertainty as to what it is, lack of adequate resourcing and lack of staff expertise...the pressures on the timetable arising from meeting the demands of the National Curriculum” (Davies, Gregory and Riley, 1999, p. 120-121).

Interestingly, despite the inadequacy of the training on citizenship education received and the fact that most teachers feel that materials for the development of citizenship in primary schools are minimal, all of the teachers taking part in this study feel confident in the teaching of SPHE and, more specifically, citizenship education.

Well, yes. Things are done incidentally a lot of the time. Like you are doing group work and you are teaching children to put up their hand, to take their turn to speak and listen when other people are speaking, respect for others etc and all of that is tied in with citizenship. I mean more could be done in specific lessons but a lot of it is integrated informally anyway. While everybody is capable of teaching it, we just need a few more ideas for concrete lessons.

(Teacher H)



The professional status of teachers is that they occupy powerful positions within their classrooms. They structure the learning experiences of children, establish the classroom climate and frequently make rapid decisions about the children with whom they interact on a daily basis whilst working within overcrowded classrooms and with inadequate resources. Given their considerable power, teachers significantly influence the course of policy implementation. Spillane, Reiser and Reimer (2002) highlight the fact that “local implementation is difficult...a key dimension of the implementation process is whether, and in what way, implementing agents come to understand their practice, potentially changing their beliefs and attitudes in the process” (p.387). The extent to which central policy influences local practice depends on those professionals charged with the responsibility of delivering policy. After all, the high levels of discretion and relative autonomy that characterises the work of those ultimately responsible for delivering the curriculum means that “policy at best can enable outcomes, but in final analysis it cannot mandate what matters” (McLaughlin, 1987, p.188). In other words, their professional autonomy, enhanced when policy dictated from above is weak or inconsistent, allows teachers to ignore or comply minimally with educational reforms with which they do not agree. As Deakin-Crick (2005) points out, “citizenship education requires teachers to use and trust their own professional judgement, working within a culture of professional responsibility rather than only within a culture of technical accountability” (p.56). It is heartening to learn that all of the teachers interviewed as part of this study claim that they value citizenship education and feel confident in teaching SPHE and, more specifically, citizenship education.

### *5.1.3 Leadership and Management*

Effective management and dedicated leadership are essential for the development of citizenship education. Traditionally, schools in Ireland were not organised or managed democratically. Dewey (1916) argued that the one-way delivery style of authoritarian schooling does not offer a good model for life in democratic society. If children are to share in the autonomy implicit in the concept of democracy, then authoritarian relationships need to be removed and democratic processes enacted in the practices and processes of the classroom. In the past, leaders and managers of the school under investigation in this study, akin to other primary schools in Ireland, adopted a top-down rather than a partnership approach to educational provision. The hierarchical way in which this school was managed until recently, given the substantial concentration of power and authority assumed by the previous principal, was mentioned by some teachers.

Things have improved. There was a tradition in this school where it was nearly like a dictatorship, I think. I wasn't here at the time but from what I've heard decisions were made and that was it, there was no further discussion and everything was black and white. There was no consultation... As a teacher you had no choice in the matter, you just did what you were told.

(Teacher H)

We know that, "democratic leadership is particularly important in relation to citizenship education, which specifically encourages democratic participation across the school" (Potter, 2002, p. 122). However, when questioned on the extent to which the ethos and culture of this school is democratic today, other teachers commented that, despite new leadership, managerial structures remain unchanged.

I think there is very much a hierarchy in this school, coming from the top-down... Here, things happen and decisions are made without you knowing about it and often they are beyond your control.

(Teacher E)

Consultation with partners in education, teachers, parents and pupils, is key to increasing the effectiveness of the teaching of and learning about citizenship education. Yet, some members of staff feel that consultation between those in management and teachers is minimal.

It could be more democratic. At the moment I think the school is run using a top-down approach. I mean certain decisions have been made over the past few years and the staff wasn't even consulted. I'd like to see that change. There should be more consultation and more communication among the staff with management.

(Teacher I)

Others disclosed that they feel communication between those in managerial positions and the rest of the staff is half-hearted and ineffectual.

I suppose, to be honest, I feel there is a lack of communication and I do find this a problem. For example, you hear on the grapevine that there is not going to be a staff meeting. I don't think the quota of staff meetings that we, as teachers, are entitled to is actually met....I do think there needs to be more meetings for the staff as a whole and more honest conversations about what people want and how they feel about things. Everybody should feel their ideas are heard and as far as possible taken into account.

(Teacher C)

Overall, the teachers appeared reasonably satisfied that traditional approaches to management structures are evolving slowly. However, that there is plenty of scope for improvement, particularly in terms of greater consultation and enhanced communication, has been flagged.

The reality is that schools are highly complex institutions in which key players may occupy powerful positions and can, not only influence, but dominate a school's agenda. To this extent, schools are limited democracies in which power struggles can occur between groups of teachers who feel that they have a greater level of influence and other teachers who feel they occupy a subordinate position in contrast to their colleagues (Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Ball, 1989). Yet, citizenship education requires a whole-school approach. The policies in the school under scrutiny in this study are inclusive and promote equality of opportunity for all pupils. And whilst there is an anti-bullying policy in place, it is notable that there is no policy on citizenship education in this school. The absence of a school policy on citizenship education was highlighted by one of the teachers interviewed.

There should be a school policy on it (citizenship education) and really everybody should be consulted. You would need to give over a whole staff meeting to that alone. There would have to be a debate between teachers, where everybody could say what they think is best and what should be in it.

(Teacher F)

It is hardly surprising, then, to discover that there does not appear to be a whole school approach to the teaching of citizenship. Rather, each individual teacher is apparently working autonomously.

No, I don't think there is a whole-school approach. I think individually we are following our own curriculum books and doing our own thing within the school and we do our best to operate as a whole school. But I think we could be doing it better.

(Teacher E)

Of course, it makes sense that "if teachers are able to develop a shared sense of what a particular subject is for they are more likely to teach it well than if they are simply following a prescribed set of procedures" (Tate, 2000, p.69).

Citizenship education concerns and should involve everyone in the school. Thus, while the intensity and complexity of the leadership role of principal and those in managerial roles in schools cannot be underestimated, leadership cannot apply solely to a select few if a whole-school approach to citizenship is to be assumed. As Flynn (2000) reminds us,

Leadership is not all down to the head teacher, the head of department or, in the classroom, the teacher. If it is, nobody is learning anything at all about leadership. The first rule of leadership is that it is shared. One person may be key, but leadership is shared – among pupils, teachers and other staff and members of the community. (p.205)

It was apparent that some of the teachers were acutely aware of their lack of power in comparison to the power of school principal and others in management positions. Undoubtedly, the principal must provide for every teacher a role in the management of

the school and opportunities for leadership (Furlong, 2000) and afford teachers “the time, space and power necessary during the school day to work collaboratively to shape policy and to work with parents and social service agencies in ways that strengthen school community ties” (Giroux, 1993, p.26). Of course, teachers must also assume responsibility for their role in adopting a whole-school approach to the teaching and learning of citizenship education. Reflecting on the relationship between education, leadership and the crisis of a democratic culture, Giroux (1993) notes,

Teaching must be linked with empowerment and not merely with technical competence. Teaching is not about carrying out other people’s ideas and rules without question. Teaching requires working within conditions in which power is linked to possibility, collective struggles to democratic reforms, and knowledge to the vast terrain of cultural and social differences that map out the terrain of everyday life. (p.26)

Despite the constraints they might feel in the way in which authority is employed, teachers, as previously noted, exercise a great deal of control and influence over their own actions and the dynamics of their own classrooms. The extent to which they are well-motivated and enthusiastic about citizenship education and democratic schooling depends, to a significant degree, on their own willingness to embrace change and develop a spirit of partnership within the school.

#### *5.1.4 School Ethos and Community*

The concept of children’s citizenship is a central guiding principle in the organisation of school life. It should inform all aspects of practice, rather

than being isolated as a subject to be learned, divorced from the realities of teachers' and pupils' experience.

(Devine, 2003, p.146)

Citizenship Education in primary schools extends beyond the formal Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b). It is embedded in the daily practices and relationships which determine the ethos and culture of the school and pervades every aspect of school life. The meaning of the term 'hidden curriculum', first used by Jackson (1968), was explored in chapter two. It refers to the values and beliefs, unintentionally transmitted to pupils each day through the unwritten school culture, embedded in the customs and tradition of every school. No two schools are the same.

Every human institution has its own ethos in the sense of a dominant, pervading spirit or character that finds its expression in the habits of behaviour of those who are part of it.

(Williams, 2000, p. 74)

The curriculum for citizenship education, the teaching and learning processes and the organisation and management of a school are intricately linked to a school's culture and ethos.

Citizenship education is recognised as a central purpose of schooling. The social studies curriculum, which draws heavily on history and the social sciences, is viewed as a key vehicle for citizenship education. In addition, other curriculum subjects, school ethos and out-of-school experiences also serve to teach young people about democracy, national identity, social cohesion and diversity.

(Hann, 2005, quoted in Osler and Starkey, 2005, p. 138)

In light of the fact that pupils need to be prepared for, as well as taught about citizenship education, the importance of school ethos in contributing to citizenship education cannot be underestimated. The reality, of course, is that while the formal curriculum endorses citizenship education within a democratic setting, a dichotomy exists, in many schools, between theory and practice. That many teachers feel the ethos and climate of this school is not wholly democratic, in that they themselves are not always consulted or asked for their opinion prior to decisions being made by management, has been noted. The teachers were asked whether the ethos and culture of this school provides pupils with opportunities to practice democracy. Almost all of the teachers commented positively on the Green-Schools programme (An Taisce, 2003), noting that it truly presents pupils with opportunities to practice democracy, but acknowledging that this is possibly the only whole-school opportunity for pupils to practice democracy.

Well, yes but only to a certain extent. I mean the Green-Schools Committee is evidence of children having the opportunity to practice democracy. I am sure that each teacher has their own elements within their individual classes but beyond the Green-Schools Committee I don't see any evidence of other whole school opportunities to practice democracy where children are involved in the running of things, or making decisions or being involved in bringing about change.

(Teacher E)

I suppose the Green-Schools initiative does give the pupils some say in the running of the school. However, there are areas such as school tours, projects etc that children could be consulted more. Probably we could allow students to come up with solutions to problems we have, for example, playground problems which would develop a sense of



ownership rather than them being given the solution or having the solution imposed on them.

(Teacher A)

The teachers differed in their interpretation of how active citizenship might be promoted in the classroom. A small number of teachers were uncertain about what active citizenship means in a primary classroom.

Well, I don't know really...I'm not sure. I suppose through participation, looking after the room, looking after each other and communicating with the teacher – not just in relation to lessons but doing their bit to maintain a good relationship with the teacher and each other. Maybe showing a sense of curiosity about what is going on in other classes and how the school works.

(Teacher I)

For others, active citizenship involves collaboration, consultation and a sense of responsibility.

Well, I think firstly children should be sitting in groups, at a round table, talking to each other. A big thing for me would be that when somebody else is talking that they would be listening so that they learn that what every child has to say is important and that everyone has the right to say something even if you don't agree with their opinion. While they would be working in groups and independently, they would have responsibility for their own place and keeping it neat and tidy and just having respect for their classroom.

(Teacher H)

Another teacher was of the opinion that active citizenship is about developing a sense of respect towards others and giving pupils ownership of their learning environment.

It's about trying to create a climate of awareness in the school, self-awareness and taking time to reflect upon our behaviour, that is pupil behaviour and teacher behaviour, in an effort to try to create respect for others, for property...It's also about trying to give pupils a sense of ownership of their environment so that everyone is aware of the needs of others.

(Teacher F)

The teachers cited various examples of democratic processes operating within their own classrooms including the establishment of the rules as a class at the beginning of each school year, the seating of children in groups and the allocation of responsibilities to pupils. Disappointingly, only a very small number of teachers interviewed expressed the need to consult with children in relation to the curriculum, for example, including the children in planning for a new topic or offering them opportunities to negotiate the timetable. Certainly, it appears that the majority of teachers are making some efforts to promote democracy. However, it is apparent that there is no general consensus on the practices and procedures which ought to be in place in order to promote active citizenship, within a democratic classroom setting.

School ethos and culture are inextricably linked to school structures. Hence, the teachers were asked to comment on the extent to which the school building and physical environment facilitates the teaching of citizenship education. It was previously noted in chapter 3 that the school under scrutiny in this study was built in 1970. The architecture of the building is such that each of the six main classrooms has its own door which gives

it direct access to the outdoors. However, there is no corridor connecting the classrooms to each other. There is no hall in the school, nor is there a reception area or central meeting point. Perhaps unsurprisingly, all of the teachers repeatedly pointed out that the physical structure of this particular school building seriously counteracts efforts to develop citizenship education.

There is no general space. There is nowhere for the teachers to gather other than the staffroom, let alone children. The children don't meet each other or walk by each other on corridors because there are none. We have no hall and so there is no place to hold plays or assemblies. In the UK, there are assemblies for the children every single day and the class teacher would have responsibility to take a theme and develop it and it was a huge thing. So, no this school is not conducive to the development of citizenship education.

(Teacher E)

The structure of the building does not allow for displays. There is no focal point such as a reception area that all the children pass on a regular basis. Children in prefabs have no need to come into the main school. The absence of a hall takes away the opportunity for children to meet as a whole group for say assembly which is used in other schools to promote a community atmosphere and a celebration of events within the community.

(Teacher A)

Also, the fact that, in geographical terms, this rural community is exceedingly dispersed was mentioned.

In terms of the wider environment around the school, yes our grounds are beautiful but we are not near a community centre that we can use or explore. In fact, this community doesn't have a core and really the hub of the community is when the school is beside a church, a centre etc and that's why we feel disjointed. I mean even the credit union is sitting on its own. The football pitch is away from that again. Everything is away from each other. I feel that it's hard in a community like this one to have active citizenship working well, even within the adult community.

(Teacher B)

Evidently, the structure of the school building and the disparity of the parish engender a sense of isolation rather than a feeling of belonging, among members of this school community. This physical sense of isolation, experienced by teachers and pupils, undoubtedly influences the school ethos and impedes the development of citizenship education. Nevertheless, teachers must overcome this challenge by drafting policies and adopting practices which will foster a more inclusive, democratic climate in all classrooms and throughout the school.

#### *5.1.5 Partnership with Parents and Local Community Relations*

Partnership with all involved in the education of children, including the children themselves, is central to the teaching of citizenship and educating about democracy. Therefore, all partners must be afforded a sense of responsibility through active involvement in the school and all voices must be heard so that no one feels excluded or marginalised. In line with legislation (Government of Ireland, 1995) which requires that schools evoke a 'spirit of partnership', many schools have taken steps to promote partnership with parents and the wider community in recent years. The teachers in this

school were questioned on the effectiveness of the development of partnerships with others including parents, members of the Parents' Council, the Board of Management, members of the local community, other schools, the County Council and voluntary organisations. Interestingly, both the principal and vice-principal maintained that partnerships are evolving slowly within this era of openness and accountability. However, other members of staff maintain that a disparity exists between the various groups and that there appears to be little evidence of a spirit of partnership in this school.

From my perspective, each of these groups is separate and there doesn't seem to be much integration between them. It feels sometimes that, for example, the Parents' Council are working on another project or another level and very much looking after their own agenda...I feel that there could be more of a link between all these groups to create a sense of belonging.

(Teacher E)

In terms of partnership with parents, it was observed that while parents are accommodated, once they have made an appointment to see a teacher in relation to their child's progress, an 'open-door' policy does not operate within this school.

I suppose each teacher has their own approach to developing partnership with parents...I am not sure whether there is a policy on involving parents. I haven't see many visitors around and, in the last school I was in, I did see a bit more of parents and people in the community being invited in to talk to the children etc.

(Teacher C)

Furthermore, where parents are encouraged to play an active role in the life of the school, it emerged that they are usually engaged in fundraising activities or to accompany classes on school trips.

I think there is good partnership with parents and the Parents' Council as they are involved in raising money for resources to be bought for the school.

(Teacher D)

Raising funds for the school does not, however, constitute partnership between teachers and parents in their child's learning. This level of parental participation is tokenistic and superficial as parents are not genuinely regarded as equal partners with the capacity to contribute meaningfully to discussions pertaining to the child's education. The characteristics of genuine partnership will be explored at a later stage in some detail. A number of teachers ascertained that it is unsatisfactory that the Board of Management plays a sedentary role, in terms of the daily life of the school.

It seems to be some ethereal body, apart from the principal and the staff representative, that we never saw and didn't have any input in the school.

(Teacher F)

I mean really the Board of Management never actually get together with the whole staff, never get together with others, even socially there is never an occasion when everyone gets together within this community. Maybe in other schools they do but I think here it isn't happening. It's all very individualistic. Teachers in this school wouldn't even know who is on their Board of Management.

(Teacher B)

Additionally, in relation to parents, other teachers feel there is still an element of 'them' and 'us' underpinning relations.

I don't think they (partnerships) are developed particularly well. It goes back years and years here. Everybody is far too wary of each other. They're kind of saying 'well, we don't want them to know this' and 'we don't want them to know that'.

(Teacher H)

The difficulties inherent in the complex relationships which exist between the various partners in education are evident. That there is minimal interaction between partners, for example, the BOM and teaching staff and between teachers and parents has been highlighted. A sense of suspicion and a lack of trust appear to underpin existing relations. It was asserted by those in management that partnerships are slowly evolving. However, it was acknowledged that much remains to be done if all parties are to be considered equal partners in education.

#### *5.1.6 Children as Citizens*

It is the central theory of this thesis that children are citizens. They are not 'future' citizens (Galston, 1991, p.253), nor are they citizens-in-waiting. This view is endorsed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) where children, under articles 12 and 13, are given the right to seek and impart information, to express their thoughts and feelings, to have these listened to and to partake in decisions affecting them. Developing children's capacity to reflect on issues, and participate in decision-making, is therefore central to enhancing active citizenship and the democracy process.

Thus, questions relating to children's citizenship were considered an imperative in order to uncover teachers' understanding and perceptions of children as citizens. It emerged that some of the teachers interviewed believe that primary school children may not be mature enough to make decisions related to their learning.

They can't be making decisions like 'oh, I don't think I will do Maths today' or 'I think we will do SPHE today' etc. They cannot have a choice in that, because as a teacher you are there to teach them, to educate them and there are certain rules and regulations within the classroom.

(Teacher G)

Some of the teachers interviewed expressed the viewpoint that any choices offered to children must be limited, and that boundaries ought to be laid when children are invited to make decisions. Other teachers, however, believe that pupils *should* be consulted with in relation to their learning and that they ought to be given opportunities to participate in the decision-making process.

I think it should be encouraged because it would give them a sense of ownership of their school day. I think it would have to be started off by making small changes, for example, for one week teachers could discuss with children homework issues or consult with them on what you might do in Art that week. I think it is important to give children choices and then taking time to reflect afterwards.

(Teacher F)

Perhaps surprisingly, almost all of the teachers involved in this study considered that children should be encouraged to think critically, although most agreed that in order to ensure that they do not undermine authority, the children need to be taught to consider



issues from all perspectives and to learn how to make their point without arguing with others.

I think actually it is important that children don't just accept things at face value but that they are taught to question and given a method to do that and not just going against things for the sake of it.

(Teacher C)

Legitimate concerns were, however, expressed by teachers in terms of the extent to which it is possible to consult with and negotiate with a large class of children, given the length of the school day and the pressures upon teachers to meet curricular objectives.

I think a certain amount of it is good but I think it can be taken to extremes because I know a friend of mine was working in an Educate Together school and it was almost decided by the children what they wanted to do that day. I mean at the end of the day the curriculum has to be taught.

(Teacher H)

Lastly, the teachers were asked whether or not they would be in favour of the establishment of a Children's Council. Most of the teachers interviewed tentatively agreed to the establishment of a 'Children's Council' though the need for ground rules and boundaries was emphasised repeatedly by all participants.

I think the idea has some merits. However, it would also have to be made clear to the children involved that there are other factors/issues governing policy in the school such as insurance, the curriculum, the Education Act, space, logistics etc and that these must be taken into consideration when decisions are made and indeed often dictate the stance taken.

(Teacher A)

One of the teachers interviewed, who trained in the UK, was particularly supportive of and enthusiastic about the establishment of a 'Children's Council' having previously seen this practice of democratic consultation operating successfully. Of course, securing the co-operation of all teachers to engage wholeheartedly with this undertaking at the outset is clearly essential.

I think it would be a great idea. Having seen it in England where you have a representative from Junior Infants right up to 6<sup>th</sup> Class and they discuss on a weekly basis if there are any issues in their classrooms. I mean it could be as simple as 'we need another bin' or 'our notice board is falling down'. If there are suggestions for changes or improvements you can discuss these as a class within your circle time or SPHE time or whatever and the representative would then go to a weekly meeting where they would have the opportunity to put their point across. Minutes would be taken at the meeting and it is all very formal and then outcomes of the meeting are fed back to the children at assembly...I have no doubt that it could work here...that is if everyone was in agreement and happy to be involved in it.

(Teacher E)

A number of teachers outlined concerns that the children might not understand the need for structure and boundaries when provided with a forum for discussion. This suggests that these teachers underestimate the capacities of young children to actively and appropriately engage in the schooling process.

On the whole, that the teachers who participated in this study are positively committed to the development of citizenship education must be acknowledged. Yet, the interviews revealed that the development of citizenship education presents a real challenge for the teachers in this school. Undoubtedly, citizenship education cannot be solely the responsibility of the school. Hence, it is necessary to consider the views of parents in relation to their role in the education of children and young people for citizenship, their perceptions of the role of the school in teaching citizenship education and their attitudes towards democratic schooling.

## 5.2 *Parents' Perspectives*

Children acquire their attitudes and values first and foremost from their parents. As their child's first educator, parents have a significant role to play in helping their child to develop a sense of active citizenship. However, the dearth of literature available on the role of parents in promoting active citizenship indicates that discussions on citizenship education have tended to overlook the significant role parents play in helping their children to cultivate a sense of belonging and develop a sense of active citizenship. According to the government's Concept of Active Citizenship document (Government of Ireland, 2007b) –

Involvement, citizenship and belonging as ways of relating and responding are typically first experienced in families and communities. In families and various local communities, children and adults learn this practice – thinking about various issues from the simple to the complex; co-operating and living with others; talking with and listening to others; using information as a basis for decision-making and action; and taking

action for agreed goals. In many respects it could be asserted that families form the basic nucleus of Active Citizenship. (p.6)

The views and attitudes of seven parents in relation to citizenship and education were elicited as part of this study. Initially, it had been considered that the use of focus group interviews might be a less protracted, informal way of collecting the data. Upon reflection, however, it was decided that one-to-one interviews, although time-consuming, would be more likely to offer a more comprehensive parental interpretation of citizenship education. Two of the parents interviewed were members of the Parents' Council. An interview schedule containing a number of detailed questions was distributed to each parent in advance of the interview. Once again, it was considered appropriate to do this as the researcher was keen to encourage the participation of parents and wished to dispel any anxieties that people might have had in relation to being questioned on citizenship and education. A variety of opinions in relation to citizenship education were offered by the participants. The responses obtained from the participants may be grouped and examined as follows – understanding citizenship, citizenship at home and citizenship at school.

#### *5.2.1 Understanding Citizenship*

At the outset, one parent pointed out that while many people have a vague understanding of the concept, the term 'citizenship' is too complex for most people to fully comprehend.

To me, the word 'citizenship', apart from being a bit hard to pronounce, in a way it's very woolly and misunderstood by most people... I think maybe they should rename the concept in a more meaningful way and make sure it is valued by people so that they understand the payoff from

being a good citizen. If I get involved by helping out in my local community there is a payoff for me, as well as for everybody else.

(Parent G)

This confusion around the meaning of the term 'citizenship' is hardly surprising given that, according to Heater (1990) -

From early in its history the term already contained a cluster of meanings related to a defined legal or social status, a means of political identity, a focus of loyalty, a requirement of duties, an expectation of rights and a yardstick of good behaviour... (p.163)

Presumably, citizenship is considered an abstract concept by a great number of people and replacing the vague concept of 'citizenship' with a more precise definition, which integrates the idea of a rights-bearing citizen with responsibilities to others, may actually help to develop a more practical understanding of citizenship.

It was considered appropriate to begin by ascertaining parents' views on what makes a 'good citizen'. In general, the parents interviewed agreed that a good citizen is somebody who cares for their local community, abides by the law and tries to teach their child morals and values.

I think a good citizen should abide by the rules or the law of the country that they inhabit. I also think a good citizen should make the time to be a part of his or her community and should encourage his or her children to grow up with the same values.

(Parent B)

When asked why the government might have set up the taskforce to encourage and promote citizenship, some parents admitted they were not aware that this taskforce had been set up prior to being interviewed as part of this study. On reflection, it was suggested that the taskforce may have been set up in direct response to the increase in the number of people arriving in Ireland from other countries and because, despite the fact that the government needs volunteers to undertake work in the community, the spirit of volunteerism appears to have disappeared in recent years.

I think active citizenship is very useful to the government. It offloads certain responsibilities to the public, for example, Tidy Towns committees take on huge responsibilities both manual and financial. Local authorities give them a lot of encouragement but little else. I think active citizenship is important, but is rapidly being lost. As people become more and more materialistic the willingness to work for no pay is disappearing.

(Parent B)

In the consumerist culture which defines society today, the pressures on families and local communities directly affect their willingness and capacity to engage in active citizenship. According to Dunne (2003) “the crisis for citizenship lies not only in the burgeoning of an unwieldy and very costly state bureaucracy. It resides more in the kind of *displacement* that brings this about – and creates an ongoing deficit of responsibility for it” (p.80).

The sense of isolation pervading contemporary society was mentioned by a number of participants.

The modern family now, including my own, would have two working adults and kids at school...therefore, there is no time for anything else. As

a result, people are becoming more and more isolated. For those who are less off or for those who live by themselves, there is no good will anymore, well to the same extent as there used to be as in helping neighbours, local community groups etc. These are all fading away and that's the reasoning behind the government setting up the taskforce.

(Parent D)

The disintegration of the local community, partly the government's doing, was also cited as a possible reason why the government needed to set up a taskforce to promote active citizenship.

I think that a lot of it has to do with the fact that our local communities are fragmenting and disappearing for commercial reasons. I mean we are losing our post offices, we are losing our banks, we are losing the local shops and the mega outlets are developing...You have dormitory towns and people living there but they are not working there so our local communities now are disappearing.

(Parent G)

All of the parents interviewed agreed that citizenship education is important for a number of different reasons, including the need to offer moral guidance to young people in light of the apparent breakdown in social order and the need to integrate people from diverse ethnic backgrounds into Ireland. In relation to the issue of where responsibility for citizenship education lies, most parents asserted that it lies primarily with themselves in the first instance and later with the school and government. Some parents drew attention to the fact that citizenship education may not happen in some homes and, thus, schools must assume responsibility for educating children and young people for citizenship. A

number of parents expressed frustration with the passive role the government appears to have assumed in relation to citizenship education to date.

I think the State has to set down, if you like, in terms of how it supports communities, how it supports families, how it supports schools and the education system. It's not just about people driving the economy, there's a bit more to it than that.

(Parent C)

I think it (citizenship education) is important but where the education takes place I don't know. I don't know if it's just the school that has a part to play. The family has a part to play. I don't somehow think that the government is going to play their part.

(Parent D)

Thus, it is clear that the parents interviewed believe that responsibility for teaching children about citizenship lies with a wide range of people. The government acknowledges that "the education system cannot be expected to resolve issues which are the result of wider societal factors" (Government of Ireland, 2007a, p.31). Nevertheless, that schools end up with a greater share of the responsibility for the development of citizenship education, as others may not duly undertake their responsibilities, was highlighted.

I would say we are all responsible. Yes, it has to start in the home but there is no guarantee that this will happen in every home as lots of homes have problems and are not able to cope. So I would definitely recommend that it happens in all schools and definitely our government should be helping us.



(Parent E)

Kymlicka (2001b) concurs that, “we cannot rely on the market, the family, or the associations of civil society to teach civic virtue... This suggests that schools must teach children how to engage in the kind of critical reasoning and moral perspective that defines public reasonableness” (p.303).

Finally, the participants were asked if they were aware of citizenship education taking place in primary schools. More than half of the parents interviewed admitted to not being aware that citizenship education is on the Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b). Some parents commented on the value of the Green-Schools programme (An Taisce, 2003) in developing citizenship and cited this as the only real evidence they have seen in relation to citizenship education.

I suppose the only evidence I would see of it at home would be the whole excitement over getting the Green Flag. That’s a good thing but it’s the only real thing I have seen at home lately.

(Parent D)

### 5.2.2 *Citizenship at Home*

The second part of the interview focused on how children are taught about citizenship at home. Almost all parents agree that values related to citizenship are discussed informally in the home, though not on a regular basis.

I suppose you take opportunities to talk about things as they arise whether it’s a TV programme that highlights some issue, something you read in the paper or something that arises in the class for the child. You try to understand and talk about issues as far as possible.

(Parent G)

In relation to active citizenship, most parents contended that they promote this by encouraging their children to assume responsibility for carrying out specific tasks/chores in the house, picking up litter, being neighbourly, fundraising, participating in local events and assuming membership of local clubs/organisations.

Yes, I would promote active citizenship at home. I encourage my daughter to be actively involved in the Girl Guides and both of my children pick up litter from the roadside with me and they occasionally help tidy up the shrubbery at (the local) church. As a family, we try to support local and school events.

(Parent B)

Most parents asserted that they are, in some way, involved in activities in the local community, though, in some cases, it emerged that this is primarily because their own children are participating. For example, some parents helped out with the football club because their son/daughter is a member of the team. One parent asserted that she is not involved in activities taking place in the local community precisely because her children are too young to participate at present. These comments suggest that some people feel that it is only necessary to become actively involved in their local community when their own children are members of clubs or participating in sports/events.

My husband is involved in the football club. He just joined it recently when my son joined up. We like to be around in whatever the children are involved in.

(Parent F)

Am I involved in activities locally? Probably not to a huge extent. I mean I am involved in the annual clean-up. Beyond that...we would support the local cemetery committee and then attending clubs like Ladybirds and tennis and that kind of thing that the children are involved in.

(Parent G)

Many parents maintained that they are not involved in their local community to the extent they would like to be, but they expressed that they would like to assume a more active role in the future. The pressures of work and a lack of time, however, prevent them from doing so at present. Of course, as one parent pointed out, although there may be several demands on people which they feel constricts their capacity to actively participate in their local community, people ultimately have to make the decision to be committed to active citizenship.

I think you can be a self-barrier in some ways. I mean it is really down to yourself. If you want to be involved in something then you can be involved in it...While it may be hard to get involved in some activities, I think for the most part it is up to the individual to decide they want to give something to the community or I want to spend some of my spare time helping others or contributing or whatever. So, I think the main barrier might be yourself really.

(Parent C)

The belief that schools ought to teach children political virtues has been proposed by theorists such as Gutmann (1987) who argues that children “must learn not just to behave in accordance with authority but to think critically about authority if they are to live up to the democratic ideal of sharing political sovereignty as citizens” (p.51). Thus, the parents involved in this study were asked if they actively encourage their children to

think critically. Almost all parents asserted that they do encourage their children to think critically, to ask questions and to reason things out. Several parents pointed out, however, that although they encourage their children to think critically, they would not encourage their children to undermine the authority of their teachers. All parents affirmed that they listen to their children and give them opportunities to discuss issues that are real to them at home on a daily basis.

### *5.2.3 Citizenship at School*

Many schools continue to function in ways that violate children's rights and are antithetical to promoting democratic citizenship values and behaviours. In fact, schools do not pose a challenge to the implementation of rights-based citizenship education, sometimes they themselves are an obstacle to learning.

(Howe and Covell, 2005, p.169)

In the third and final part of the interview, the participants were questioned on their role in the school. To begin with, the parents were asked whether they feel they are offered opportunities to be actively involved in the education of their children. There are, according to Pugh and De'Ath (1989), five dimensions to parental involvement. These include non-participation, support, participation, partnership and control. It is worth briefly considering each of these levels of involvement to determine the extent to which there is genuine partnership with parents in the school under investigation in this study. In relation to non-participation, Pugh and De'Ath (1989) consider that parents may be either 'active' non-participants who make the decision not to be directly involved and are satisfied with the work going on in the school or alternatively they may be 'passive' non-participants in that they would like to be more involved but lack the confidence to

assume a more active role and/or they may be dissatisfied with the level of partnership offered to them. At the next level, parents may occupy a supportive role in that they support the school, by attending events or raising money, but only when invited to do so. Participation, either as helpers or learners, is the third level of parental involvement. At this stage, parents offer assistance and subsequently participate in school activities, for example, by going on school tours, supporting children's learning within the classroom or attending parent workshops on occasion. The next phase of involvement is partnership. At this level it is envisaged that parents and teachers have a working relationship with a shared sense of purpose. In other words, this level of parental involvement ensures parents have access to information and school records, share in the diagnosis and assessment of their children's learning needs and are involved in the selection and appointment of teachers. The fifth and final stage of parental involvement is control. At this level, parents make and implement decisions. Furthermore, they are directly responsible and accountable for teaching and learning within the school.

The establishment of a National Parents' Council in 1985 and the affirmation of the central role parents play in the education of their child in legislation (Government of Ireland, 1995) is recognition of the fact that parents are partners in education. Furthermore, it may be proposed that, in terms of the framework proposed by Pugh and De'Ath (1989), some parents are willing to be involved at partnership level. The parents interviewed as part of this study, however, did not indicate that their involvement is at the level of partnership. Mixed responses were obtained from participants in relation to the parental involvement in school activities. Half of the parents clearly identified themselves as 'active' non- participants. They expressed their satisfaction with existing

arrangements and appeared happy to leave the running of the school and the teaching of their children to the staff of the school.

Well, basically when I put my children on the bus in the morning I don't think about them until I pick them up in the evening and that's always the way. Anything that happens in school I leave it to the school to deal with it themselves.

(Parent E)

Other parents may be classified as 'passive' non-participants. They claimed that they would like to be more involved in school activities but feel they cannot assume a more participative role until they are invited to do so.

I'd love more opportunities to get into the classroom to see what the children are doing. When the children are doing little plays or concerts at school I am always a bit sad that I can't come along to see it. They perform for other classes but never for us. Maybe even the chance to come in and use your own talents...I know friends of mine are involved in schools in Dublin and they are often in during the school year to talk to the children or give little workshops and they love that and the kids love it too...I mean take Sports Day. The parents would love to come along on Sports Day and they could get involved in that, if even as a fundraiser.

(Parent G)

I suppose I am not invited to the school and asked to this, that or the other. I'm not saying that the school isn't open to it. It just hasn't happened that's all.

(Parent F)

The majority of the parents interviewed claimed that they support the school 'from the outside', by attending school events and raising funds. Yet, we know that parental and community involvement is crucial to the success of a school and to the success of children. According to Putnam (2000), "student learning is influenced not only by what happens in school and at home, but also by social networks, norms, and trust in the school and in the wider community...when parents and the wider community work with schools, students benefit in concrete and measurable ways" (p.302).

Overall, most of the participants were positive about the changes which have taken place in recent years and they feel that have a good relationship with the school principal and teachers. It was suggested, however, that there is room for improvement in terms of improving existing partnership.

I think there is a partnership of sorts there but I think it needs development...I don't think it's as good probably as it could be.

(Parent C)

Indeed, none of the parents interviewed indicated that they consider their involvement to be a genuine partnership with teachers. It is apparent that these parents feel they do not have equal access to information and records. Equally, they do not share in the diagnosis and assessment of their child and are not involved in the selection of teachers – all of which constitute being 'in partnership' as parents in the final stage of the framework outlined by Pugh and De'Ath (1989).

The participants were asked whether or not the school uses parent volunteers and what they thought of this idea. Most parents considered that the school probably does use volunteers on occasions but, other than school tours, were not quite sure how this is

actually happening. All of the parents interviewed thought that the involvement of parent volunteers in schools was a good idea.

Yes, sometimes they do use parent volunteers. I think it's a good idea because you get involved in school activities and it is great fun. I helped out with the play at Christmas and I had a great time.

(Parent A)

Some parents, however, expressed the view that volunteers should be invited into this particular school more often and suggested that a prescribed protocol for recruiting volunteers be put in place so that all parents are offered the opportunity to take a more active role in school activities if they wish.

Selectively. It is a good idea but it would benefit from a more formal structure on it. I think the way volunteers are picked up is that if someone is around or the principal or a teacher gets to know someone then they'll ask them to do something but what does that say about other people...I think things are a bit *ad hoc* really and maybe it's not well developed in other schools around the country either but again it's something that could be looked at...it is about structuring things so that there is flexibility and possibility there for people.

(Parent C)

In relation to the extent to which parents feel they are consulted in the decision-making process within the school, once again the participants varied in their responses. Some parents feel they are not consulted in decision-making, while other parents contended that it may not always be necessary to consult parents and concluded that they are happy to trust the school to make the decisions.



The parents involved in this study were subsequently invited to offer an opinion on their child's experiences of citizenship education at school. When asked about the meaning of active citizenship in a primary school, it was clear that the participants had a wide and varied understanding of active citizenship. One parent recognised that citizenship is a sense of belonging to a school and a community. Other parents maintained that citizenship education involves teaching morals and engendering respect for others. Another parent alluded to the fact that citizenship involves working together and collaboration and made reference to the necessity of seating children in groups order to facilitate that work. Once again, the Green-Schools programme (An Taisce, 2003) was cited as an example of active citizenship taking place in this particular primary school. Furthermore, when asked if they thought their child was learning about civic responsibility and participation at school, all participants were hopeful that this type of education was actually happening and most parents cited the Green-Schools programme (An Taisce, 2003) as an example.

In relation to consultation with pupils at school, some parents felt satisfied that their children are consulted with, while other parents appeared unsure as to the extent that this happens. One parent was adamant that her children are not listened to or consulted on matters which affect them.

No. My children don't feel that they have an opportunity to discuss issues that are real to them at school. If I encourage them to discuss things with their class teacher, I usually get the reply 'no! I will get into trouble!' or 'Teacher doesn't have the time'.

(Parent B)

It emerged that, on the whole, the parents interviewed are not convinced that the ethos and culture of this school encourages and provides children with opportunities to practice democracy and would like to see more examples of this.

To be honest I'm not sure on that one. There may be some asking 'what do you think?' but I suppose I can only go on what I have heard the children say and I've never heard them say they have actually voted or have partaken in that level of activity.

(Parent C)

### 5.3 *Conclusion*

Schools are faced with teachers who have no training in citizenship education, with parents who have doubts about teachers delivering a citizenship education programme...and with students who appear to be not only ignorant of political issues but are mostly negative and cynical about them.

(Lee and Fouts, 2005, p. 115)

In relation to understanding citizenship, the fact that the term 'citizenship' comprises diverse and often contentious meanings was explored earlier in Part I. During the course of this study, that people struggle to make sense of this abstraction and that a more concrete, accessible explanation of citizenship in democratic society ought to be offered, was alluded to. As Miller (2000) concurs, "citizenship – except in the formal passport-holding sense – is not widely understood...people do not have a clear idea of what it means to be a citizen (p.26). Obviously, if we are to develop citizenship, we need to understand what citizenship means. The majority of teachers interviewed felt

they had a general understanding of citizenship education. Yet, they defined citizenship in rather narrow terms and appear to view citizenship as a type of social education rather than political education. Most of the parents participating in this study also considered citizenship education to be a type of social and/or moral education rather than political education. On the whole, the teachers and parents interviewed acknowledged that there is a growing sense of crisis in democratic society with regards to citizens' lack of engagement in civic life and, consequently, positively value citizenship education.

The majority of parents were hopeful that citizenship education is being taught in this school, yet there appeared to be some confusion among parents as to how citizenship education might be developed in a primary school classroom. From the teachers' perspectives, there appeared to be a spirit of goodwill extended towards citizenship education. However, it may be concluded from their comments that, in their efforts to teach an already overloaded curriculum, many teachers do not prioritise the teaching of citizenship as set out specifically in the Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b). In fact, given the absence of a whole-school approach or coherent policy, the teaching of citizenship in this school might be described as *ad hoc*.

The teachers interviewed asserted that the development of citizenship education presents them with a great number of challenges. For example, the training and resources that would assist effective delivery of citizenship education, as outlined by the Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b), and promote participation and involvement, are extremely limited. They expressed a need for professional development opportunities, classroom materials to support the teaching of citizenship and a greater contribution from other people, specifically the government. Almost all of

the parents interviewed cited the pressures of work and lack of time as the main barriers to their taking a more active role in the community. One parent conceded that she is happy to relinquish responsibility for citizenship education to the teachers.

In relation to partnership, it was apparent that both teachers and parents feel that the notion of partnership is evolving slowly in this school and that, ultimately, there is scope for improving existing arrangements. For the most part, parents indicated that they are keen to understand what is happening in the school in terms of citizenship education and would welcome more opportunities to actively participate in school activities. For their part, the teachers acknowledged that, at present, negotiation with and collaboration between the various partners in education is minimal but suggested that a spirit of partnership is gradually developing within this school.

Parents and teachers appeared divided on the extent to which children ought to be encouraged to think critically, though, interestingly, not in terms of their distinct groupings as 'parents' or 'teachers'. While most teachers and parents maintain that children ought to be encouraged to think critically, a small number of both teachers and parents asserted that children should only be taught to think critically to the extent that they do not challenge the authority of adults.

The ethos of a school has significant implications for the development of citizenship education. School ethos, as explicated in chapter two, refers to the intangible character and spirit that permeates the daily activities of school life and underpins relationships in terms of how people interact with each other within the school community. The teachers and parents interviewed concurred that the ethos and culture of this school is not as

democratic as, perhaps, it might be. Some of the teachers claimed that, as members of staff, they themselves are not always consulted on issues which arise or invited to participate in the decision-making process. In turn, they asserted that the extent to which children should be consulted on matters which affect them is questionable in that their age may limit their capacity to make decisions. From their comments, it was apparent that much of what happens in the classrooms stems from the fact that teachers occupy positions of authority and, ultimately, the decision to consult with children remains at their individual discretion. The majority of teachers claimed that they take steps to develop democratic climates within their own classrooms. As a group, however, the teachers conceded that the ethos and culture of the school is not entirely democratic and that there ought to be more consultation and collaboration between staff and management and, to some extent, between staff and pupils. The majority of parents asserted that they were hopeful that their child would be consulted on issues that affect them at school, although some parents appeared sceptical with regard to the extent to which this is actually happening. Nevertheless, the Green-Schools programme (An Taisce, 2003) was positively appraised by both groups as an evidence of democracy in practice within the school.

Finally, it was apparent that all of the teachers and parents interviewed in this research study positively value citizenship education. The teachers, for their part, are positively committed to developing citizenship education despite the numerous challenges which constantly impede their efforts to, formally and informally, teach active, global citizenship. For their part, the conversations with the parents indicated that, although they recognise that citizenship education is not solely the responsibility of the school, they trust the teachers to successfully develop citizenship education at school. In the

final part of this thesis, it is necessary to draw some further conclusions by reviewing the findings of the present study from the viewpoints of all of the participants involved and to consider the implications of these findings for the advancement and enhancement of the development of citizenship education, not only in the school under scrutiny in this research study, but possibly in other Irish primary schools as well.

## **Conclusion**

## **Conclusion: Outcomes and Recommendations**

### *Introduction*

Children are largely invisible, yet it is they, and not their parents, who are the direct users of the school system, and who may well have strong views of their own about their education.

(Bulmer and Rees, 1996, p.276)

This research study endeavoured to understand how a particular group of children experience citizenship and democracy at home and at school, appreciate the barriers which impede their parents from taking a more active role in their community and identify the challenges which their teachers face in developing effective citizenship education in the school and in the community. Thus, Part II of this research study interpreted and analysed children's perceptions of their schooling experience and their status as citizens, the views and attitudes of teachers in relation to the development of citizenship education and parents' perspectives of citizenship education at home and at school. The aim of this conclusion is to review the findings of the study, to consider the extent to which the main questions posed at the outset have been answered and to discuss the significance and implications of the main findings for practice, policy and research.

Active citizenship is most definitely on the public policy agenda in Ireland. This is evidenced in the recent governmental reports and studies concerned with trends in the level and nature of active citizenship including the Report of the Democracy Commission (2005a), the Report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (2005b), the Report of the National Economic and Social Forum (2003) and the Report of the National Committee on Volunteering in Ireland (2002). The Taskforce on Active Citizenship was established in



April 2006 to review trends in civic engagement in Ireland. The recently inaugurated Steering Group on Active Citizenship (5<sup>th</sup> November 2008) will assist and advise on how best to increase engagement in politics, community organisations, volunteering and neighbourhood activities. In the midst of rapid economic and social change, the government is increasingly reliant on the estimated 20,000 groups and organisations in the voluntary and community sector of society (Government of Ireland, 2007a). In short, the practice of active citizenship is of enormous importance to the government since it cannot possibly meet all needs and relies heavily on people to play their part by becoming actively engaged within their own neighbourhoods and communities and working together to sustain democratic society.

In the present climate in Ireland, the development of citizenship education is, perhaps, more urgent now than ever. The importance of citizenship education in preparing citizens to actively participate in local, national and global communities is recognised by the government. Citizenship education is part of the Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b). Yet, almost a decade later, the actualisation of citizenship education in Irish primary schools remains obscure. It is in this context that the present study aimed to offer insight into the development of citizenship education in one Irish primary school.

### *Discussion of findings*

Schools do not simply pose a challenge to the implementation of rights-based citizenship education; sometimes they are themselves an obstacle to learning.

(Howe and Covell, 2005, p.169)

There are significant obstacles to the development of citizenship education. The findings of this study were analysed and interpreted in chapters four and five in the context of the existing research and debates in contemporary philosophy and education, considered previously in Part I. Chapter four explored the children's perceptions and experiences of citizenship and democracy. Chapter five focused on the perspectives of teachers and parents on citizenship and education. This discussion of the outcomes examines the significance of these findings for policy, practice and research.

The children who took part in this research study demonstrated a good understanding of citizenship. In terms of their identity, they explained that they feel they belong within a range of settings including the home, the school, their local community and wider society. Furthermore, these children appeared acutely aware of their responsibilities as citizens at home, at school and in the community. This is analogous with the views of their parents and teachers who, on the whole, consider citizenship to be a type of social education rather than political education. The need for children to develop a sense of respect and concern for the welfare of others, to become tolerant of a diversity of views and to realise the importance of active participation, given their obligations and responsibilities to their fellow citizens in the community, was emphasised by both groups. However, as the Taskforce on Active Citizenship points out (Government of Ireland, 2007b), "active citizenship is as much about decision-making, politics, democracy and participation in the governance of communities as it is about 'helping out' and volunteering" (p.6). That children must acquire knowledge of political issues so that they may participate in the democratic process was not alluded to by parents or teachers.

Interestingly, most of the children interviewed found it more difficult to articulate their rights as citizens than they did their responsibilities. Initially, they demonstrated a complete lack of awareness of their rights suggesting that the children participating in this study may not have been specifically instructed on their status as rights holders. The question of children's rights is increasingly discussed with regard to the citizenship of children. During the present study, the children asserted their present, and not future, status as citizens in society. Having explored the rights of children as set out in the UNCRC with the researcher, they concluded that, as children, they do not have access to the full range of rights available to them, more specifically, the right to be consulted, express their views and have their opinions taken seriously when decisions are being made which affect them. The extent to which teachers genuinely regard children as citizens is questionable, given that some members of staff believe that primary school children are not mature enough to make decisions in relation to their own learning. The children asserted that they would like increased opportunities for participation and responsibility in school and suggested the establishment of a children's council/School council in order to extend their opportunities to have a say, take responsibility and make decisions about the running of their school, all of which are elements of active Citizenship. Yet, while the majority of teachers maintained that they are in favour of encouraging pupils to think critically and ask questions, few were wholeheartedly enthusiastic about the establishment of a children's council/school council. Talk is fundamental to active citizenship (Enslin, Pendlebury and Tjiattas, 2001). Yet, a number of teachers appeared sceptical about the extent to which it is possible to regularly consult and negotiate with children and outlined their concerns that children might not understand the need for structure and boundaries, when provided with a forum for discussion. It may be suggested that some teachers underestimate the capacities of

young children to actively and appropriately engage in the schooling process. From a parental perspective, almost all of the participants in this study claimed that they encourage their children to think critically, to ask questions and to reason things out. They affirmed that they listen to their children and give them opportunities to discuss issues that are real to them at home on a daily basis. However, these parents appeared uncertain about the extent to which their children are given opportunities to participate in decision-making at school.

Some of the older children asserted that their teachers occupy a more powerful position in the classroom and insinuated that inequality epitomised the adult-child relationships in school. They expressed their frustration with the power imbalances within the school, citing the rules in school which curb their freedom and their experiences of apparently unfair, non-negotiable punishments being meted out by teachers as evidence that they are positioned at the bottom of an existing hierarchy. Interestingly, the conversations with the teachers and parents revealed that traditionally, a hierarchy did, in fact, exist in this school whereby previous principals were in complete control and assumed a powerful and authoritative role in the daily running of the school. For some teachers, this primary school continues to be characterised by hierarchy and authority in that they feel, as members of staff, they are not always consulted or invited to participate in the decision-making process. From the perspective of some of the parents interviewed, they would like to be more involved in school activities but feel they cannot assume a more participative role until they are invited to do so. Accordingly, it is apparent that all of the participants, pupils, parents and teachers, feel somewhat confined in their capacity to ultimately influence organisational and managerial decisions.

In the course of this study, it emerged that there is no formal policy on citizenship education in place in this school. Hence, teachers have the autonomy to subjectively interpret the concept of active citizenship, which, of course, means that the children they teach are likely to experience citizenship education differently as they progress through the school, depending on the perspective of the individual teaching them. The teachers themselves were noticeably uncertain about how citizenship education is developed outside their individual classrooms. Similarly, there appears to be a good deal of confusion among parents as to what citizenship education entails and how it might be implemented in a primary school classroom. Nevertheless, all of the participants cited the Green-Schools programme (An Taisce, 2003) as an example of an environmental programme which addresses citizenship through active involvement. That the children, as members of a democratic committee, are responsible for organising practical ways of addressing general concerns about the school environment was commented upon favourably by almost all of the children, teachers and parents participating in this study.

The interviews revealed that the development of citizenship education presents a number of challenges for both teachers and parents. The teachers repeatedly mentioned that the training and resources that would assist effective delivery of citizenship education as outlined by the Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b) are seriously lacking. Thus, for a variety of reasons, including inadequate pre-service training and in-service development, scarcity of resources, an overloaded curriculum and pressures to attain results in high stakes examinations, large classes and lack of space, citizenship education is a marginal curricular concern for the teachers involved in this study. In so far as it is being taught at all, a cross-curricular approach is taken to citizenship education in that it is not taught as a separate subject or topic, nor is it integrated with

other subject areas, for example, geography or history. Rather, it is assumed that citizenship education permeates the entire curriculum and underpins teaching and learning in all subjects. In relation to their role in promoting active citizenship, almost all of the parents interviewed cited the pressures of work and lack of time as the main barriers to taking a more active role in their community. Those parents who do participate in community activities appear to do so because their children are involved in a particular club, for example, Ladybirds/Brownies/Boy scouts, football club, tennis club or in school events. For the government, the impact of changes in the economy and changing patterns of work, the effects of a greater ethnically diverse population as a result of increased emigration to Ireland, the creation of new forms of community, as well as the apparent lack of interest and involvement of young people in public and political life, present challenges in encouraging people to play a more active role in their neighbourhoods, communities, voluntary organisations and political structures. Clearly, there are implications and challenges associated with promoting and supporting active citizenship for all of us.

### *Recommendations*

#### *Recommendations for Practice*

The incorporation of citizenship education into schools calls for very considerable planning, co-ordination and leadership on the part of teachers.

(McLaughlin, 2002, p.559)

It is apparent that there is a need to promote a whole-school approach to citizenship education. It is anticipated that this school is not alone in its failure to recognise the broad scope to citizenship education and to subsequently translate this into a coherent

whole school policy. On my interpretation, a coherent whole-school policy on the development of citizenship education needs to be formulated and implemented by the school community. This school, possibly like many other schools, also needs to identify the effect of citizenship education on aspects of school policies, teaching and learning, leadership and management, school ethos, curriculum development and community relations. It has been established that the physical structure of this primary school does not facilitate the development of citizenship education. Nevertheless, teachers must overcome this challenge by drafting policies and adopting practices which will promote and support active citizenship. Given the evolving nature of citizenship education in this school, the appointment of a citizenship co-ordinator who will work in partnership with staff, parents and pupils to promote citizenship education would undoubtedly improve existing efforts to implement citizenship education in this school.

The interviews with parents and teachers revealed that this school needs to establish meaningful partnership with all partners in education. It hardly needs to be emphasised that schools alone cannot assume full responsibility for the development of an active citizenry. As Dunne (2003) points out,

The best intentions and abilities of teachers notwithstanding, it defies moral-political gravity to expect schools on their own to counter the deep-lying tendencies of a society – tendencies that bear very heavily on schools themselves. (p.86)

There is a wide range of additional contexts and resources which can contribute to the development of citizenship education, including the family, the media, political institutions, political parties, pressure groups, local initiatives and voluntary community activity (Tooley, 2000), as well as the powerful stakeholders in education, namely the

State, Church, teacher unions and parent associations. This school, like many other schools, must seek to involve all partners in the development of citizenship education. Ultimately, the whole school community, teachers, pupils, parents and members of the wider community, must collaborate to develop the mission statement, policies and codes of behaviour, and work together to create a shared vision of active citizenship which represents the knowledge, understanding and aspirations of all concerned. After all, active citizenship is everybody's responsibility. The ancient African proverb "it takes a village to raise a child" reminds us that responsibility for the upbringing of children lies with the family, the extended family, the school, the community, the government and the media, all of whom must demonstrate a willingness to understand, recognise and assume their responsibilities if all children are to be enabled to be active citizens of democratic society.

A commitment to democratic schooling is at the core of effective citizenship education. However, the organisation and management of schools in Ireland has unquestionably been undemocratic and the school under scrutiny in the present study is no exception. We know that children cannot simply be taught to be citizens but must learn it through experience. Thus, children in schools must be given opportunities to voice their opinions, listen to what others have to say and participate in the decision-making process. In any case, under Article 27 of the UNCRC (1989), pupils have the right to be informed about the activities of their school and to be actively involved in the operation of the school. The implication for teachers is that they need to come to realise that the ways in which they organise their classrooms and facilitate learning can offer a powerful model for democracy, for example, the provision of opportunities to engage in dialogue, participate in decision-making and learn to compromise as members of a group.



Consequently, teachers must critically review their practice and revise their teaching methodologies. Schools, on the whole, must adopt a more democratic structure of working. After all, “a school will hardly produce democrats if it is not run by people committed to and living the principles of the democratic form of life and government” (Aspin, 1997, p. 255). There is a need for a change of ethos in schools. Ultimately, schools’ commitment to the promotion of active citizenship will be reflected in the way in which pupils interact with each other, in the way staff and pupils interact and in the way the school relates to the community.

Evidently, there is a need for teachers to review existing power relations within this school setting and, subsequently, take positive action to empower the children in a range of situations in order to re-address the inequalities which exist. Citizenship is about “recognising the interconnectedness of our lives as adults, parents and children and no longer seeing the relationships between adult and child as naturally and necessarily hierarchic” (Roche, 1999, p.485). The children who participated in this study demonstrated that they are capable of forming opinions, expressing ideas, making informed choices and actively participating. Clearly, if we are committed to recognising children as citizens, then their views and ideas must be taken seriously. In order to ensure children are consulted and to guarantee their participation in the decision-making process, children need to be given meaningful fora in which their views can be aired and considered as part of the democratic process, whether in schools, in local communities or at national level. Thus, it is recommended that a Children’s Council/Student Council be set up in this primary school, as suggested by the pupils during this study, without delay.

This school, like many other primary schools in Ireland, is predominantly mono-ethnic. Yet, as we know, schools have a responsibility to address the issues of gender difference, class inequalities and cultural diversity which exist in society. After all, “intercultural education is for all children irrespective of their ethnicity. Since all our children live in a country and a world that is becoming increasingly diverse, we need to prepare them for that world” (NCCA, 2005, p.4). Intercultural education, as set out in the NCCA Guidelines (2005), should be integrated into the teaching of all curricular areas, taught formally as part of SPHE/CSPE, so that specific issues are addressed and conveyed informally in the structures and practices that underpin teaching and learning. It is apparent that “the educational system as a whole must adopt a much more pro-active attitude towards the inclusion of diverse cultures in relation to the curriculum, not least in primary schools” (Richardson, 2008, p.66). Also, members of ethnic minority groups should be employed as teachers in schools and be included as members on educational programme boards and Boards of Managements, thus sending a clear message that recognition, representation and respect for cultural differences in an inclusive school surpasses making tokenistic gestures and endeavours to seriously challenge racial, ethnic and cultural inequalities in schools.

### *Recommendations for Policy*

Citizenship education looks like the seed that did not fall on fertile ground. The main problem is that it is being introduced into an education system that is undemocratic and does not have anything like the congruent structures, procedures, values, assessment and staffing it requires.

(Harber, 2002, p.237)

Policymakers hugely underestimate the considerable discretion and relative autonomy teachers have in relation to the implementation of policy. As McLaughlin (1987) points out, “policy, at best, can enable outcomes, but in final analysis it cannot mandate what matters” (p.188). Thus, policymakers need to question the extent to which there is a shared interest in and commitment to reforms which are dictated from the top and into which teachers and pupils may feel they have had little input. The extent to which central policy influences local practice depends on the extent to which the government engages all partners in education in the policymaking process. Sugrue (2004) highlights the fact that, “promoting dialogue about the nature and purpose of primary curricula and schooling is a requirement in a more open, pluralist and (hopefully) more democratic Ireland” (p. 169). That policy-makers must recognise the centrality of the teachers’ role in developing and implementing policy, and seek to empower teachers to undertake a leadership role within the school community, is fundamental to the development of citizenship education.

Our children are the nation’s most precious asset yet the preposterously poor level of government investment that characterises Irish primary education sends a clear message to all regarding the status of children. The direct implication of this paucity of funding in schools is such that many children experience their education in overcrowded and undersized classrooms which are insufficiently resourced and not functionally equipped to facilitate the development of citizenship education. Where policy is weak, or professionals do not have the capacity or the resources to meet demands, it is the children who bear the costs. The Report of the National Education Convention Secretariat (1994) highlighted that -

One of the significant lessons learned from international research is that it is a difficult and complex task to bring about significant educational change and the time-span involved may be frustrating for impatient reformers. Resources, timing and attitudes are very central elements of the process. (p.163)

It is essential that the government demonstrates its commitment to the development of citizenship education by ensuring that schools are properly resourced with the appropriate teaching materials to support the 'Developing Citizenship' strand of the SPHE curriculum. Moreover, given that it was recently reported in a national newspaper that "Irish classrooms are among the most overcrowded in Europe...with one in four students sharing their classroom with thirty pupils or more" (Donnelly, 2007), it is difficult to envisage how teachers might facilitate innovative, practical activities related to citizenship in overcrowded, confined classrooms. A radical reduction in class sizes is an imperative for the effective development of citizenship education.

During the course of the study, it emerged that many parents aspire to be more actively involved in voluntary activities and events taking place within the local community. However, a number of barriers exist which prevent them from engaging and participating in society. The Report of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship (Government of Ireland, 2007a) identified the main obstacles to greater participation as "time, new patterns of work and leisure, as well as changing values and choices...insurance, bureaucratic burdens and lack of facilities" (p.16). It is crucial that children, from an early age, see the adults around them demonstrate that, as citizens of a democratic society, they (the children) have rights and responsibilities to the wider community. Parents who vote, make a contribution to their community, participate in neighbourhood watch schemes

and become involved in local youth/sports clubs, as well as voluntary organisations, inspire their children to be active, engaged citizens. Clearly, if the government is serious about encouraging people to play a more active role in their communities, whether this is civic participation, community involvement or volunteer work, then the necessary supports will have to be put in place to facilitate greater participation in society.

Teachers are, according to Davies, Gregory & Riley (1999), confused about citizenship education. This is hardly surprising given that teachers in Ireland have received minimal training in citizenship education. The interviews indicated that citizenship education is a relatively low priority curricular area for teachers. Extensive initial teacher education and additional in-service training is essential to the development of citizenship education. Teachers must be given opportunities to reflect on existing practices and the capacity for change at school and classroom level if schools are to become 'communities of practice' (McLaughlin, 1987). Additionally, teachers are, according to Davies, Gregory & Riley (1999), unfamiliar with significant aspects of citizenship education. While there is genuine goodwill, the teachers who participated in this study did not appear to be familiar with the main theories behind citizenship education. Teachers' understanding of the philosophical theory behind citizenship will influence how they develop citizenship education. In light of the ambiguity and controversies around the notion of citizenship, teachers need to be involved in the development of a clear policy of citizenship education so that they may have a shared sense of what citizenship education entails as a curricular subject. At the present time, there would appear to be a danger that many teachers are merely following a prescribed set of procedures, as set out in the Primary School Curriculum (1999b).

It is apparent that, if citizenship education is to be successfully developed in Irish primary school, the government must take action. As Tate (2000) correctly points out, “we will need guidance. We will need case studies. We will need the support of business and voluntary bodies. We will need public figures to be associated with the initiative. We will need to give thought to ways of accrediting and rewarding those aspects of citizenship capable of assessment. We will need professional development” (p.73). In short, the government must make it clear that it is genuinely serious about the development of citizenship education.

#### *Recommendations for Research*

The relative lack of research specifically on children’s experience of school can be attributed to adult perceptions of children as immature and not knowledgeable about school matters, due to their status as children.

(Osman, 2005, p.182)

This study offers valuable insight into the development of citizenship education in one particular primary school. It is anticipated that the findings will motivate the teachers involved in the study to reflect on how citizenship education is currently planned, implemented and promoted in this school and, following some discussion with the other partners in education, initiate a significant degree of change in practice. It is appreciated that there are limits to this case-study and, as such, it may be suggested that further research might be conducted. In the United Kingdom, the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (2001-2010) aims to study the effects of the compulsory citizenship education curriculum by using case study visits and regular surveys to examine how citizenship education is being delivered in schools and the outcomes for pupils and schools. It is proposed that a follow-up to the present study, whereby qualitative,

longitudinal case studies of a small number of schools be conducted in order to give an in-depth insight into the development of citizenship education in Irish primary schools, within an agreed timeframe, would have much to recommend to policymakers and practitioners alike.

In conclusion, while the findings of this single case study may not be generalised to other school communities, the present study offers meaningful insight into children's experiences, teachers' attitudes and parents' perceptions of the development of citizenship education in one particular primary school. The pursuit of an active citizenry, it has emerged, presents immense challenges for all of us. Nonetheless, these complexities and challenges cannot be avoided and must be addressed, as a matter of urgency, if all citizens on this island are to be empowered and supported to make a greater contribution to civic and community life.

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## **Appendices**

## **Appendix A**

### *The Green-Schools Programme*

Green-Schools, known internationally as Eco-Schools, is an international environmental education programme and award scheme that promotes and acknowledges whole school action for the environment. There are currently over 21,000 schools in 39 countries in Europe, Africa, Asia, Oceania and South America taking part in the programme. The Green-Schools programme is a long-term programme that invites pupils, teachers, parents and the wider community to take part in an environmental management system. Furthermore, it encourages all involved in the programme to develop a strong sense of active citizenship as they work together towards a common goal. The aim of the Green-Schools programme is to strengthen pupils' awareness of environmental issues and encourage them to take action. By ensuring that children are involved in the decision-making process and are responsible for taking action, the Green-Schools programme quashes hierarchical management structures and promotes democratic structures and organisation. After registering to participate in the programme, schools are given a Green-Schools Handbook which sets out the seven steps of the first theme – Litter and Waste. This involves establishing a Green Schools Committee, undertaking an environmental review, establishing an action plan, monitoring and evaluating the work taking place, addressing environmental awareness and care through curriculum work and informing and involving the local and wider community. Schools that have successfully worked through the seven steps of the first theme, Litter and Waste, are awarded the 'Green-Flag'. While they must continue improving on their work on this theme, as the award has to be renewed every two years, school may

work towards the next theme - Energy and then move onto the Water theme. Since this programme was implemented in this particular school two years ago, fortnightly committee meetings have been held to determine any school environmental problems, identify the action needed to resolve the problems and specify the people responsible for undertaking the work. The children set the agendas, chaired the meetings, took minutes, shared ideas, consulted with each other, made decisions, informed teachers and peers of the outcome of meetings and worked diligently as a team to ensure the work was done. In acknowledgement of the conscientious work performed and the huge successes accomplished by the whole school community, the school under scrutiny in this study was successfully awarded its first 'Green Flag' in May 2008.

## **Appendix B**

### *Principles of qualitative research*

#### *Credibility*

Qualitative researchers use the terms credibility and validity interchangeably. Hammersley (1992) ascertains that “an account is valid or true if it represents accurately those features of the phenomena, that it is intended to describe, explain or theorise” (p.69). It is recognised that conducting ‘backyard’ research (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992) may have compromised the researcher’s ability to disclose information and to raise difficult power issues. Thus, a number of strategies were employed to ensure the credibility of the findings which would emerge from this study. Data was collected from a number of sources and the findings triangulated to ensure the accuracy. The participants were involved in the design stages of this study, the conversation were taped so that detailed notes could be accurately transcribed and feedback was constantly sought from participants in an attempt to achieve a balance between perceived and actual importance of information revealed. Furthermore, rich, thick description was used to convey the findings to offer the reader deep in-sight into the school setting under scrutiny in this study.

#### *Transferability*

The findings of case studies are often criticised as weak and inconclusive on the grounds that they lack rigour in terms of the evidence produced and they fail to produce verifiable, robust findings. However, as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) point out, “case studies can penetrate situations in ways that are not always

susceptible to numerical analysis” (p.181). The notion of carrying out a larger scale study and using instruments such as surveys to obtain the viewpoints of participants was rejected at the outset on the basis that much of the rich data might well be lost and the unique features of the situation may well go unnoticed. In focusing attention on the individual case, rather than the whole population, the case study is not about generalization but about understanding the particulars of that case in its complexity. It is acknowledged that the findings of this study cannot be generalised to a larger population. Rather, it is likely that the findings will present something unique (Stoufer, 1941) in terms of the nature and historical background of the school, the physical setting, other factors such as the hidden curriculum and the participants of this study. It is anticipated that the audience, particularly those teaching in a rural, medium-sized primary school will view the findings as meaningful and applicable in terms of their own experience.

### *Dependability*

In generating hypotheses and testing theories, quantitative research requires a degree of reliability to ensure the accuracy of the research findings so that the same result would be measured should the experiment be repeated. In qualitative studies, reliability requires fidelity to real life, context- and situation-specificity, authenticity, comprehensiveness, detail, honesty, depth of response and meaningfulness to the respondents (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). Thus, throughout this research study, efforts were made to be rigorous and systematic in the collection and analysis of data.

## Appendix C

*Letter to Senior Infants*

6 Wood View,  
Dark Lane.



Thursday

Dear Senior Infants,

My daughter Goldilocks keeps running away into the woods. She won't listen to a word I say. What can I do to make her listen to me and do as she is told?

Thank-you for your help,

Goldilocks' Mammy

## Appendix D

### *Senior Infants: Transcript of Session 2*

- Researcher: Can anybody remember what we did last week?
- Child F: We took pictures of things that we like and we don't like.
- Researcher: Ok. What do you remember taking a photo of?
- Child B: I remember taking a photo of the office.
- Researcher: You took a photo of the office because you like it or you don't like it?
- (Pause)
- Child B: Because I...do like it.
- Researcher: Oh?
- Child B: Yes, when I'm going on messages.
- Child B: I liked when I seen the photocopier because it reminded me of my Dad's printer.
- Child A: I remember I took a picture of a volcano (art work) and one of those big twirly things that make a mess.
- Researcher: Was that some of the art work?
- Child A: Yes.
- Researcher: And why did you like taking a photo of the art work?
- Child A: Because I really like art. It's very arty and I think I can be an artist when I grow up and make loads of stuff and mosaics.
- Child C: I like the P.E. shed and I took a picture of it. When you go inside it's all dark but you can see the toys and the hula-hoops and footballs and loads of other toys in it. So, I like it.
- Researcher: Mmm...
- Child F: I like the (em) classrooms.
- Researcher: Really?

Child F: Yeah. Because we get to do loads of fun stuff in it.

Researcher: Like what?

Child F: Like play with toys.

Child D: I took a picture of Percy's bus because I like to have a ride in it because Percy is a very nice bus driver.

Child E: I took a picture of Percy's bus too because he's my bus driver. He got a new bus because the other one broke.

Researcher: Ok. I have here the photographs that you took. I 'd like you to have a look at them first to see what you think of them.

*(Researcher proceeds to distribute photographs. Children chatter and laugh as they excitedly look at the photographs for several minutes)*

Researcher: Ok. Lets spread out the photographs on the table. Maybe you could think about why you took that photograph. You could choose your favourite one. You might decide which is your favourite photograph and then tell us why it is your favourite.

Child C: I got four favourite ones. I like the bus because my second favourite colour is yellow. Yellow is nearly the same as purple. The snowmen are my favourite because I really like doing art. I like the hedgehogs that the Junior Infants done. I can see they worked very hard on them. The 'Alive O' and the toys are my favourite as well.

Child F: These are my three favourites.

Researcher: Do you want to tell us about them?

Child F: I like the 'Winter Wonderland' because it has loads of silver and things on it. And we are picking this one too...

Researcher: What is it?

Child F: The balls in the P.E. shed.

Researcher: Do you like P.E.?

Child F: Yes.

Child B: I like the big books because I like reading a lot. And I have this photograph with Jack in it. I was pretending that Jack was playing football with Horrid Henry when I took it.



Child B: And I got this.

Researcher: What is that?

Child B: Eh...the photocopier.

Researcher: Why did you take a photo of the photocopier?

Child B: Because I like colouring lots of pictures and I like photocopying things.

Child E: Percy's bus is my favourite. And the P.E. shed because I love doing P.E. And 'Horrid Henry' because I have 'Horrid Henry' CD in my Dad's car. I took a photo of the Green Schools notice board because it tells us how many times we didn't throw any litter.

Researcher: Do you think it's important not to throw any litter?

Chorus: Yes!

Researcher: Why do you think it's important?

Child D: Well, I saw litter on the yard and I got it and put it in the bin.

Researcher: So, do you think you should pick up other people's litter?

Chorus: Yes!

Child A: My favourite one is the 'Winter Wonderland' and the big town art. Because I like making art and I like sticking and gluing and ripping. And I like putting on glitter and stuff. I also like the computer because we can play 'Classroom Kindergarten' because I like it. It has loads of activities.

Child D: They're all my favourite because they're nice and colourful.

Researcher: Do you have a favourite one?

Child D: Eh...I like the art too.

Researcher: Ok. We're going to map our photographs so that they tell a story. You can decide how you would like to work. You can do it by yourself, or you can work with a partner or the boys can work as a group and the girls work as a group. And I would like each of you to choose a photograph of something you liked as you walked around the school and a photograph of something you didn't like. Is that ok with you all?

Chorus: Yes.

Child A: I don't like the office.

Researcher: Why do you not like the office?

Child A: I once got sent there by accident. Because I was messing a little in the bathroom.

Researcher: You were messing in the bathroom?

Child A: Well, it was last year...

Child E: I think we will stick the ones that we like there and the ones that we don't like there.

Researcher: Ok.

*(Children talk as they continue working together to map photographs)*

Researcher: Why did you take a photograph of the table?

Child E: Because here's when we are in groups and in reading groups. We are the pink reading group. Seán and Katie are at my table.

Researcher: Do you like being in a group?

Child E: Yes because when we work in groups we are allowed to ask for help.

Researcher: Who do you ask for help?

Child E: The teacher.

Researcher: Anyone else?

Child E: Well, (quietly) the people beside you but you're not really allowed to do that because that would be cheating.

Researcher: Oh, is it? So, you are not allowed to ask the people beside you for help?

Child F: No, only you are allowed to ask the teacher.

Child A: But you are allowed to ask someone in your reading group because it's called helping people and it isn't annoying teacher when she's in another group.

Researcher: I see.

Child E: Yeah. Because you see when we're in the reading groups we're allowed to ask the people beside you for help.

Child F: That one's my favourite.

Researcher: What's that?

Child F: The 'Winter Wonderland' art.

Researcher: What do you not like about this school?

Child F: The office... because if I go there I might be in trouble.

*(Researcher moves to the group of girls who are working together)*

Child C: We're deciding what way we'll put our stuff. These are mine and that's Aine's and Ellen's.

Researcher: I see a photograph of the yard. Do you like the yard Emily?

Child C: No, because me and Katie just walk around and Sinead doesn't let us play with her. So, we just have to walk around the yard. Some people are the boss of things. When it's nearly time to go in we go and stand at number 2 so we're nearest the top.

Child B: I don't like Horrid Henry.

Child D: I don't like the office but I never got sent up there, thank Goodness. I like P.E.

Child E: I like lego. I do not like (the principal's) office.

Child F: And I like art but I do not like (the principal's) office either.

Child B: I do not like the staffroom either.

Child C: I don't like the yard.

Child A: Can we bring these photographs home?

Researcher: Yes, you can. Some people drew some pictures for me. I'd like to talk to you about them. Who drew this one?

Child C: Eh...me.

Researcher: Tell me about it.

Child C: I drew me and Julie going on a message up top (the principal's) office. We have to get the sheet laminated. And I

have the sheet in my hand. And we're going up to get more pockets. I like going on a message.

Researcher: Who else likes going on a message?

Chorus: Me!

Researcher: Do you get to do lots of jobs or just sometimes?

Child A: I get to do it sometimes but not all the time because teacher lets different people have different turns every day.

Researcher: And is it fair that in your class that different people get to go on messages?

Chorus: Yes!

Child E: And we get the 'Worker of the Week' on Friday. And different people have jobs and get to go on messages.

Researcher: I see. Now, who drew this picture?

Child E: Me.

Researcher: What is it about?

Child E: It's when we were playing football but it's over for the year right now.

Researcher: Did you like being part of the local football team?

Child E: Yes.

Researcher: What does it mean if you are part of a team?

Child E: It means that you pass the ball to others and not just keep it for yourself.

Researcher: Who drew this picture?

Child D: I did. It's a picture of me eating my lunch. I like eating my lunch in school. And at the back there's a picture of me and Chloe playing football.

Researcher: When you are eating your lunch are you allowed to talk to other people?

Chorus: Yes.

Child B: Well, only quietly.

Researcher: Ok. Whose is this picture?

Child A: It's mine. That's my robot that I made in art.

Researcher: And whose is this picture?

Child F: It's mine. I drew the teachers. I like the teachers.

Researcher: Oh, tell me about it.

Child F: It's of me and my teacher and you.

Researcher: Are the teachers in this school nice?

Chorus: Yes.

Researcher: I'm wondering about something. Do you have rights?

Chorus: Yes.

Researcher: Tell me more.

Child A: Well, actually...what are rights?

Researcher: That's a sensible question. Does anybody know what rights are?

Child D: Well, there's left but then the other one is right.

Researcher: You are thinking about directions, for example, going left and going right. Did you ever hear of having 'rights'?

Child E: Yes. It means joining something like going to Beavers'.

Researcher: So, you have a right to join Beavers if you want to?

Child E: Yes.

Researcher: Let me explain. There are rules which mean adults have to protect children. The rights for all children are the same.

Child A: Like we are allowed to go and play outside.

Child C: You are allowed to take out your lunch but only when you are told to. If you take out a drink then you are going to get in trouble because you have to ask the teacher if you can do it first.

Researcher: What other rights do children have?

Child A: We have a right to do art so we can make all the things we like.

(pause)

Researcher: Do you have responsibilities, that means, like important things that you should do at school?

Child C: Yes. We have to do what we are told when we are told to do it.

Researcher: So you have to do what you are told?

Child C: Yes, because one day the helper asked Niamh to get her a tissue and Niamh wouldn't do it. Teacher told Niamh that you have to do what the helper tells you. So Niamh should do what she is told even if Janice isn't a real teacher. That means you should do what your real and your not real teacher tell you.

Child D: I'm thinking about the work. You have to do your own work and you can't copy anybody else.

Researcher: If you want to be a really good person what can you do?

Child A: I help people. I share Christmas with my family because I love that.

Child F: I would like to give presents to everybody.

Child B: I like sharing with my friends. When my friend comes over I let her put on my dressing up clothes and wear my shoes.

Researcher: What do you do at school to help others?

Child A: We help them to do their jobs and if they are stuck on their work we help them.

Child C: We help other children who are stuck in their work and if they are stuck on a little sentence then you can help them if you know the word.

Child D: If they don't have a treat because their Mam forgot that it's Friday then you could give them some of yours.

Child A: Oh, I know! We give *Trocaire* money. That's the important thing for the poor people out there to get food and drink because they're not so...And they don't have fun because they

don't have lots of toys, just a few of them. Some people might die over there if they don't have food or money or drinks.

Researcher: So, what do you do?

Child A: We bring in money for them.

Researcher: And where does the money go?

Child A: It gets sent to America or somewhere else.

*Session draws to a close*

## Appendix E

*Letter to Second Class*



Cosy Cottage  
Stalk Town.

Monday

Dear Second Class,

Now that we are rich, I think that Mammy should pay me for tidying my bedroom. However, she doesn't agree. She says that it's my room and my mess and that I should not expect a reward for clearing it up.

What do you think is right?

Love Jack



## Appendix F

### *2nd Class: Transcript of Session 3*

Researcher: Did anyone here ever hear the story of *Jack and the Beanstalk*?

Chorus: Yes.

Researcher: Who'd like to tell me about it?

*(Child F and Child E proceed to tell the story of 'Jack and the Beanstalk' between them)*

Researcher: And how did Jack and his Mum end up?

Child F: They ended up very rich and they went away and bought a new house.

Researcher: Ok. I see. Well, this letter arrived at the school with the post this morning. The principal gave it to me for you. Who'd like to open it?

Chorus: Me!

Researcher: Alright, here you are. You might open it up and read it out to us. Who is it from?

Child D: Jack.

Researcher: Ok, we can all have a look at it...Now could you read us the letter out loud please?

*(Child D proceeds to read the letter aloud)*

Researcher: How many people here have to clean their own bedroom?

Child F: I don't.

Child D: I don't actually. Well, sometimes I do and sometimes I don't.

Researcher: So four of you do. Does your Mammy pay you if you clean your bedroom?

Child D: Sometimes.

Child E: No but she pays me if I clean the car.

Researcher: Now is that paying you to do a job for her or are you earning your pocket money?

Child E: Earning your pocket money.

Researcher: And what would you have to do to earn pocket money?

Child B: Well, we do jobs and we get a star then and every star is worth 30c and after five weeks we count up all the stars and my Dad gives me the money.

Researcher: I see. And what kind of jobs would you have to do to earn a star?

Child B: Tidying...I have a little brother and sometimes I have to mind him. Sometimes I have to tidy the kitchen.

Researcher: Do you think you should have to do jobs?

Child F: No.

Chorus: Yes.

Child E: Well like if our Mum is nearly forty then she might break her back.

Researcher: Why do you think you should do jobs Evan?

Child C: Well you can earn money for them. Then when you grow up and get a job, like you might be a farmer or something, so you'd have to know how to do loads of jobs.

Child A: I think about pocket money that you kind of do have to earn it yourself. But I do quite a few jobs and I don't get pocket money.

Researcher: So why do you do jobs if you don't get money?

Child A: Because my Mum...I have two brothers and they're both babies...so she needs to go around cleaning up after them and my Dad is not always here because he goes to work and so I have to do some jobs that my Mum can't do at the moment.

Researcher: Ok, and do you feel it's important to do that?

Child A: Yes.

Researcher: That's what's called a responsibility. It's when you think you are responsible for something and you don't necessarily expect to get paid for it. Do you do anything in your house that is responsible?

Child D: I always mind my little brother...

Child E: Sometimes I have to clear up the table and I have to set it...

Researcher: Do you have responsibilities at school?

Child E: Yeah.

Child F: Sometimes.

Researcher: And do you get paid for them?

Chorus: No.

Researcher: And do you want to do them?

Chorus: Yes.

Researcher: So what kinds of jobs do you do at school?

Child B: Well, some people do Litter Patrol and some people are responsible for giving out the milk. The some people have to take down the flags.

Researcher: Ok and do the Litter Patrol people get paid to pick up the rubbish?

Chorus: No.

Researcher: And do you think they should get paid or not?

Child D: No, I don't think I should be paid. When I was on Litter Patrol we found loads of pieces of litter and I don't think that you should be paid because you are just helping pick up and it doesn't matter who picks it up but you should help.

Researcher: What other responsibilities do you have at school?

Child E: Some of the 6<sup>th</sup> Class people have to do the bins...

Researcher: I see. Would you like more responsibility at school?

Child A: I myself would like to have more responsibility like in doing my work, I'd like to have a fairly high level in the lines that I write in the story.

Child F: When the teacher goes out to get a cup of tea and the class are still inside, maybe she could have somebody for each week and they could be in charge of making sure the class isn't messing. If somebody was bold then the person could write down the name on the board and then the person could tell the teacher why they were messing and then teacher could talk to them or something.

Researcher: What kind of a person do you think your teacher would choose to be in charge of a class?

Child D: Somebody who would not actually be messing themselves and actually do the job properly.

Child B: Someone who gets their work done and who's a good person.

Child E: Say if somebody was very good at their work and they got it done so they would be able to do the job or else it would have to be someone in 3rd class or up who will mind us. But sometimes when the teacher goes to get her cup of tea she leaves the door open and the teacher beside us comes in and out.

Researcher: Ok. Do you think Jack should get paid to clean his own room or do you think he should want to clean it himself?

Child B: Well...I think he shouldn't get too much money but at least a little.

Child A: I think he should get about 5c for cleaning his room.

Researcher: So only a very little amount for cleaning his room?

Child A: Yes.

Child C: Well, I think he should get paid but not too much, maybe €1 is like a lot of money but I think he should get that much.

Researcher: Do you think anybody pays your Mammy to clean her kitchen or her room?

Chorus: No.

Child E: I have another responsibility. If your Mum had to clean all the time and she was fed up of it you could get a cleaner and then you'd have to pay them like every week.

Researcher: But say you didn't have enough money to pay the cleaner, what could you do so Mum wasn't so fed up cleaning?

Child E: Well, maybe the son or the daughter, if they had some pocket money left over, then they could pay the cleaner.

Researcher: Any other ideas?

Child D: You could let your Mum or Dad sit down and have a rest and you could continue on cleaning.

Researcher: Yes you could. Does anybody here ever clean up after the dinner?

Chorus: Yes.

Researcher: Ok. Did you ever hear of the word 'citizen'?

Child E: It was in the letter that we got off you when you asked us to do this.

Researcher: It was. Does anybody know what a citizen is?

Child F: It's being a person in a part of the town. It means you are part of a town and a few people or maybe a lot of people know you in the town. So you can be a well-known citizen or not-a-lot known citizen

Researcher: Are you a citizen?

Chorus: Yes.

Child D: Everybody knows you in the school.

Researcher: Ok, so you are a citizen of this school and you're a citizen of (this townland). What's a good citizen do you think?

Child E: I'm not sure...

Child B: Like people in the town like the milkman who goes around the town with the milk.

Researcher: Ok, so people who help us like the milkman. Who else is a good citizen?

Child E: Oh, the bus drivers who bring you to school and also the teachers who teach us.

Researcher: So are you a citizen now or will you be citizen when you grow up?

Child E: Well, all our life we could be a citizen.

Researcher: So, you are a citizen when you are seven or eight years old?

Child E: Yes.

Researcher: That's right. And I am sure that you are all not only citizens but good citizens. What do I mean by that?

Child D: You help people.

Child A: You help your fellow citizens.

Researcher: What do you mean by 'your fellow citizens'? Whom are you talking about?

Child A: If someone was in trouble or they need help doing things you could help them by doing it for them or helping them get to the place they want to go.

Child E: Maybe if there was another citizen you knew and you were old enough to drive and you had your licence and your finance and all that, you could drop them. Say if my sister wanted to go to town and she can't drive but my Mum could drop her in then that would be a citizen helping another citizen.

Researcher: Absolutely. That's a great idea. When you are on Litter Patrol do you think you are being a good citizen?

Chorus: Yes.

Researcher: Why?

Child C: You're helping pick up the litter and if there was only one person doing it they wouldn't be able to do it on their own because there might be too much pieces.

Researcher: So, you need to work as part of a team when you do Litter Patrol?

Child C: Yes.

Child E: And say if you are on Litter Patrol and you are on the Green Schools Committee and you are one of the inspectors...and say when you are on Litter Patrol you would be helping your community. Like if this was the only school in our community and we were getting the huge Green Flag that is going to be out there then that would be kind of helping our community because everyone that was passing the school would know that we are a clean school.

Researcher: And how would you feel if you knew you were doing something to help the community?

*(Silence)*

Researcher: Does it feel good?

Chorus: Yes.

Researcher: How else would you feel?

Child D: Happy.

Child B: Joyful.

Researcher: And if we had the big Green Flag out there we would feel proud of ourselves. Wouldn't we?

Child E: Yeah.

Researcher: And would you want to be paid to get the flag or would you be proud just to get the flag?

Chorus: Just the flag.

Child E: Very proud.

Researcher: I would be very proud too. So as a citizen you have rights and we talked about the rights you have last week. What sorts of rights do you have in this school as citizens?

Child D: You have rights to play.

Child E: Like what I said last week we should be in as much as in charge as the teachers.

Researcher: Ok...We talked about rights and we talked about responsibilities. So, one hand you have rights and on the other hand you have responsibilities. For example, on one hand you have a right to say what you think and be listened to. But you also have a responsibility to...?

Child A: Listen to other people.

Researcher: So every time you have a right you also have a responsibility and I think that's what makes a good citizen – somebody who takes their rights and their responsibilities seriously. Do you think Jack is a good citizen?

Child D: No.

Researcher: Why not?

Child D: He is a bit but not that much because he wants to get paid for just tidying his room and he's the one who's rich so he probably gets paid all the time. Do you think he should expect his Mammy to do it?

Chorus: No.

*Session comes to a close*

## Appendix G

### *Letter to Fourth Class*



Little Cottage,  
Edge-of-Wood.

Wednesday

Dear Fourth Class,

I am getting along fairly well with the other children at our new school. However, Gretel is shy and not so confident. One of the older girls has taken a dislike to her. She is going around saying "if you are friends with Gretel you can't come to my party." She is also encouraging other children to tease Gretel. Gretel hasn't got any friends and it's making her miserable. If I stand up for Gretel, they will just start picking on me as well. Please tell me what to do.

From Hansel



## Appendix H

### *4th Class: Transcript of Session 3*

Researcher: Hello boys and girls. Last week we were talking about decision making at home. What sorts of decisions did we say we make at home?

Child E: What time we go to bed at.

Child C: What we eat.

Child B: What we wear.

Child D: What we could watch on telly.

Child F: When we have our friends over.

Child C: When we go outside.

Child E: When to go on the computer if we have one.

Researcher: Ok. Well done. Now, this week we are going to have a think about decisions made at school. Last week we used a traffic light system to show the amount of say we have at home. You decided to colour it green if you have all the say, yellow if you have some say and red if you have no say at all. What sorts of decisions are made at school?

Child A: What subject we do.

Researcher: Right. And who usually makes that decision?

Child A: Eh...teacher.

Researcher: Do you have any say in that?

Child A: No.

Child C: Who we sit beside.

Researcher: Do you get to choose who you sit beside?

Child C: No.

Researcher: I see. And what way are the tables in your rooms arranged?

Child C: In lines of tables on their own and at the back there's a line of two tables together... in rows.

Researcher: And is that ok with you?

Child C: No, I'd prefer if we were sitting in groups.

Researcher: Why?

Child D: Because if you are sitting in groups you could be sitting here and your best friend could be this side of you and another friend could be that side of you. So you'd like somebody on the table.

Researcher: And if you were sitting beside someone you did not like, what would you do about it?

Child D: You would just have to deal with it.

Child C: You'd just have to sit beside that person until the end of the month.

Researcher: Ok. So, do you get changed around at the beginning of every month?

Chorus: Yes.

Child C: Well, like we might change on the Wednesday or the Thursday in the week and not on the first day of the month...It's whenever Teacher says.

Researcher: And how are you organised?

Child E: Boys have to sit beside girls.

Child D: But there's two extra boys in the class so they get to sit beside each other.

Child C: You see there are 16 boys and 14 girls so girls don't get to sit beside each other.

Researcher: And if you didn't agree with your teacher's decision, would you ask if you could sit beside your friend, or another girl/boy?

Chorus: No.

Child E: She might give out to you.

Researcher: What other decisions are made at school?

Child B: When you go outside.

Researcher: Can you go outside whenever you like?

Chorus: No.

Child E: When you are sent out for a message then you can go out.

Child F: How much homework you have.

Researcher: Do you get to have a say in that?

Child F: No.

Researcher: And if you thought you had gotten too much homework what would you do about it?

Child D: You'd have to deal with it.

Child C: You'd have to do it.

Child E: When you go to the toilet.

Researcher: Who makes that decision?

Child E: Eh...teacher.

Child E: Well, you'd ask to go but sometimes if it's close to break time you'd have to wait and then go on your way outside.

Researcher: I see.

Child D: When we watch a video on the telly.

Researcher: Who decides that?

Child D: Teacher. Some days we get to watch it at the end of the day. Or on Fridays.

Researcher: Well, you have thought of lots of decisions that are made at school already. When you are doing the chart, with a friends if you like, you might think of more. Did you work in pairs last week?

Child C: No, we did them by ourselves.

Researcher: Would you like to do the charts by yourselves or in pairs this week?

Chorus: In pairs.

Researcher: Or you could work as a group – three girls together and three boys together. Whichever you prefer is fine with me.

Child A: Boys together and girls together

Researcher (*to girls*): I see you have written down 'how much homework we get'.

Child B: We may just put teacher because we don't really have any say in that.

*(Children continue talking and working in groups for several minutes)*

Child E: Homework. How much homework we get?

Child A: Well, we don't get any say in that.

Child D: But in Irish sometimes she might say 'is that too much?'

Child E: We could colour it yellow then. Because when we get Irish spellings she would ask us sometimes is that too much.

Researcher: You've been working hard here boys. What are you writing down now?

Child D: Eh...lunch. We get to have a say in that because we eat what we want in our lunchboxes.

Child E: Well, we don't really cos we are not allowed fizzy drinks and crisps and stuff like that so we don't have all the say.

Researcher: So, are you allowed Coca Cola?

Chorus: No.

Child D: And we are only allowed popcorn but not crisps and that.

*(Children continue chatting among themselves for several minutes. Then meet back together to form one large group.)*

Researcher: Overall, girls do you think you have a say in the decisions that are made which affect you?

Chorus: No.

Researcher: What about you think boys?

Child A: None. We have no say.

Child C: We have some. A little bit. But only in the most obvious things like, what we play in the yard.

Researcher: Ok, well let's have a chat about what you feel you don't have a say in and what you feel you don't have a say in. What did you talk about girls?

Child C: Who you sit beside.

Researcher: Did you chat about where you sit too boys?

Child D: Yeah.

Child E: That was our first one.

Researcher: And what did you decide girls?

Child C: We wrote that the teacher makes the decision.

Child B: And that we have no say in it.

Child A & Child D: Yeah.

Researcher: What do you think about that? Do you think it's fair enough?

Chorus: No.

Child C: You should be able to sit beside whoever you want.

Chorus: Yeah.

Child A: If you just fell out with someone on the yard and then you come in and you change places and you end up having to sit beside them, I don't think that's very fair.

Child D: And it's not like always you're going to be sitting beside your friend and talking to them so I think you should be able to pick who you sit beside.

Child B: I don't think it's fair that girls have to sit beside boys.

Child A: Or that boys have to sit beside girls.

*(All laugh)*

Researcher: Ok. The next decision that you thought about?

Child A: When you go to the toilet?

Child B: Oh...yeah.

Researcher: You had that down already too girls. Well, what did you decide boys?

Child E: Yellow. Some say.

Child A: Us and teacher.

Researcher: And what do you think about that? Should you have more say or is that ok as it is?

Child A: I think we should have all the say. Because if we need to go to the toilet, then we need to go to the toilet.

Child C: Yeah because if we need to go to the toilet and it's coming up to break time then teacher asks us to wait but if you really needed to go...

Child B: But if it's like half an hour after break time and you need to go teacher says you should have gone at break time.

Researcher: So would you have to wait for a while?

Chorus: Yeah.

Child E: If you'd only just come into the classroom and you needed to go then she wouldn't let you.

Child C: She'd say you should have went before you came into the classroom.  
(Laughs nervously)

Researcher: Ok. What was your next decision, girls?

Child B: When you go outside side.

Researcher: Do you have that one written down boys?

Child D: No.

Researcher: Ok, well before the girls tell us what they thought, what do you think? How much say do you have about going outside?

Child E: Eh...None.

Child D: Yeah, none.

Child C: That's right we said no say to that.

Researcher: Ok. What was your next decision?

Child D: How much homework we get?

Child E: That wasn't that hard. We said teacher decides.

Child C: We said we had some say because last week when we got loads of Irish spellings she said we didn't have to do them all...

Child A: She just took away two of them.

Child C: Yeah I know. I suppose we have some say about the spellings but not about anything else...

Researcher: So in relation to homework you don't have any say in general?

Chorus: Yeah.

Researcher: And what about the subjects you do in class? Sam mentioned that earlier.

Chorus: Teacher...we have no say.

Researcher: So how would you feel if your teacher came into the classroom on a Monday morning and put a big white chart on the board and said you were all going to plan the week, for example, you have to do Art once, P.E. once or twice etc?

Child C: That'd be good.

Chorus: Yeah.

Child E: Well, we do go out for P.E. two days – Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Child A: Yeah but only for like 5 minutes...that's all.

Child C: And she doesn't even do them on those days.

Child D: She could do them on like Friday if we didn't already do it. She could bring us out then for about half an hour.

Child E: Although one week we didn't get any P.E.

Child B: We don't have a gym.

Child C: We should have one though. Because it usually rains a lot around here and then we don't get out for P.E on the days it rains.

Child C: But then you have to do work instead and you'd be really like mixed up and annoyed in the class and you wouldn't be able to focus on your work.

Child D: And the classroom can get really noisy but you didn't get outside all day. See, if it's raining and you didn't get P.E. you'd be really annoyed and fed up and you'd start talking and stuff.

Child C: And then she'd be getting annoyed as well because you wouldn't be trying your hardest on your work.

Researcher: Who do you think is to blame for the fact that there's no hall here?

Child D: Nobody really.

Child C: Well, the Board of...

Child E: Management. The Board of Management.

Researcher: The Board of Management? I suppose you're right. And the Department of Education.

Child D: They're the ones with the money.

Child C: All the government are doing now is building roads but they're not actually looking at all the hospitals or the schools...

Child D: Yeah, that need the facilities.

Child C: They just keep building more prefabs. But we don't need prefabs. We need like a gym.

Child E: Yeah but I think they might put a gym inside in that prefab there that's being built.

Child C: No, they're not because the 5<sup>th</sup> class are going in there.

Child E: But...eh...yeah.

Researcher: I don't think it has been decided yet who is moving out there. But I don't think it's going to be a gym.

Child C: But we don't need another classroom. We need a gym.

Researcher: That room over there will be free soon. Do you think you might be asked what that room should be used for?

Chorus: No.

Child A: We should get a say about what it should be. But I don't think we'll get our say.

Child C: It's our school. The teachers wouldn't be like learning in it because they've already been to school. So we should have more say because we are the ones learning here.

Researcher: And you don't think anyone will ask you what that room should be used for?

Chorus: No.

Child D: It used to be a library and on certain days different classes would go there. And there'd be books there for Junior Infants right up to 6<sup>th</sup> Class. Books that they think you should be reading.

Child C: It would be better if in there you had lots of computers. You could pick out groups for every day to use it. And you could look up stuff on the computer and that.

Child D: And if we stayed in because we had to stay in or because we wanted to say in it would be better if we could bring in like some of our computer games and play them.

Child B: Or say if it was raining at lunchtime you could get to go there.

Child C: It would be better though if we were allowed to bring some stuff into school so if was going to rain you'd have something in your bag to play with.

Child E: Yeah.

Researcher: Do you have games in your class for when it's raining?

Child C: Well...yeah, but they're boring.

Child A: Yeah, they're boring.

Child C: Some games up there are good and some are bad. It's not really fair that some people get all the good games all the time and some people get the bad ones.

Researcher: Ok...Any other decisions written down that you discussed?

Boys Chorus: What we eat.

Child E: We are not allowed bring in like Tayto's and fizzy drinks or like packets of sweets.

Child A: But I think we should be allowed.

Child C: I don't think we should.

Child A: What's wrong with fizzy drinks?



Child C: Ok, maybe we should be allowed fizzy drinks but not crisps. Crisps will get all over the place. We don't have any rules about what we eat then everyone will bring in like chewing gum and things.

Researcher: So, why do you think you are not allowed bring certain foods into school?

Child D: Because we bring them in we might get fat.

Child C: And like we eat loads at home and then if we are bringing them into school...

Child B: School is supposed to be where you are eating all healthy and then at home you are eating way more other stuff.

Researcher: So, do you agree with the rule about lunches?

Child D: I think we should be allowed to bring in some of it but not like every packet of it.

Child C: Maybe on Fridays we could have it.

Child A: Yeah, on Fridays.

Child E: In every other class you are allowed that, even fizzy drinks as well.

Researcher: What about on the day of the holidays? Are you allowed treats then?

Child C: No.

Chorus: We are on that day.

Researcher: Do you think the government has anything to do with schools?

Child B: They have to make sure they are good and that no-one is getting like no attention and some people are getting all the attention.

Child D: They are in charge of the facilities, like the building. They have to make sure we have a certain amount of classrooms and if we need more classrooms then we should be allowed to build them but not like to build prefabs which will scare away all the nature.

Child E: Since they built that prefab over there not much birds are coming around anymore. We use to leave bits of food from our lunches on the ground and the crows would come and different birds to eat it.

Child C: Yeah, you don't see much birds out there now.

Child A: Yeah, you used to see loads and loads of birds out there.

Child C: You use to be able to put your hand up and a small bird would fly into it when we were in Junior Infants but now it's like we are in a new school. The birds don't come and the girls and boys are together on the yard now.

Researcher: What do you mean?

Child D: The boys used to be in the big yard and the girls use to be in the small yard. I think it's because there was always more boys in the classes. The girls use to be in the tennis yard (smaller yard).

Researcher: Has anyone ever heard the word "curriculum"?

Child D: No.

Chorus: Yes

Child A: I've heard of it but I don't know what it is.

Child F: It's books that tells teachers what they have to teach.

Researcher: Do you think your teacher has to teach certain subjects?

Chorus: Yes.

Child C: I think someone decides what she has to teach but she can decide how much she teaches on it.

Chorus: So you think she has some say and flexibility?

Child C: Yes.

Researcher: Does anybody here know what a democracy is?

Child C: I've heard that word but I can't think of what it is.

Child D: Yeah, I've heard of it but I don't know what it means.

Researcher: Well, Ireland is a democracy which means we vote for our government.

Child A: Oh, yeah.

Researcher: It means that the biggest vote is carried. In this way everybody has a say. Who is our Taoiseach at the moment?

Chorus: Bertie Aherne.

Researcher: So, when we had the election like we did last May, you remember that, more people in the country voted for Fianna Fail to be the leaders in the government. Who did they not vote for then?

Child B: The Green Party.

Child C: Fine Gael. Or the Progressive Democrats.

Researcher: Good. So now we know what a democracy is. Is our school like a democracy where everybody gets to have a say?

Chorus: No.

Child E: The teachers decide the stuff. So we don't get to say about things.

Child A: Teachers and principals have most, all the say. But children don't and I think that we should have.

Child B: We should have more say. Not all the say but more say than we have right now.

Child C: Yeah, because it's our school. Not the teachers' and principal's, just because they teach in here.

Child C: We are supposed to be learning here so we should have more say.

Child D: And there's more of us than them. There's two hundred and something children but there's only eleven teachers.

Researcher: Right. And what could you do about the fact that you think you don't really have any say?

Child A: We can't do anything.

Child E: No, we can't do anything.

Child A: If we say anything to the teachers they're not going to let us and they're only going to give out to us.

Child C: It's just like some teachers and people think that because they are bigger than us then they should have all the say.

Child D: They think they are more powerful.

Child C: Yeah, like they can make us do more things and stuff that we can't make them do. We can't really make them to anything.

Child A: It's like being at home and your cousins are down and they just boss you around. Like you can't do anything with them and they can do all sorts of things to you.

Researcher: You seem upset about this.

Child A: I am.

Child B: We should have more say than we have.

Researcher: Can you think of anything you could do about this?

Child A: No.

Child A: We could go on strike!

Child B: We could not go to school but then our Mam and Dad would give out to us.

Researcher: Is there a law that says you must go to school?

Chorus: Yes.

Researcher: And what would happen if you didn't go to school?

Child D: Your Mam and Dad would get arrested.

Researcher: Would it be a good idea if there was another person or a group of children you could go to and tell them to put your views forward?

Child C: Yeah, like if there was a group of people, I mean children, but it couldn't all be 6<sup>th</sup> class because then it wouldn't really be fair. You know, like a few from each class.

Child D: About two from every class.

Child C: Well, maybe not the Junior Infants.

Child A: Or Senior Infants or First Class.

Child C: From Second up...

Child D: No, from First Class.

Child C: OK, then from First.

Child D: The Junior Infants and Senior Infants just want to play with toys.

Child C: Then this group would have to meet the whole school on some day and everyone would have to listen to the points of views. The if they think it's alright then they have to do, they can't say no just because it's too much money or they don't want to spend any money.

Researcher: Would the teachers have to listen to what this group of children have to say?

Child C: Yes, but the teachers, well they don't listen just because you are smaller.

Child A: There is sort of a way to get the teacher to do some things. You could tell your Mam and Dad and they'd come into the school and tell them. Teachers can't bully the parents.

Child C: It's not all teachers. Just some teachers.

Child A: Some teachers listen to your ideas.

Child C: It's just we get listened to at different times.

Child A: Last year the teacher would listen to us. He would let us choose what we did for P.E. and he did loads of fun games.

Child C: And our teacher last year would let us do what story we wanted. She'd give us the header and we'd write what we want. She wouldn't say it has to be about this or that.

- Child D: Yeah, she'd let us use your imagination to think of what ideas you could put in it.
- Child A: With our teacher last year he'd let us decide what story we want but our teacher this year decides what story we all write.
- Child E: Like if you wanted to go to the toilet really badly she won't let you go because it's close to...
- Child C: She shouldn't be able to get away with that. Ok, you shouldn't be able to go in the middle of tests but the other times...
- Child A: If you have to go you should be able to go no matter what subject's she's in the middle of. If you have to go, you have to go.

*Session comes to a close*

## Appendix I

*Letter to Sixth Class*

10 Woodside,  
Near Wolf- Town.



Friday

Dear Sixth Class,

I think Granny should come and live with us. She's obviously not safe on her own. Granny, however, says she likes her cottage and she won't move.

Would it be right to force her to move in with us?

Love From

Red Riding Hood's Mammy.

## Appendix J

### *6th Class: Transcript of Session 2*

- Researcher: Last week we were discussing decision-making at home. Can you remember what we talked about?
- Child C: We talked about what say you have.
- Child D: The jobs we do.
- Researcher: And who has the most say about the jobs you do?
- Chorus: Our Mam and Dad.
- Child E: When we do our homework.
- Researcher: And who has most of the say in that?
- Child E: Me!
- Child C: When you go to bed.
- Researcher: And who has most of the say in that?
- Child C: My Dad.
- Researcher: Last week we made a decision-making chart about how much say we have at home using a traffic light system. You decided that overall you have some or most of the say in decisions made at home concerning you. What sorts of decisions are made at school that concern you?
- Child B: When you come to school and when you go home.
- Researcher: And who decides that?
- Child B: The Principal.
- Child D: Who minds the infants at break-time.
- Researcher: And who decides that?
- Child D: Usually (the principal).
- Child A: What homework you get and how much of it you get.
- Researcher: And who decides that?

Child F: Teacher.

Child A: Well, sometimes we get to say...

Child E: No we don't!

*(Others laugh)*

Child D: No, we don't.

Researcher: What other decisions are made during the school day?

Child E: When we go out to the yard and when we get to go up the field.

Researcher: Who makes that decision?

Child E: The teacher on the yard.

Child C: When break is over.

Researcher: And who decides that?

Child C: The teacher.

Child D: Who does the bins.

Researcher: Who makes that decision?

Child D: The teachers.

Child E: Who does the Litter Patrol.

Researcher: Who makes that decision?

Child E: Teacher.

Child A: Sometimes pupils volunteer.

Researcher: Who plans the day?

Child B: Teacher.

Child A: Well once he said we have to do English and French. We can do English or French today and the other one tomorrow. Which do you want to do?

Child D: That was once in a blue moon. He never said that before!

Researcher: So he gave you a choice. Do you like it when you have a choice?



Chorus: Yes.

Researcher: We can talk about this further in groups. It's up to you to organise yourselves however you wish. How would you like to do the chart this week?

Child C: Separately.

Child F: In two groups.

Researcher: Look I'll let you organise yourselves...

*(Researcher outlines briefly what has to be done and the children decide to work in two groups – boys together and girls together)*

Researcher: So, what's the first decision you are writing down that concerns you?

Child B: When we come to school and go home.

Researcher: Who makes that decision?

Chorus: (the principal)

Researcher: Do you have any say at all in that?

Child F: No.

Researcher: What's next?

Child B: Homework.

Researcher: Who makes that decision?

Child A: Teacher.

Researcher: How much say do you have in that?

Child B: None.

Child F: The times we do certain work.

Researcher: Oh, do you mean the timetable of when you do certain subjects during the day?

Child F: Yeah. Like how much P.E. we get.

Researcher: Right and who decides the timetable?

Child F: The teacher.

Child A: Well sometimes she might let us to a bit of extra P.E.

Child F: Yeah but not often and she decides.

Child A: Yeah, you know we should go to the Class President and tell them to ask her for a bit for say.

Researcher: Pardon?

Child B: We elected a Class President this week.

Researcher: Oh, who is it?

Child B: (names child). Most of the lads voted for him and some of the girls did too.

Researcher: I see. What about the layout of the classroom?

Child F: You mean how we put out the chairs and that?

Child B: It's in rows, three rows of two desks on that side and four rows of two desks that way and...

Child F: Because like there's people in front of you then you can't see but if it was like going in a U shape then you could see more.

Child B: We'd rather have it in groups like in this room (Junior Infant classroom) and then you could choose where you'd like to sit.

Researcher: So, you'd like to sit in groups and choose who you sit beside. Do you get to choose who you sit beside in your classroom?

Chorus: No.

Child F: But last year when it was a few weeks coming to the end of the year our teacher let us pick who we wanted to sit beside. We put ourselves into groups like this and then we got to decide.

Researcher: Do you change around or do you have to sit beside the same person all the time?

Child B: We've changed once so far this year

Researcher: If you didn't like the person you were sitting beside what would you do?

Chorus: Nothing you can do. Put up with it.

- Child A: But sometimes when you start off sitting beside someone you might not like them but at the end of the time of sitting next to them you do actually like them.
- Child F: If you don't like someone you can really go to them if you are stuck on a Maths problem or something and say how do you do this? Because if you don't like them then you are not going to go to them and ask for their help.
- Researcher: So, who makes the decision as to who you sit beside?
- Child B: Teacher.
- Child F: Yeah, mostly teacher.
- Researcher: Girls, I can see you have write quite a few – what we do during the day, who we sit beside at school, what we do for P.E., how much homework we get, where we sit and what we play in the yard. Ok, is that it?
- Child D: What we wear!
- Researcher: Who decides what you wear?
- Child C: (the principal)
- Researcher: Do you have any say in that?
- Child C: No.
- Child E: Well, we can't decide between a skirt or trousers but we can decide which jumper.
- Researcher: So you can decide whether to wear your P.E. jumper or your school uniform jumper?
- Child E: Yeah. So, is it red for no say or yellow for some say?
- Child C & Child D: Red.
- Researcher: So what else do you do during the day apart from work and play?
- Child E: Well, who goes on the computer. That's yellow (some say) because when you get finished writing your story then you can type it out on the computer and people go to different classrooms to use their computers.
- Child E: What we eat for lunch.

Researcher: And who has the say on that?

Child E: Well like we can't have fizzy drinks and stuff...

Child C & Child D: (the principal)

Child E: Yeah, (the principal).

Child D: Yeah, But I don't mean he tells us we can't have cheese or other healthy things...

Child E: No, but we just know we can't have fizzy deinks or chewing gum and that anyway.

Researcher: Will we write one more and then join up with the boys to see what they came up with? What are you writing there?

Child D: School Tours.

Researcher: Do you get any say in that?

Child E: Well, she said that this year she will pick three or two places and we can pick out form that where we want to go because it's our last year.

Researcher: Ok. Did you ever get any say before?

Child E: No.

*(Two groups of children join back up together)*

Researcher: Who decides what you wear to school?

Child B: The teachers. I don't think it's totally fair because sometimes you can wear your P.E. tracksuit but say if you are going to a party then you don't have time to change or anything...

Researcher: Ok, do you agree with having to wear a uniform?

Child B: No, not the whole time.

Child F: A uniform is not really that bad only if there are some days that you don't want to wear it...

Researcher: So, if you had a choice either to wear whatever you like to school or to wear a uniform, what would you choose?

Child B: I'd probably go with what you want to wear.

Child E: In another school I know they have to wear their skirt or pinafore when it's not P.E. day and when its P.E. day they have to wear their tracksuit...we don't. So, it's not too bad here.

Researcher: Looking at your chart – in general, do you get much say in school?

Chorus: Not really, No.

Researcher: Well, I can see that the lads don't think so because their spots are nearly all red for no say. Do you get more say at home?

Chorus: Yes.

Child B: Way more say.

Child A: It's just that there are more people in school so it's probably for our own safety, so it probably makes sense.

Researcher: Do you think you should have more of a say?

Chorus: Yes.

Researcher: On what sorts of issues?

Child B: The school uniform.

Child F: Yeah, and like three weeks in the whole year that you can use your homework credits...

Researcher: Do you get homework credits?

Child E: If you get twenty stars you get one. Then you can keep it like 'til the Summer or keep it 'til whenever...

Researcher: Oh, I see. It's a permit in that it gets you off homework?

Child F: Yeah but the thing is it takes you maybe four or five weeks to get it, maybe more.

Child D: I think it should be reduced to fifteen stars...

Child F: Or twelve.

Child D: Yeah, twelve.

Researcher: So, would you suggest that to your new Class President?

Chorus: Yeah.

Researcher: I think a reduction in the number of stars you have to earn seems like a fair suggestion.

Child A: Yeah, because I still have five more stars to get before I can have a homework credit and we are at school how many weeks?

Child B: Like you might get a star in your tests.

Child E: But like she never really remembers to put them on.

Researcher: And if you had a complaint about something, would you say it to your teacher?

Chorus: No.

Researcher: Would you say it to (the principal)?

Chorus: No.

Researcher: Would you say it to your parents?

Chorus: You'd just have to put up with it.

Child A: You could talk to the Class President but you only get to talk to him out on the yard about stuff.

Child D: Some things I would tell my Mam.

Researcher: Do you feel you are listened to? Are you asked for your opinion on things?

Chorus: No...

Child A: Well, maybe at home but not really at school.

Child F: We are not really asked for our opinions on the school uniforms because the teachers just sent a note home to our parents about what we have to wear.

Child E: And obviously parents are just going to say yes because like sometimes it's a pain to try and pick things out in the morning.

Child F: And like it saves money.

Child D: My Mam agree with wearing your own clothes because she doesn't want me to get them dirty and my Dad he didn't like to see children being excluded because sometimes the richer kids have flasher clothes and there could be peer pressure.

Researcher: If you wanted to be listened to on something, how could you get your point across?

Child C: We have the Class President.

Child B: Yeah, but like most of the time is what he is going to say just going to be forgotten about?

Child E: Yeah, and because it's a boy most of the girls won't go up and tell him stuff.

Child B: Yeah, but like there should be a day every week when the Class President gets to go up to the teacher and say what everyone has been saying and what he thinks should be done...but there's none of that.

Researcher: Was anyone here on the Green Schools' Committee last year?

Child D: Me. I was.

Researcher: Did you like it?

Child D: Yes. Because it's nice to be involved in helping the environment. I like the environment.

Researcher: Did you feel you were listened to?

Child D: Yes. We all sort of sat down and all the teachers, well they weren't talking down to you – they were talking to you as if you were on equal.

Researcher: And do you not feel like that at other times?

Child D: Not really.

Child B: Instead of having a Parent's Council, you could have something like that.

Child A: A Children's Council!

Child B: A Student's Council!

Researcher: How would get on this Student Council?

Child F: You'd have to have a vote.

Child E: Maybe like two pupils from every class.

Researcher: And who would they meet with?

Child F: The teachers.

Child E: Well, one or two of them.

Child B: Just like a few and then they could discuss it in the staffroom. I don't think like Junior Infants really have a clue and even Senior Infants.

Child C: When I ask my sister (who is in Junior Infants) something and I think she probably doesn't much but she has loads of ideas.

Researcher: And what would this Student Council do? How would it work?

Child D: Well, for the Green Schools we didn't just involve the committee in the work. We talked to classes. We went into classes and started reading out newsletters and people were able to ask questions. So we were really involving everyone.

Child F: But like we need to be able to talk to the Council, not just out on the yard when they'll be too busy playing to talk to us.

Researcher: What would the solution be to that then?

Child F: If there was like a meeting held with us.

Researcher: So if your teacher left the room and gave you time to talk to the two representatives on the Student Council, would you talk then?

Child F: No, we'd probably just end up talking about other things.

Child B: Yeah, loads of people would start talking at the same time.

Child E: Like now when Teacher goes out of the room everyone just starts talking and shouting.

Researcher: So, would it be better if the teacher stayed in the room and wrote all your ideas up on a big chart, for example?

Chorus: Yes.

Child F: Yeah, that would be better.

Researcher: And would you feel free to say something to your teacher then?

Child E: Yes. And like maybe she wouldn't say anything in the staffroom. It would stay just between the class.

Researcher: Do you mean you'd like it to be in confidence?

Child E: Yeah.



- Child D: And if there was any messing she could discipline you.
- Child B: Or maybe the Class President could go to the meeting too.
- Child A: Yeah, like maybe each class would have a representative and a Class President.
- Researcher: And what are the things you'd want to change around here?
- Child A: Maybe we could have options where the school uniform is concerned. Instead of having one jumper which is plain, maybe we could have one with a zip or a hoodie as well.
- Child B: Well you wouldn't be allowed wear the hoodie when you are playing football.
- Child F: Because people can grab you.
- Child A: And you know how here we don't have to wear our uniforms in the last few weeks at school? Well, maybe we could make that a bit longer so we wouldn't have to wear it in the hot weather.
- Child D: I'd like to have more say about where we sit. I'd like us to sit in groups. Because then you are going to like someone on your table. It's very hard in our room when you are doing group projects are you are kind of like this (lean forward and over to opposite direction) because we are sitting in a line
- Child C: Yeah.
- Child F: But sometimes if we are doing a project with four of us in it and we are allowed sit at a table for four, it can be kind of noisy.
- Child C: Yeah, people would be all chatting to each other.
- Researcher: I suppose to begin with people might talk loudly when they start sitting in groups but after a while they get used to it and they are not as noisy as they were. Anything else you'd like to raise with your Class President at the moment?
- Child C: What we do for the day.
- Child C: We need to do Maths but...
- Child B: P.E. and that.
- Child F: Yeah, cos on like Sundays everyone is like "oh no! School tomorrow" but if you change P.E. to Mondays it totally changes your form on Mondays.

Researcher: And has your teacher changed to Mondays?

Child F: Not yet but the Class President is going to ask for that.

Child A: Yeah, that makes sense because every Monday since I was like...it's like every Sunday you could be over at your cousin's house and feeling really happy and then you come home that evening and you remember it's Monday tomorrow and you are like 'oh no!' school tomorrow.

Child D: You couldn't do it for every subject but even if you had like Art on a Monday or something fun to do...

Researcher: And do you think people are sensible enough to be able to plan the day?

Chorus: Some of them would. Yeah, only some of them.

Child D: Probably most people would be seeing as we are in 6<sup>th</sup> Class.

Child E: But every time she says right 'let's do P.E.' everyone goes mad because we barely ever do it.

Chorus: Yeah.

Child A: I think actually by law we have to do P.E. so many times a week but over in my last school it was really, really bad because we only had P.E. every two months!

Researcher: Ok, well you just mentioned that you think there is a law. Has anyone ever heard of the Primary School Curriculum?

Chorus: Yes.

Researcher: What do you think it is?

*(Silence)*

Researcher: Who writes it?

Child B: The Board of Education?

Researcher: Mmm...And do you think the teachers have to follow it?

Child A: Yes.

Chorus: No, not really...

Child B: But it says what you have to teach for the week.

Child E: Yeah.

Child B: Just not what days it has to be on.

Child D: And not the exact time of the day...

Child A: I don't think they have to do it in a day, like I think the Board of Education says what you have to teach in a whole year.

Researcher: And would the teachers have to answer to anybody if they don't teach everything they are supposed to?

Chorus: Not really sure...Eh...

*Session draws to a close*

## Appendix K

### *Transcript of Interview with Teacher H*

Researcher: Since this research project is about citizenship education, I'd like to start off with some general questions about citizenship and education for citizenship. What do you think makes a good citizen?

Teacher H: I think a good citizen is one who integrates well in the community, who makes decisions to better life, not just for themselves, but for everybody. People who can forge partnerships, work in groups, respect what other people have to say and are not just out for themselves are good citizens.

Researcher: In April 2006, the government set up a taskforce to encourage and promote active citizenship. Why, do you think, the government felt the need to do this?

Teacher H: I think one of the reasons that the government did this was because there have been people from so many other countries coming into Ireland and to improve the integration of these people into Irish society. Also, Irish life is changing. Historically, decisions were made by leaders but they want to make people more conscious that if they make decisions for the betterment of themselves then they can improve their lives.

Researcher: Do you think active citizenship is important?

Teacher H: Yes, absolutely. It is to prepare people for life in the future. At present, people are really for themselves and are not working for the betterment of the community in general so if something doesn't change goodness knows what life will be like in 50 years time. We need to think about that now and encourage people mixing with each other and getting on.

Researcher: Why, do you think, the government has decided that children need to be taught citizenship education in primary schools?

Teacher H: Children need to be prepared for life, be prepared for the future. And if this is not addressed in primary school then it is almost too late as children are already set in their ways and working towards exams in secondary school and they just focus on that. We have to remember that it is children who are going to be responsible for society in the future and the decisions that they make in the future will affect life for everybody.

## Part 2

- Researcher: What do you think are the main challenges to the development of citizenship education?
- Teacher H: Probably the main thing is time. Everybody looks at it that there's a long list of subjects and we kind of look at SPHE as the last thing we get round to, look at all the priorities that you have to do during the week when you think of Irish, English and Maths etc. Also, space in that if you had a bigger room, more space, a hall that you could go to because if you doing something like the 'snowballing effect' or debating or whatever it would be much nicer if you had a bigger physical environment. You could come out of the classroom and although the boundaries were set it could be the one time when you could really allow the children to act democratically. Time is the biggest challenge but also I think that all the boundaries have to be set when you are teaching about citizenship education for classroom control and you need to have good classroom control.
- Researcher: Do you think, at present, there is a whole-school approach to citizenship education?
- Teacher H: No, I don't think so. Everybody's doing their own bit but you couldn't be sure that the same thing isn't being done every year. This is something we need to address in the *Plean Scoile* within the SPHE curriculum. It is really a thing that people leave off 'til the very end.
- Researcher: As one of eleven curriculum subjects, how important do you consider SPHE and more specifically citizenship education in terms of your delivery of the curriculum every day?
- Teacher H: In reality it isn't really a priority. It comes at the end of a long list of priorities. Everybody tries to get round to SPHE once a week but really in terms of citizenship education if you get four lessons a year done you would be doing well I suppose.
- Researcher: Do you feel that the college training/in-service you received was sufficient in preparing you to develop citizenship education?
- Teacher H: No, I don't think so. I wouldn't have done it in college at all and we did have in-service on the SPHE curriculum but due to the fact that the relationships and Sexuality education came in at the same time that kind of overtook citizenship. Relationships and Sexuality education was prioritised and we did very little on citizenship education.

Researcher: Do you think that the teachers in this school feel confident in the teaching of SPHE and more specifically citizenship education?

Teacher H: Well, Yes. Things are done incidentally a lot of the time like you are doing group work and you are teaching the children to put up their hand to take their turn to speak and listen when other people are speaking, respect for others etc and all of that is tied in with citizenship. I mean more could be done in specific lessons but a lot of it is integrated informally anyway. While everybody is well capable of teaching it we just need a few more ideas for concrete lessons.

Researcher: So you feel teachers need resources like a book they can put their hand on when they teach citizenship education?

Teacher H: Exactly. There's a little bit in those Earthlink books which gave you an idea for it but we need more books. For example, one time I did a bit on the 'snowballing effect' whereby you put the children in groups of three and as a small group they had to come up with three decisions each to better the local community, then they had to join another group to become a group of six and they were still only allowed three decisions and so they had to lose some of their ideas. And so on until they were left with only one idea for bettering the local community. It's a great way of getting them involved in discussion and everything but as regards space you just need more space in the classroom just even for walking around and interacting. This is a noisy lesson and it's good but just getting round to it...

Researcher: In thinking about the classrooms, corridors, this school as a whole, do you think the school building and physical environment facilitates the teaching of citizenship education well?

Teacher H: No. Basically with no corridors even for displaying the work of the children, it means you just see the work of the children in your own class. Also, we have no school hall and so there's no place where the whole school can actually be together at the same time where everyone can see the importance of listening to each other from Junior Infants right up to 6<sup>th</sup> Class. There is no assembly. If you were to have school council meetings then you would be having them in a corner of some room. There's just no place for actual discussion. And another thing, there is no entrance. If there was a nice entrance into the school that we could have displays up even of things happening in the local community, things in the local environment or even a welcome sign but we can't have any of that. Even the office is not in an obvious place.

Researcher: How well, do you think, partnerships are developed with others – parents, members of the Parents Council, the Board of Management, members of the local community, other schools, the county council, voluntary organisations etc?

Teacher H: I don't think they are developed particularly well. It goes back years and years here. Everybody is far too wary of each other, they're kind of saying 'well, we don't want them to know this' and 'we don't want them to know that' because in some cases Parents' Councils have been a way for people to moan about things rather than doing something practical like organise something that would benefit the school and actually do something.

Researcher: To what extent do you feel the ethos and culture of this school is democratic?

Teacher H: Things have improved. There was a tradition in this school where it was nearly like a dictatorship I think. I wasn't hear at that time but from what I've heard decisions were made and that was it there was no further discussion and everything was black and white. There was no consultation. Teachers were told what class they'd be having and some teachers ended up having the same children for four years in a row. As a teacher you had no choice in the matter, you just did what you were told. You weren't allowed a lunch break on your yard duty day and you weren't allowed discuss it, you were just told 'no, have your cup of tea and food in your classroom with the children'. Things have improved but, as in all schools, there is more staff meetings needed. Responsibility needs to be delegated a bit more. At the end of the day we are all as qualified as each other and just because somebody is in the school longer it doesn't mean that their opinion is more important than anybody else.

### *Part 3*

Researcher: In terms now of active citizenship, what do you think this means in a primary classroom?

Teacher H: Well, I think firstly children be sitting in groups, at a round table, talking to each other. A big thing for me would be that when somebody else is talking that they would be listening so that they learn that what every child has to say is important and that everyone has the right to say something even if you don't agree with their opinion. Also, while they would be working in groups and

independently, they would have responsibility for their own place and keeping it neat and tidy and just having respect for their classroom.

Researcher: Do you think children are capable of making decisions in terms of their education and to what extent should we consult children on matters which affect them be encouraged?

Teacher H: I think a certain amount of it is good but I think it can be taken to extremes because I know that a friend of mine was working in an Educate Together school and it was almost decided by the children what they wanted to do that day. I mean at the end of the day the curriculum has to be taught. Yes there is room for a bit of flexibility and children can be asked to make decisions around the class rules and sanctions for work not done but in setting out the boundaries in September they need to know that when they make a decision it has to be a responsible decision. If there are no boundaries then children will choose to do Art all day or whatever. You can still give children choices, for example, in P.E. offer them the opportunity to do this or that by putting it to a class vote and they learn that the majority wins but ultimately the boundaries are set.

Researcher: Do you think teachers should try to develop a democratic climate in their classrooms and if so, how might they do this?

Teacher H: I think yes there is a place for it but children have to realise that rules are important at the same time and that some rules might come from a teacher and work has to be done. Every September everybody sets up their class rules and these come from the children and you are finding out what they think the rules should be. Every child likes a well-disciplined class at the same time. If they are asked 'what do you think should happen if, for example, somebody is reprimanded for talking out loud three times?' They can come up with ideas and then make decisions. If children know that you are asking them to be responsible then they will be.

Researcher: Do you think the children are consulted?

Teacher H: To some extent, through the Green Schools Committee they are but that is only a new thing. I think it was a tradition in this school, and maybe lots of other schools as well, that children were to be quiet, seen and not heard and in the past the children would walk around almost in silence. I don't think that they feel consulted except for the Greens Schools Committee. They could, especially the older children, be given a bit more responsibility. For example, with regard to Book Week maybe they could be responsible for organising



one particular aspect of it, like an activity for the younger classes or something.

Researcher: What would you think about the establishment of a Children's Council?

Teacher H: It's a good idea in theory but boundaries would need to be set at the very beginning. It's like with the Parent's Council, children would need to be reminded that it is not a forum for complaining and moaning and that ideas would need to be reasonable and practical and for the benefit of the school. There are children who would do a good job once as I said they knew that the boundaries were set and that they were working for the betterment of the whole school population.

## Appendix L

### *Transcript of Interview with Parent G*

Researcher: Since this research project is about citizenship education, I'd like to start off with some general questions about citizenship and education for citizenship. What do you think makes a good citizen?

Parent G: To me a good citizen recognises how society works, that we are all interdependent, that society only works if we all pull our weight and that others depend on me too – I am not a sole operator. As a good citizen it is part of my job to do my share by making my contribution locally whatever it is and to make my local community and my country work well. In a way it is about understanding what duty is and that duty is a part of life for all of us and the community is about people as well as systems. I think that's the basic principle of good citizenship and then that applies to more practical things like getting involved in your community, maybe doing volunteer work, cleaning your part of the pavement outside because it's your job, not the council's job. That's at the more micro level but I think it's basically understanding that you have a duty to be part of your community which otherwise won't work. To me the word 'citizenship', apart from being a bit hard to pronounce, in a way it's very woolly and misunderstood by most people. I remember years ago we did civics at school and it meant absolutely nothing. It was a subject I had to do but I didn't know what it was about. I think maybe they should rename the concept in a more meaningful way and make sure it is valued by people so that they understand the pay off from being a good citizen – if I get involved by helping out in my local community there is a pay off for me as well as for everybody else. So children need to understand why they have to get involved in society because if they don't then we are into a different ball game – a different society.

Researcher: In April 2006, the government set up a taskforce to encourage and promote active citizenship. Why, do you think, the government felt the need to do this?

Parent G: Until now I didn't actually know that they had but I mean it's interesting and I'm glad they have. I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that our local communities are fragmenting and disappearing for commercial reasons. I mean we are losing our post offices, we are losing our banks, we are losing the local shops and the mega outlets are developing. Also, people now...you have dormitory towns

and people living there but they are not working there so our local communities now are disappearing. I think too, perhaps because of our social styles, there are huge law and order issues now in Ireland coming to the fore. I think in a way we have a more selfish society. There's a lot of the 'it doesn't affect me' syndrome and 'it's not my job, it's the government's job, it's your job or somebody else's job' attitude and that's a huge issue for our society. I'm calling it a selfish society...I think also too because of our society and the way people are working now the whole voluntary sector is now being affected very badly. It's being eroded very badly. I think in a way too with the gradual disappearance of religious orders, which had a very strong social role, there's now a big vacuum there that needs to be filled. If people can't fill that vacuum then it's a very big problem for the government.

Researcher: Do you think citizenship education is important for children? If so, why?

Parent G: Extremely so. In a way though, it cannot be seen as a separate topic from daily life. It's almost like religion, if you believe in it then it's there with you. It's a basic set of values and in a way it's a hard one to teach because if the teacher or the parent doesn't have the value then it won't work. So, you have to find out or decide who is going to teach it and at what level because you have to really believe it if it is to become part of your everyday life.

Researcher: That's interesting because in the UK citizenship education is often taught to all the children by one specific teacher in the same way that Maths is taught to all the pupils by one teacher in secondary school in Ireland.

Parent G: I think it's better if all teachers teach it actually because in a way if it becomes pushed away into one separate subject that you do once a week then I'd wonder if it has real meaning for a child. It's a hard one to know I suppose but everyone has to believe it's important and in a way it's...how do you teach values? It's a very hard one. Naturally, it's up to the parents to teach it first but in the absence of the parents it falls to the teacher to make up lost ground. It's a hard one really especially if there is conflict between the two.

Researcher: With whom do you think responsibility for citizenship education lies (school, church, government, yourself or some other body)?

Parent G: I think it has to start in the home because that's where they learn their earliest values but I think that won't happen for lots of children so I

think the school has to catch the ones who fall through the net. I think the government has to play a role but how they teach values I don't know. I suppose through supporting education. I think that if one the one hand teachers are teaching this course in schools and yet on the other hand we have a government that doesn't see the problem with removing the infrastructure in the local community then I think the child's getting a mixed message. I fact I would love to see a government state 'we believe A, B and C...We believe in the importance of the community and in the importance of citizenship' and actually have it stated in a policy and put this message out their very strongly. I mean they so this on posters at election time but we are not hearing this.

Researcher: Are you aware of citizenship education in primary schools?

Parent G: I'm kind of aware. I have a funny feeling it's going on but I don't really know what's involved in it.

Researcher: Do your children talk about citizenship education when they come home from school or are they inclined to talk about other subjects?

Parent G: They aren't talking about it, no. I suppose what I was very aware of and very supportive of was the Green Schools Committee. That was a very strong and a very visual sign that this education is going on and that's great. The children love it.

## *Part 2*

Researcher: Are values related to citizenship discussed in your home?

Parent G: Yes, very much so. I would have inherited values from my parents and in a way I would try unconsciously to pass them onto my children. I suppose you take opportunities to talk about things as they arise whether it's a TV programme that highlights some issue, something you read in the paper or something that arises in the class for the child you try to understand and talk about issues as far as possible.

Researcher: How do you promote active citizenship at home?

Parent G: They have jobs and when they complain about doing them I say 'look you are part of the house team, we are all living here together and we all have jobs and if you don't do your job then you aren't part of the house team'. So, they get a sense of being part of a team at home and

in fact he enjoys responsibilities once he is given them and praised for doing them. I very much believe in them having jobs in the house and doing their bit. They know that it isn't always my job to do it. The house lady goes on strike occasionally!

Researcher: Are you involved in activities in your local community? If so, what are they? If not, what are the barriers to taking a more active role in community activities?

Parent G: Probably not to a huge extent. I mean I am involved in the annual clean-up. Beyond that...we would support the local cemetery committee and then attending clubs like Ladybirds and tennis and that kind of thing that the children are involved in. Also, we attend events taking place in the school and local community.

Researcher: Are your children given opportunities to discuss issues that are real to them at home?

Parent G: Yes, very much so. I would actively encourage that for all the obvious reasons. I think it's very important that the children know if there is a problem then they always have someone to talk to and that for the future if there's an issue that someone can always help to resolve it. They have that message from an early years and as they head towards teenage years trying to keep that door open will be very important.

Researcher: Do you encourage your children to think critically or do you think that children who think critically are likely to challenge and perhaps undermine the authority of teachers and yourself?

Parent G: Very much so. I would encourage them to be inquisitive, to ask question and seek answers and reason out things that are happening in the world. I love the idea of debating and any kind of discussion in class. I think it's great to get them to think from an early age about their own values, their own view of the world and I would always encourage them not just to follow the masses but to have their own sense about things and if they don't agree with something that they would be able to say so.

### *Part 3*

You:

Researcher: Do you feel that you are offered opportunities to be actively involved in the education of your children?

Parent G: I think so, yes. The door seems very open in the school certainly with my child with special needs I am very involved because of the extra support needed. I would always actively seek that involvement. Perhaps with my other child I have been less involved as he has progressed along well. I would be involved at home certainly in what's happening at school if that makes sense.

Researcher: In your opinion, how well are partnerships with parents developed in this school?

Parent G: I think they're good. I think there have been huge changes since the old days (laughs). I think the school is very open and encouraging. The only area where I'd feel needs developing is that I'd love more opportunities to get into the classroom to see what the children are doing. I know it's difficult but like the Book Fair is great because you get the chance to come in and see things and have a bit of interaction with other children. Maybe like when they are doing shows. When the children are doing little plays or concerts at school I am always a bit sad that I can't come along to see it. They perform for other classes but never for us. Maybe even the chance to come in and use your own talents. If you are somebody who paints then maybe you come in to do a small bit of painting with the children or to give a talk on your job or something but just a reason to come into the classroom at some stage and actually be with the children. I know friends of mine are involved in schools in Dublin and they are often in during the school year to talk to the children or give little workshops and they love that...and the kids love it too. I think all parents want to see on the ground what is happening. I mean take Sports Day, the parents would love to come along on Sports Day and they could even get involved in that even as a fundraiser.

Researcher: Do you, as a parent, feel that you are consulted in the decision-making process?

Parent G: Mmm...I'm not sure, probably not but in a way I'd be happy that things are working ok. In the past I'd have had problems with previous leadership but I think now the school is very open and very receptive so in a way there is less of a need to be informed. In having

said that maybe there are different areas where we should be more informed, I'm not sure about that.

Researcher: Does your school use parent volunteers? Is this a good idea? Would you like to do this?

Parent G: I think it is a good idea and that the school should have parents in a little bit more. I think it would be interesting to be involved.

### Your Child:

Researcher: What, do you think, active citizenship means in a primary school?

Parent G: I think it is fundamentally teaching them responsibility. I think it is also as they get older increasing their power within the school but teaching them the responsibility that goes with power. In a way that's how society works. I think the Green Schools Committee is excellent for that. It gives them a whole sense of communal responsibility and having focused tasks and jobs and they all loved it. It was actually really good. I think the garden too is a very good development. I came along one day and I remember thinking 'God, this is brilliant, seeing all those children out there digging the garden'. It's brilliant for the parents too. I think maybe in a way choosing a little project in the community might be good too whether it's adopting some local cause and doing something for it even if it's just visiting the elderly or holding a fundraiser or maybe cleaning up some local dump. Just some project that they take on as a school that they have some involvement with. I also like the idea of a guardian angel system whereby the older children have responsibility for younger children. It would give the older children a sense of responsibility and it makes them realise that they are part of the whole school and a society so to speak. I liked when I heard about the shared reading scheme working where some of the bigger children went down to read with the small children. That was brilliant because they all loved it. That kind of thing which gives older children responsibility for younger children during the year is great. I also think that some kind of mini *Dail* or some kind of society set up which would give them a very practical introduction into how society works. I know they do it in secondary schools. It would be great if this was done with the older children where one group of children would be responsible for the needs of society and another group would be responsible for seeing how much taxes we could raise and another group deciding how we should spend it,

which in a way is like mirroring how society works. They would also be debating and having lots of discussion and in fact the teacher might tweak things so that a few disasters happen and they have to deal with 'oh dear, we've just had a flood, so we don't have that twenty million euro after all!' It's about giving the children as many opportunities as you can to understand how society works and making them realise that you really have to get stuck in and play your part. If you don't do it, who is going to do it?

Researcher: Do you think your child is given opportunities to discuss issues that are real to them at school and are consulted on matters which affect them?

Parent G: I'm not so sure about that...I can't think of an example.

Researcher: And finally, do you think the ethos and culture of this school encourages and provides children with opportunities to practice democracy?

Parent G: I think yes in that the school is very open and the children are encouraged but I don't actually have any examples of it so maybe some more tangible experiences to do it. I think what they have learned from the Green Schools Committee is extremely and to have a few more of those particular kind of projects during the year would be great, and not just 6<sup>th</sup> class but maybe even the younger classes too at their own level...Maybe they could set up a mini town or village where everyone has different jobs and they have to make different choices decisions for everyone based around the town's situation. I think this might make them realise that their life is more than their own house or even this school but there is actually a village, town or street that they are part of too. They could even simply draw a map of their own village and put in the people who live there about who would need more help from the teacher, the doctor and so on so that they are thinking about their area and what the needs are.